

From Godan to Wotan: An examination of two langobardic mythological texts

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Introduction

As most of our knowledge of the gods and myths of the North is from Scandinavian and particularly Icelandic sources, occasionally the curtain is lifted to give us a tantalising glimpse of a facet of the world of the ancient Germanic gods south of Dannevirke.

On this occasion I intend to revisit the mysterious mention of the god, Godan, in two ancient Italian accounts in Latin of how the Langobards won their name after a battle with the rival Vandals to determine territorial possession.

Langobardic sources

The first mention of this god is an anonymous text entitled *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, dated in the seventh century and the second in the eighth-century text, *Historia Langobardorum*, by Paul the Deacon. The spotlight of this presentation is on the sparse evidence given on the nature and function of

Godan, and the evidence is then assessed in the light of later information from the rich Icelandic and Norwegian sources on Óðinn.

The version of the tale in the *Origo gentis Langobardorum* runs as follows:¹

The Winnilies lived on an island called Scadanan. They were ruled by two chieftains, called Ybor and Agio, and their mother, Gambara. The Vandals moved in with their army, and the two Vandal chieftains, Ambri and Assi, ordered the Winnilies either to pay or to engage with them in battle. The Winnilies chose to fight their opponents. Then the Vandals entreated Godan to grant them victory, and he replied that he intended to bestow victory on those whom he first saw at sunrise. Not to be outdone, Gambara approached Godan's wife, Frea, for advice. She suggested that the warriors of the Godan's wife should line up at sunrise, accompanied by their wives with their hair let down and held around their faces to resemble beards. When day broke, Frea turned around the bed of the still sleeping Godan to face the east and then woke him. On seeing the Winnilies lined up, Godan exclaimed, "Who are these long-bearded ones?" Frea then commented that since he had given the Winnilies a name, he had to give them victory. Consequently the Winnilies defeated the Vandals and were thenceforth called 'Langobards'.

The second account of the same story is from the pen of the Lombardic historian, Paul the Deacon. It differs from the older version in certain aspects:²

Because of overpopulation, the Winnili, originally inhabitants of an island called Scandinavia, were forced to draw lots and a third of the tribal group sailed away. The emigrant Winnili under their appointed leaders, Ibor and Aio, and their powerful mother, Gambara, settled in Scoringa for some years. The Vandals under Ambri and Assi, coercing their neighbouring provinces, sent messengers to the Winnili to either pay tribute or engage in battle. The Winnili decided rather to fight for their liberty than be enslaved by the Vandals. When the Vandals besought Godan for victory, he promised it to those whom he first saw at sunrise. However, Gambara went to Frea for advice, and she suggested that the Winnili should line up early with their wives with their hair let down and arranged around their faces like beards. When Godan saw the long line of warriors at dawn, he exclaimed "who are these long-bearded ones?" Frea persuaded him to give victory to those to whom he had given a new name. Hence the Winnili were victorious.

Some comments on the texts

It is apparent that Paul the Deacon based his section of the origin of the name of the Langobards on the account in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. There are, nevertheless, some divergences. Paul adds the story of population pressure, which caused a third part of the Winnili to migrate; he names two areas where the Winnili lived, the original Scandinavia and Scoringa, where they resettled; he modifies the events surrounding the waking of Godan, omitting the stage management by Frea to have him facing the east, thus seeing the assembled Winnili warriors and their women. On the other hand *the Origo Gentis*

¹ In the Appendices there is a new translation of the Latin text from *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, from *Edictos Rothari: Origo gentis Langobardorum, Scriptorum Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec VI--IX*, ed. G. Waitz, Hanover, 1878, pp. 2-3.

² In the Appendices there is a new translation of the Latin text from *Pauli Diaconi Historia Langobardorum*, ed. Lidia Capo, 11 editione febbraio, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1993, pp. 22-26.

Langobardorum mentions the island of Scadanan as the only place of residence of the tribe. Jordanes in his *Getica* (ch. 4, §25) names the place of origin of the Goths as “Scandza”.³

Mommsen is mainly correct in commenting that Paul misunderstood the earlier narrative of events.⁴ He sees the bed facing the west, and hence the Vandals would be the recipients of the promised victory, but the change in position of the bed meant that victory would be apportioned to their opponents. On the other hand Paul has Godan looking east out of a window. This would seem to be the obvious direction for him to look at dawn to greet the rising sun. But Frea’s ruse in *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* does explain why Godan granted victory to the Winnili, whereas the reader of Paul’s account would attribute it to the inscrutability of a capricious divinity, under female influence.

Paul is obviously embarrassed by this mythological vignette. He calls it a “silly story” (*ridicula fabula*) narrated by the “antiquity” or “people of olden times” (*antiquitas*)⁵ Later, in the same chapter, Paul writes that “these things are worthy of laughter and are to be treated as being of no significance”.⁶ Then, treading the path of theological correctness, perhaps necessary in a world which was still shaking from the taint of Arianism, Paul piously opines that “victory is not to be attributed to the power of men, but it is rather granted from heaven”.⁷

Then Paul gives an alternative etymology lest anyone think that he has fallen for syncretism, “. . . it is certain that the Langobards were later thus called on account of the length of their beards, untouched by any iron implement, whereas they were first called Winnili. For according to their language “lang” means long and “bart” means beard.”⁸

Paul the Deacon also comments on the form of the divine name, “Godan”. In 1.9 he uses the form “Wotan” and comments that “Wotan, whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one who is called Mercury” Again Paul covers his tracks in order to anticipate any possible accusation of theological impropriety by stating that the Mediterranean god did not exist in modern times,

³ Jordanes writes, “Now from this island of Scandza, as from a hive of races or a womb of nations, the Goths are said to have come forth long ago . . .” See *The Gothic History of Jordanes*, trans Charles Mierow, Cambridge and New York, 1966, p. 57. Earlier Jordanes quoted Claudius Ptolemæus. “There is a great island situated in the surge of a juniper leaf with bulging sides, witch taper to a point at a long end” (Ch. 3, §16 Mierow edition p. 55). It lies in front of the River Vistula.

⁴ Mommsen, Th, “Die Quellen der Langobardengeschichte des Paulus Diaconus”, *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere Geschichte*, Hanover, 1879, Vol 5, pp. 65-66.

⁵ *Historia Langobardorum* 1.8 “Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam” (At this point the ancient tell a silly story)

⁶ loc.cit. “Haec risu digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda”

⁷ loc.cit. “Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.”

⁸ *Historia Langobardorum* 1.9 “Certum tamen est, Langobardos ad intactae ferro barbae longitudine, cum primis Winnili dicti fuerint, ita postmodum appellatos. Nam iuxta illorum linguam “lang” longam, “bart” brabam significat.”

and not in Germany, but in Greece.⁹

Correspondences between Godan and Óðinn

(1) Name

The form of the name of the god used in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* and also by Paul the Deacon was Godan, but the latter mentions the form Wotan. The form Godan derives from the initial “wo” in many forms of the name or the “wuo” (as in the Old High German *Wuotanestac* for “Wednesday”) having the consonant “g” added to the “wo”.¹⁰ De Vries gives the Low German forms of *Godensdag* and *Gaunsdag* for “Wednesday”.¹¹ Interestingly enough, one of the MS variants of the name “Winnilis” in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* is “Guinnilis”.¹²

Having discussed a possible alternative etymology of the name of the Langobards, Paul writes, “Wotan, whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one who is called Mercury”. (see Footnote 9). This indicates that the form “Wotan” was also known to Paul, presumably from contact with some contact with Germanic world, or perhaps from the earlier Gothic settlers.

In 1.9 Paul stated that Godan corresponds with the Roman god, Mercury. Paul based this comment on a well-attested tradition amongst classical writers. In *Germania* c.9 Tacitus wrote that the ancient Germanic tribesmen honoured Mercury most and they thought it fitting to present human sacrifices to him on certain days. In the text he continued with a mention of Hercules (?) and Mars as also being the object of sacrifices.¹³ Here it is obvious that Tacitus was referring to the correspondence between Mercury and Wotan.

Adam of Bremen, on the other hand, identified Óðinn with Mars. Here he may have been thinking of shared characteristics as war gods rather than basing his identification on a long-standing custom. Jordanes wrote that the Goths sacrificed their prisoners to Mars and hung captured war-gear on trees.¹⁴ This

⁹ op. cit. 1.9 “ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antea, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur.” (...whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one Mercury amongst the Romans and by all the peoples of Germany is worshipped as god, is considered to have existed not in these times, but a long time ago, and not in Germany, but in Greece.) This idea fits in with the Euhemerism adopted by the early Church, whereby pagan gods were perceived as having been real human beings, later divinised, but currently of a diabolical nature.

¹⁰ The same feature occurred with the adoption of Germanic words into Romance languages e.g. “war” and “guerre” in French, “ward” and “guardare” in Italian.

¹¹ de Vries, Jan, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, vol 2, 1957, p. 27.

¹² See Waitz p. 2, note k). The only other use of the name in the nominative had “Winniles”.

¹³ Tacitus, *Germania* c.9 “Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent. (Herculem et) Martem concessis animalibus placant.”

¹⁴ Jordanes, *Getica*, book 4, (40-41). “Moreover so highly were the Getae praised that Mars, whom the fables of poets call the god of war, was reputed to have been born among them. Hence Virgil says: ‘Father Gradivus rules the Getic fields.’ (*Aeneid* book 3, line 35) Now Mars has always been worshipped by the Goths with cruel rites, and captives were slain as his victims.

practice suggests that the god referred to was Wotan.

(2) The function of the warrior god

From both Langobardic texts it is impossible to perceive with precision whether Godan was both the war god and the leading god of both the Vandals and the Winnili-Langobards, because he is the only male god mentioned. He is at least the war god, but the reader gains the impression that he is both. It is in his hands to grant victory as the lord of the battle and to whomsoever he chose. We are not told of any sacrifice offered to him by his devotees to gain the desired victory. The Vandals merely besought him to aid them to defeat their enemy and received the enigmatic answer that he would grant success to those whom he saw first at dawn. When Gambara, on behalf of the Winnili, approached his wife, Frea, this fact of the first to be seen was taken for granted and the goddess suggested to Gambara a possible stratagem to win the victory.

This corresponds with one of the many functions of Óðinn. In contrast to the simple account of Godan in the two Lombardic sources, the figure of Óðinn in his capacity as a war god is far more complex and the various aspects can only be lightly touched upon here. The first aspect is Óðinn inciting heroes to battle.¹⁵ One of his nicknames was Hnikarr or Hnikaðr, which means “the one who incites to battle”. In *Harbarðsljóð* 24 Óðinn boasts that he incites princes to fight against each other. The second aspect is that armies sacrificed to him before engaging in battle for a successful outcome. Adam of Bremen (book IV 27) reported that Swedes were wont to sacrifice to Óðinn before a war. Snorri Sturluson states in *Hákonar saga góða* ch. 14 that during the sacrificial banquets the Thrándheimers drank toasts firstly to Óðinn for the king’s victory in war and his power and then to Njörðr and Freyr for good harvests and peace. Thirdly, he is seen as the protector of heroes. In many accounts he is depicted as the patron of the hero, e.g. in *Völsunga saga*, where he is the guardian of Völsungs. Fourthly, it was Óðin’s function to apportion victory to those whom he designated. Hence amongst his titles were Sigfaðir (the father of victory) and Sighöfundr (the awarder of victory). But this victory could be awarded unjustly, such as is mentioned in *Lokasenna* 22. In the already mentioned *Völsunga saga*, the last stand of the hero, Sigmundr, indicates the capricious nature of Óðin’s apportioning victory. A one-eyed, black-coated man with a spear in his hand accosted Sigmundr. The hero’s sword struck the spear and shattered. From that point on, the battle turned against Sigmundr and he lost his life. The fifth aspect was the taking by Óðinn of his favourite slain warriors to dwell with him in

They thought that he who is lord of war ought to be appeased by the shedding of human blood. To him they devoted the first share of the spoil, and in his honour arms stripped from the foe were suspended from trees. And they had more than all other races a deep spirit of religion, since the worship of this god seemed to be really bestowed upon their ancestor.” *The History of Jordanes*, trans. Charles Mierow. Cambridge and New York, 1966, p. 61.

¹⁵ Turville Petre, Gabriel, *Myths and Religion of the North*, London, 1964, p. 51.

Valhöll. Thus in *Völuspá* 1 he is called Valföðr (the father of the slain).

(3) The link with chieftains

In Paul the Deacon's account the two leaders of the Winnili, Ibor and Aio, were "appointed" over the third part of the tribe, which was forced to abandon their native soil. (Book 1, ch. 3) The account further describes them as being "in the bloom of youthful vigour and more eminent than the rest". This suggests that they were appointed because of their potential leadership qualities rather than belonging to a power-broking élite. They were appointed immediately prior to the emigration.

In the two Lombardic texts it was the Vandal chieftains. In *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* it was Ambri and Assi, the leaders of the Vandals, who had direct access to Godan, and the matriarch of the Winnili, Gambara, who had direct access to Frea, who thought up the stratagem of having the women masquerading as men and effected the moving of furniture so that Godan would look first to the east and give victory to her devotee. Paul the Deacon relates that it was the Vandals who approached Godan to win his support for victory. He does not mention the two leaders of the Vandals, Abri and Assi, but it can be assumed that it was only they who negotiated with the god. There is no reference to sacrifices being offered to Godan, but presumably knowledge of the ancient heathen cults was lost to the Langobards by the 7th and 8th centuries. Hence, the only information we can glean from the Langobardic texts is that the leaders had access to the gods, at at least to one god and his wife.

The Norse tradition is very rich in examples of the link between Óðinn and the ruling class. He was at times the protector of prominent heroes and the progenitor of some royal families. In Sweden he was the father of Yngvi, who is seen to be Freyr as well as the ancestor of the Ynglingar.¹⁶

(4) The celestial vantage point

In both the Langobardic and the Norse traditions the war god had a vantage point in the skies from which he could observe the world of humans. In *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* Godan informed the Vandals, who sought his support for success in combat, that he would give victory to those whom he first saw at sunrise. The text informs us that later "... when it became light as the sun was rising, Frea, the wife of Godan, turned the bed, where her husband was lying, putting his face towards the east, and woke him up. And looking at them, he saw ...". From this source we gain the impression that in the god's abode there are windows at least to the west and the east and that he normally looked out of a western window. The change in the location of the bed caused victory to be granted to the group for which it was not intended. Paul the Deacon (1.8)

¹⁶ *Snorra Edda*, Prologue, ch 5, *Edda Snorri Sturlusonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Akureyri, 1954, p. 7.

changes this part of the tale and states that Godan “was accustomed to look through his window towards the east” Both sources have the Vandals approaching him and learning that he would grant victory to the army he first saw at dawn. The *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* gives a clear reason why the Winnili outwitted the Vandals, but Paul misses the point.

In the Norse tradition Óðinn had a *hásaeti* (= high-seat) in Ásgarðr from which he could perceive all that went on in the nine worlds.¹⁷ The value of this piece of furniture was that it was one of the four sources he had of obtaining intelligence. The second was the two ravens, Huginn and Munin, who flew around the worlds and returned to perch on Óðin’s shoulders and supply information (*Grímnismál* 20). The third source was the loss of an eye in return for a draft of the precious fluid at the well of Mímir (*Gylfaginning* 8). Finally, there was the gaining of the runes, i.e. secret, occult knowledge of the wisdom behind all things, by sacrificing himself to himself one windswept tree for nine nights and days (*Hávamál* 138-141)

(5) The war god’s wife

In the Langobardic Latin texts Godan’s wife is called Frea, whereas in the Norse tradition she is Frigg. One can only wonder how Frigg became Frea, which can be so easily confused with the name of the goddess Freyja, the sister of Freyr and daughter of Njörðr.

Reliability of the Langobardic tradition

The episode of the tribal naming, which has captured our interest with its mythological implications, inevitably poses the question of whether the tale is a genuine survival from a mythopoeic situation, which stems back to the time of emigration, or whether it is a later invention.

In the 19th century there were several writers who suggested alternative etymologies. Even Paul (ch. 6) himself - perhaps as an act of theological correctness - later gives the demythologised literal etymology, which he may have taken from Isidore of Seville, who wrote, “The Langobards were commonly so called from their flowing and never shaven beards.” (*Etymologies* IX, 2, 94)

William Dudley Foulke in his translation and commentary presents three variant etymologies in a footnote to Ch. 9 of Paul the Deacon.¹⁸ Schmidt imagines that *bard* or “beard” was the original name of the tribe and that *lang* was later added. Hodgkin prefers the Old High German *barta* or “axe”, which survives in the English “halburt”, whereas Schmitz derives the name from *bord*, which he envisioned being the long and low meadows of the River Elbe,

¹⁷ *Grímnismál*, prose introduction; Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* chs 6, 9, 40, 68.

¹⁸ *History of the Langobards by Paul the Deacon*, translated and edited by William Dudley Foulke, New York 1906, p. 18.

where the Langobards resided. Foulke sums up these three derivations as “the long-bearded men, the long-halbert-bearing men, the long-shore-men”. All except the suggested literal etymology of Isidore belong to the world of fantasy and throw no light on the subject,

Our interest at the moment is not in the origin of the Langobards but in the mythological connection with the name-giving. Nevertheless, in order to posit the mythological tale in its setting, it is helpful to examine the evidence available about the tribe when it first appears in historical sources. Several Greek and Roman authors wrote that the Langobards lived in territory along the River Elbe. Strabo comments that they were part of a larger Suevic confederation between the Rhine and the Elbe. At the time of writing Strabo said that they had been driven to flight out of their country into the land on the far side of the river. He added that “it is a common characteristic of all the peoples in this part of the world that they migrate with ease, because of the meagreness of their livelihood and because they do not till the soil or even store up food, but live in small huts that are merely temporary structures, and they live for the most part of their flocks, as the nomads do, so that ... they load their household belongings on their wagons and with their beasts turn whithersoever they think best.”¹⁹

It appears that the Germanic tribes were fluid in structure and this fact makes it difficult for archaeologists to define a tribe by means of a distinct material culture with clearly defined social and stylistic traits.²⁰ Christie refers to the work of W. Wegewitz in a compact group of urn-cemeteries in an area in the Elbe valley between the River Oste in the west and River Jeezel in the east, centred on Bardengau. Excavations have since the late 19th century uncovered a large number of cremation cemeteries dating from the 6th century B.C. to the 3rd A.D. Wegewitz discovered a decline in finds 100-50 B.C., and then the occurrence of finds of lances, swords and shields from about 30 B.C.²¹ He regarded these as belonging to a newly immigrated tribe, which he identified as Langobards.

The weapons reflect a militaristic community, where the use of the lance was prominent. Christie reports that the appearance of spurs indicates competence in horsemanship, a skill not common in West Germanic tribes, but noted amongst the Langobards.²²

¹⁹ Strabo, *Geographica*, translated by H. L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library, London and New York, 1944, Book 7, 1.3, pp. 157-158.

²⁰ Christie, Neil, *The Lombards: The Ancient Langobards*, Oxford UK and Cambridge USA, 1995, p. 4. The following section of my argument is dependent on the material in this book.

²¹ Christie, op. cit. pp. 6-7.

²² Christie, op. cit. p. 7. Paul the Deacon (Book IV ch. 37. Latin text ed. Lidia Capo pp. 210-216; Foulke translation pp. 179-183) writes of an attack on the Langobards under Duke Gisulf by a band of mounted Avars, and the daring flight on horseback of three lads, one of them very young. Even children are shown as being skilled horsemen.

The same period is noted by an increased importing of Roman goods, which accelerated a growing social stratification. This increased trade is reflected in finds of imported goods in graves of the upper class.²³

The Marcomannic invasions and the campaign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (164-180) shattered the fragile economic balance that had developed, leading to economic and social instability as tribal élites lost their wealth and sought alternative sources of wealth. The resultant growing demand for goods from the Roman world and the population increase are suggested as being causes of a break in the pattern of settlement and of push and pull factors of a new wave of migration in the later 2nd or earlier 3rd centuries.²⁴

Nevertheless, the difficulty of a precise identification of the archaeological material as being Langobardic makes it hard to be definite about the evidence. No urn in one of the cemeteries has a tag with “*langobardi*” on it. One can only say that it is possible and even perhaps probable. Christie sums up the situation as follows:²⁵

Nonetheless, we must remain cautious in these arguments. Excavations outside the Bardengau zone remain somewhat patchy and do not, as yet, clearly help to distinguish a Longobard territory from those of neighbouring tribes. Many of the cultural traits identified by Wegewitz, such as the use of weapon graves, of separate male and female cemeteries and of distinctive metalwork, can now be shown to extend across a much broader territory, running from the Weser to the Vistula. The probability is that the Bardengau belongs culturally to the wider grouping of the Suevi and, later on, the Saxons and stands out merely because of its better archaeological documentation ...

According to Christie a battle against the Vandals or some other group perhaps lay behind this upheaval. Indeed it could have happened that the outcome was, in reality, different from that recorded in the Langobardic sources and that outcome was less favourable to the Langobards than recorded. These external pressures effected a more general Germanic destabilisation of settlement patterns, and the Langobards may have been drawn into the migratory chain.

This examination of evidence of possible Langobardic settlement on the Elbe indicates the situation out of which the change of name of the ancient Germanic tribe might have occurred. In 7th and 8th century Italy there was a memory that the now semi-assimilated community in times of yore had changed its name from Winnili to Langobard. The story may be much older than the period of the settlement on the Elbe: it may have been re-adapted to fit later historical conditions. But the correspondences between the figures and functions Godan and Óðinn name, role as war god, link with tribal chieftains, possessing a celestial vantage point and in having a wife with versions of the

²³ Christie, op. cit. p. 9-10.

²⁴ Christie, op. cit. p. 9-11.

²⁵ Wegewitz sums up his findings in Wegewitz, *Rund um den Kiekeberg: Vorgeschichte einer Landschaft an der Niederelbe, Vor- und Frühgeschichte aus dem niederelbischen Raum*, Neumünster, 1988, pp. 135-178. Here I cite Christie's brief summary op. cit. p. 12.

same name indicate a striking similarity and a connection lying far back in antiquity.

Appendices

1. English translation of *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, ch. 1

IN NAME OF THE LORD THE ORIGIN OF THE PEOPLE OF THE LOMBARDS BEGINS

Ch. 1. In the regions of the north, where many people live, there is an island, which is called Scadanan and which means “destruction”; among these there was a small tribe called the Winniles. And with them there was a woman called Gambara, and she had two sons; the name of one was Ybor and the name of the other, Agio. With their mother, Gambara by name, they held power over the Williles.

Then the leaders of the Vandals, that is Ambri and Assi, moved with their army and said to the Williles, “Either pay us tribute or prepare yourselves for battle with us.” Then Ybor and Agio with their mother Gambara answered, “We had better prepare for battle than pay tribute to the Williles.”

Then Ambri and Assi, that is the leaders of the Vandals, asked Godan to give them victory over the Winniles. Godan answered, say thus, “I shall give victory to those whom I first see at sunrise.”

At that time Gambara, with her two sons, that is Ybor and Agio, who were chieftains over the Williles, asked Frea, (the wife of Godan), to be propitious to the Williles. Then Frea gave advice that the Williles should come at sunrise, and that their women should also come with their husbands with their hair let down around the face like beards.

Then when it became light as the sun was rising, Frea, the wife of Godan, turned the bed, where her husband was lying, putting his face towards the east, and woke him up. And looking at them, he saw the Williles and their women having their hair let down around their faces; and he said, “Who are those long-bearded ones?” And Frea said to Godan, “Since you have given them a name, give them also victory.” And he gave them victory, so that they should defend themselves according to this plan and gain victory. Since that time the Williles were called Langobards.

2. Latin text of *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*

IN NOMINE DOMINI INCIPIIT ORIGO GENTIS LANGOBARDORUM

Cap. 1. Est insula qui dicitur Scadaman, quod interpretatur excidia, in partibus aquilonis, ubi multae gentes habitant; inter quos erat gens parva quae Winnilis vocabatur. Et erat cum eis mulier nomine Gambara, habebatque duos filios,

nomen uni Ybor et nomen alteri Agio; ipsi cum matre sua nomine Gambara principatum tenebant super Winniles. Moverunt se ergo duces Wandalorum, id est Ambri et Assi, cum exercitu suo, et dicebant ad Winniles: “Aut solvite nobis tributa, aut praeparate vos ad pugnam nobiscum.” Tunc respondent Ybor et Agio cum matre sua Gambara: “Melius est nobis pugnam praeparare, quam Wandalis tributa persolvere”. Tunc Ambri et Assi, hoc est duces Wandalorum, rogaverunt Godan, ut daret eis super Winniles victoriam. Respondit Godan dicens: “Quos sol antea videro, ipsis dabo victoriam.” Eo tempore Gambara cum duobis filiis suis, id est Ybor et Agio, qui principes erant super Winniles, rogaverunt Fream, (uxorem Godan), ut ad Winniles esset propitia. Tunc Frea dedit consilium, ut sol surgente venirent Winniles et mulieres eorum crines solutae circa faciem in similitudinem barbae et cum viris suis venirent. Tunc luciscente sol dum surgeret, giravit Frea, uxor Godan, lectum ubi recumbebat vir eius, et fecit faciem eius contra orientem, et excitavit eum. Et ille aspiciens vidit Winniles et mulieres ipsorum habentes crines solutas circa faciem; et ait: “Qui sunt isti longibarbae?” Et dixit Frea ad Godan: “Sicut dedisti nomen; da illis et victoriam.” Et dedit eis victoriam, ut ubi visum esset vindicarent se et victoriam haberent. Ab illo tempore Winniles Langobardi vocati sunt.

The Latin text is taken from *Origo gentis Langobardorum, from Edictus Rothari: Origo gentis Langobardorum, Scriptores Rerum langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec Vi--IX*, ed. G. Waitz, Hanover, 1878, pp. 2-3.

3. English translation of Paul the Deacon: *History of the Langobards*

Ch.1.7. The Winnili, then, having set sail from Scandinavia with their leaders, Ibor and Aio, coming into the district, which is called Scoringa, settled there for a number of years. And this at that time Abri and Assi, the leaders of the Vandals, were subjecting the neighbouring provinces by war. The latter, already elated by many victories, sent messengers to the Winnili, telling them that they should either pay tribute to the Vandals or that they should prepare themselves for struggles of war. Then Ibor and Aio, with the agreement of their mother, Gambara, resolved that it would be better to defend their liberty by arms than to disgrace it with the payment of tribute. They sent a reply to the Vandals by messengers that they would rather fight than be slaves. Inasmuch as all the Winnili were then at the prime of their youthfulness, but very few in number, since they had only been the third part of one island of no considerable size.

Ch.1.8. At this point the ancients tell a silly story that the Vandals, approaching Godan, asked for victory over the Winnili and he replied that he would give victory to those of whom he first caught sight at sunrise. Then Gambara approached Frea, the wife of Godan, and asked for victory for the Winnili. And Frea gave her the advice that the Winnili women, having let down their hair,

should arrange it around their faces like beards and in the early morning should stand next to their husbands and place themselves to be seen as well by Godan from the place, from which he was accustomed to look through his window towards the east. And it was done like this. And when Godan caught sight of them at sunrise, he said, “Who are these long-bearded ones?” Then Frea persuaded him to grant victory as a gift to those to whom he had bestowed a name. And thus Godan granted victory to the Winnili. These things are worthy of laughter and are to be treated as being of no significance. For victory is not to be attributed to the power of men, but it is rather granted from heaven.

Ch.1.9. However, it is certain that the Langobards were later thus called on account of the length of their beards, untouched by any iron implement, whereas they were first called Winnili. For according to their language “lang” means long and “bart” means beard. Wotan, whom they called Godan by the addition of a letter, is the one who is called Mercury amongst the Romans and by all the peoples of Germany is worshipped as god, is considered to have existed not in these times, but a long time ago, and not in Germany, but in Greece.

Ch.1.10. Therefore, the Winnili, who also are Langobards, having joined battle with the Vandals and, as one might expect, struggling vehemently for the glory of liberty, they won victory. Having later suffered privations from hunger in the same province of Scoringa, they were greatly troubled in spirit.

4. Latin text of *Pauli Diaconi Historia Langobardorum*

Cap.1.7. Igitur egressi de Scandinavia Winnili, cum Ibor et Aione ducibus, in regionem quae adpellatur Scoringa venientes per annos illic aliquot conederunt. Illo itaque tempore Abri et Assi Wandalorum duces vicinas quasque provincias bello premebant. Hi iam multis elati victoriis, nuntios ad Winnilos mittunt, ut aut tributa Wandalis persolverent, aut se ad belli certamina praepararent. Tunc Ibor et Aio, adnintente matre Gambarara, deliberant, melius esse armis libertatem tueri, quam tributorum eandem solutione foedare. Mandant per legatos Wandalis, pugnatuos se potius quam servituos. Erant siquidem tunc Winnili universi iuvenili aetate florentes, sed numero perexigui, quippe qui unius non nimiae amplitudinis insulae tertia solummodo particula fuerint.

Cap.1.8. Refert hoc loco antiquitas ridiculam fabulam: quod accedentes Wandali ad Godan victoriam de Winnilis postulaverint, illeque responderit, se illis victoriam daturam quos primum oriente sole conspexisset. Tunc accessisse Gambaram ad Fream, uxorem Godan, et Winnilis victoriam postulasse. Freamque consulum dedisse, ut Winnilorum milieres solutos crines erga faciem

ad barbae similitudinem conponerent maneque primo cum viris adessent seseque a Godan videndas pariter e regione, qua ille per fenestram orientem versus erat solitus aspicere, conlocarent. Atque ita factum fuisse. Quas cum Godan oriente sole conspiceret, dixisse “Qui sunt isti longibarbi?” Tunc Fream subiunxisse, ut quibus nomen tribuerat victoriam condonaret. Sicque Winnilis Godan victoriam concessisse. Haec risu digna sunt et pro nihilo habenda. Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.

Cap.1.9. Certum tamen est, Langobardos ad intactae ferro barbae longitudine, cum primis Winnili dicti fuerint, ita postmodum appellatos. Nam iuxta illorum linguam “lang” longam, “bart” brabam significat. Wotan sane, quem adiecta littera Godan dixerunt, ipse est qui apud Romanos Mercurius dicitur et ab universis Germaniae gentibus ut deus adoratur; qui non circa haec tempora, sed longe antea, nec in Germania, sed in Graecia fuisse perhibetur.

Cap.1.10. Winnili igitur, qui et Langobardi, commisso cum Wandalis proelio, acritur, utpote pro libertatis gloria, decertantes, victoriam capiunt. Qui magnam postmodum famis penuriam in eadem Scoringa provincia, valde animo consternati sunt.

The Latin text is taken from *Pauli Diaconi Historia Langobardorum*, ed. Lidia Capo, 11^a edizione febbraio, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1993, pp. 22-26.