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Mirosław J. Leszka

University of Lodz, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Institute of History, Department of Byzantine Studies, ul. Kamińskiego 27a, 90-219 Łódź, Polska/Poland, miroslaw.leszka@uni.lodz.pl

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Mirosław J. Leszka (Łódź)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2643-4520>

LILINGIS, THE BASTARD HALF-BROTHER OF ILLUS*

Abstract. The paper is devoted to Lilingis – one of the leaders in the Isaurian uprising against emperor Anastasius I. He was Illus' half-brother. Illus was an Isaurian who, aside from Zeno, played the most important role in the life of the Byzantine state in the 470s and 480s. It is possible that from 484, Lilingis held the position of the Isaurian *comes* and was so successful at it that he probably retained it until the end of Zeno's reign and gained authority among his tribesmen, which resulted in his participation as one of the leaders in the Isaurian uprising. Lilingis was co-commander in the first rebel clash with the emperor's forces at Kotyaeum (492). He met his death in the battle.

Keywords: Lilingis, Illus, emperor Zeno, emperor Anastasius I, Isaurians

The reign of Emperor Zeno¹, who originated from Isauria, was a time when the Isaurians achieved considerable influence, both in the army and in the administration of the Byzantine Empire. Such a statement may give the impression that the sources provide plentiful information about a number of figures originating from Isauria. This is not the case. On the pages of the works of Byzantine historians, we can find only a dozen or so figures of Isaurian origin, active during the reign of Zeno and soon afterward². Generally, there is rudimentary information about them, and we have a more complete, though not necessarily a full dossier, only about a few of them. Lilingis is one of these dozen or so Isaurian figures that we do find in the sources. He certainly cannot be counted among the Isaurians about whom we have considerable knowledge³. The source references concerning

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¹ The fullest image of Emperor Zeno – R. KOSIŃSKI, *The Emperor Zeno. Religion and Politics*, Cracow 2010 [= BSC, 6]; P. CRAWFORD, *Roman Emperor Zeno. The Perils of Power Politics in Fifth-Century Constantinople*, Yorkshire–Philadelphia 2019.

² W.D. BURGESS, *Isaurian Factions in the Reign of Zeno the Isaurian*, L 51, 1992, p. 874–880.

³ The basic information about this figure – W. ENSSLIN, *Ninilingis*, [in:] *RE*, vol. XVII.1, Stuttgart 1936, col. 632; *PLRE* II, p. 683–684 (s.v. *Lilingis*); C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie des oströmischen*

him oscillate practically around several episodes in his life, namely, his origin, his role in suppressing the usurpation of Illus and Leontius (484), and his participation in the revolt of the Isaurians against Emperor Anastasius, which broke out in 492. The purpose of this text is to analyze the source references concerning Lilingis and attempt to define his role among the Isaurian elite of Zeno's time and the beginning of Anastasius' reign.

The name of the protagonist of this article appears in the sources in different variants⁴, namely: Lilingis⁵, Longinines⁶, Linginines⁷, Lingines⁸, Ninilingis⁹, Lingis¹⁰, Linges¹¹, Illoulingis¹², and finally, Ninigius¹³. It appears that a preference should be given to the version given by Marcellinus Comes, the author who wrote closest to the time of the figure we are interested in here.

We know neither when nor where Lilingis was born (except that it happened somewhere in Isauria). However, we do have interesting references in two sources that speak about his parents, although not directly. John of Antioch and the Book of Suda inform us that Lilingis was Illus' half-brother, born out of wedlock¹⁴. Illus was an Isaurian who, aside from Zeno, played the most important role in the life of the Byzantine state in the 470s and 480s. In the course of his career spanning more than a dozen years, which can be traced in the sources, he served as *magister officiorum*, *magister militum per Orientem*, was the consul of the year 478, and a patrician. He was involved in filling the imperial throne, although he did not pursue it himself. For a time, he was the most important, albeit difficult, ally

Reiches, ca. 457–518. *Prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, München 2018, p. 179–180. Perhaps he was mistaken for Indes. On this subject, see F.K. HAARER, *Anastasius I. Politics and Empire in the Late Roman World*, Cambridge 2006, p. 24, note 68.

⁴ On the subject of the name Lilingis – W. BURGESS, *The Isaurians in the Fifth Century A.D.*, Wisconsin 1985, p. 162 [an unpublished doctoral thesis].

⁵ JORDANES, *Romana*, 355, ed. T. MOMMSEN, [in:] *MGH.AA*, vol. V.1, Berolini 1882 (cetera: JORDANES, *Romana*); *The Chronicle of Marcellinus*, a. 492, trans. et comm. B. CROKE, Sydney 1995 [= BAus, 7] (cetera: MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*).

⁶ *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, XVI, 3, rec. J. THURN, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2000 [= *CFHB.SBe*, 35] (cetera: IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*).

⁷ *Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta quae Supersunt Omnia*, 239.5, rec. S. MARIEV, Berolini–Novi Eboraci 2008 [= *CFHB*, 47] (cetera: IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*).

⁸ *Constantini Porphyrogeniti Excerpta historica*, vol. III, *Excerpta de insidiis*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Berlin 1905, p. 137.

⁹ THEOPHANES, *Chronographia*, AM 5985, rec. C. DE BOOR, Lipsiae 1883 (cetera: THEOPHANES), p. 138.

¹⁰ *Lexicographi graeci*, vol. I, *Suidae lexicon*, ed. A. ADLER, Lipsiae 1928, p. 471, B 279 (cetera: *Suidae lexicon*).

¹¹ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 214.2.

¹² IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 237.2.

¹³ *Chronique de Michel le Syrien: Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1198)*, IX, 8, vol. II (livre VIII–XI), ed., trans. J.B. CHABOT, Paris 1901.

¹⁴ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 237.2; *Suidae lexicon*, p. 471, B 279.

of Emperor Zeno, and the grey eminence of the Byzantine court. He ended his career, as well as his life, as a mortal enemy of his Isaurian kin¹⁵. From the accounts of John of Antioch and the Book of Suda, it appears that Lilingis and Illus had one father, about whom, however, we know nothing. Lilingis' mother was a concubine or mistress of Illus' father, not even mentioned by name. We do not know whether Illus was an older or younger brother of Lilingis. It should be noted that Lilingis' half-brothers were also Appalius¹⁶ and Trocundes¹⁷, who were Illus' brothers. We do not have any information regarding Lilingis' relationship with his half-brothers.

As for the date of Lilingis' birth, there are no clues. He appears in the sources in the year 484 as a leader entrusted by Emperor Zeno with the responsible task of suppressing the revolt of Illus. Hence, he must have been an experienced man, having held other positions before. If so, he was born at least in about 450; in 484, therefore, he would have been a man over thirty years old. By comparison, Illus, his half-brother, appears in the sources ten years earlier, in 474, when Zeno put him in command of a division of troops tasked with stopping Theodoric Strabo's Goths operating against the empire in Thrace¹⁸. He also does not appear to have been a man without experience at the time. It is presumed that Illus had spent some time in Constantinople and he had had some experience in the service of the state. An inscription from Cilicia dating to 458 or 473 referring to an Illus who was μεγαλοπρεπέστατος κόμης and πατήρ πόλεος Elaoussa-Sebaste¹⁹ may provide some clue in this regard. The title μεγαλοπρεπέστατος κόμης was typical of late 5th-century provincial administrators. With a high degree of probability, the Illus from the inscription can be identified with the later *magister officiorum*. The name *Illus* is rare, and the inscription comes from a period when he may have already been an adult (this is important when dating the inscription to 458) and from an area that was associated with Isauria. It is worth noting that until 474, Illus' career developed without Zeno's support²⁰. It is possible that he owed its first stage to his father's influence, although there is no source evidence for this. His father's influence could also explain that Lilingis, too, began to perform some function, probably in the army. It cannot be ruled out that his father looked out for his illegitimate offspring.

¹⁵ Basic information about Illus' career – A. NAGL, *Illus*, [in:] *RE*, vol. XVIII, Stuttgart 1916, col. 1089–1090; *PLRE* II, p. 586–590 (s.v. *Illus* 1); cf. H. ELTON, *Illus and the Imperial Aristocracy under Zeno*, *B* 70, 2000, p. 393–407; C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie...*, p. 154–158.

¹⁶ On this subject, see C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie...*, p. 81.

¹⁷ On him *PLRE* II, p. 1127–1128 (s.v. *Fl. Appalius Illus Trocundes*); M.J. LESZKA, *The Career of Flavius Appalius Illus Trocundes*, *Bsl* 71, 2013, p. 47–58; C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie...*, p. 250–251.

¹⁸ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 233.

¹⁹ H. ELTON, *Illus...*, p. 406; K. FELD, *Barbarische Bürger. Die Isaurier und das Römische Reich*, Berlin 2005 [= *Mil.S.*, 8], p. 99; cf. H. TAEUBER, *Der kilische Comes Illus*, *JÖB* 42, 1992, p. 247–248. On the subject of Elaoussa-Sebaste – F. HILD, H. HELLENKEMPER, *Kilikien und Isaurien*, vol. I, Wien 1990 [= *TIB*, 5], p. 400–401.

²⁰ M.J. LESZKA, *Illus Izauryjczyk wobec uzurpacji Bazyliskosa*, *AUL.FH* 80, 2005, p. 47.

In 483²¹ or 484²², Emperor Zeno stripped Illus of his position of *magister militum per Orientem*, after the latter refused to surrender his brother Longinus to the emperor. The emperor then expelled people from Constantinople who were associated with Illus, and gave their property to the Isaurian cities. Trocundes, Illus' brother, may have been among those removed from the City. Illus decided to openly rebel against the emperor²³ and led to the proclamation of Leontius as emperor on July 19, 484, who shortly before his ascension, had held the position of *magister militum per Thracias*²⁴. Zeno opted for an armed showdown with his opponent even before the latter led to the imperial proclamation of Leontius. Then, at the very beginning of the action, Emperor Zeno made Lilingis one of the leaders (besides Conon, son of Fuscianus), commanding the troops sent to suppress Illus' revolt. It is not clear what position he was then given. John of Antioch, indeed the only source that mentions it, describes him as a strategist²⁵, which may have meant *magister militum*. This is how S. Markov understands it²⁶. Other authors consider it doubtful and indicate that at that time, he held the office of *comes et praeses Isauriae / comes Isauriae*²⁷. It is known that in the hands of this dignitary there was both civil and military power²⁸. Thus, Lilingis, while holding this office, was able to conduct military operations against Illus. It should be noted that the last *comes*

²¹ E.g. H. ELTON, *Illus...*, p. 399; R. KOSIŃSKI, *The Emperor Zeno...*, p. 147.

²² E.g. M. SALAMON, *Pamprepiusz z Panopolis – pisarz, profesor, polityk, obrońca pogaństwa w cesarstwie wschodnim*, [in:] *Studia Classica et Byzantina. Alexandro Krawczuk oblata*, Kraków 1996, p. 182; K. FELD, *Barbarische...*, p. 269.

²³ On the subject of the conflict between Zeno and Illus, see M.J. LESZKA, *Kilka uwag na temat losów Illusa Izauryjczyka w latach 479–484*, M 42, 2007, p. 103–105.

²⁴ Leontius came from Dalisandos in Isauria, but it is not certain that he was of Isaurian descent. Sources mention his Syrian ancestry. His career was of a military nature. On the subject of Leontius, see, e.g. *PLRE II*, p. 670–671 (s.v. *Leontius 17*); A. KIEL-FREYTAG, *Betrachtungen zur Usurpation des Illus und des Leontius (484–488 n. Chr.)*, ZPE 174, 2010, p. 291–301; M.J. LESZKA, *O Leoncjuszu i jego zmaganiach o cesarski tron w latach 484–488. Raz jeszcze*, PNH 20.1, 2021, p. 47–72.

²⁵ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 237.2: στρατηγόν.

²⁶ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, p. 435. It cannot be excluded that the emperor entrusted him with the post of *magister militum in vacans*. Certainly, it was not the position of *magister militum per Orientem*, because John the Scythian held it at the time. It is not out of the question that John of Antioch used the term στρατηγός to describe a leader without knowing what position he actually held. It should be noted, however, that for the period of the 4th and 5th centuries, John uses the term to refer to persons who were *magister militum* (e.g. Jordanes – 231; Cottomenes – 237.6; Patricius – 242.3; Cyril – 242.18), sometimes giving the full name of the position (233: Οτι ἐπι Ζήνωνος τοῦ βασιλέως Θεοδώριχος ὁ Τριαρίου τὴν στρατηγίδα τῶν Θρακίων).

²⁷ *PLRE II*, p. 683 (? *comes et praeses Isauriae*; C. BEGASS, *Die Senatsaristokratie...*, p. 180 (*comes Isauriae*). Cf. K. FELD, *Barbarische...*, p. 98–99; 356 (*comes et praeses Isauriae*)).

²⁸ W. BURGESS, *The Isaurians...*, p. 34–36; N. LENSKE, *Assimilation and Revolt in the Territory of Isauria, from the 1st Century to the 6th Century AD*, JESHO 42.2, 1999, p. 443–444 and K. FELD, *Barbarische...*, p. 89; R. KOSIŃSKI, *Izauria w orbicie wpływów rzymskich do połowy V wieku*, BTH 8, 2010, p. 22.

of Isauria recorded in the sources before 484 was Aetius (in 479)²⁹. The question of whether Lilingis commanded an army by virtue of his position as *comes* or *magister militum* cannot be resolved unequivocally given the existing state of the sources. The only thing that remains beyond discussion is the fact that in 484, he must have had prerogatives that entitled him to command an army. It is worth noting that Zeno, entrusting him with the task of fighting Illus, must have had confidence in him. This may mean that, despite family ties, Lilingis was on precarious terms with his half-brother. The emperor must have been aware of the nature of Illus' relationship with Lilingis and may have known him personally from before his great career began³⁰.

We know nothing about Lilingis' participation in the battles against the rebels. The main role in suppressing the usurpation was played, as we know, by John the Scythian³¹. One thing that seems certain about Lilingis' role in suppressing the usurpation is that he did not fail the emperor's trust since, at the end of the latter's reign, he held the office of administrator of Isauria³².

Lilingis next appears in the sources only in connection with the Isaurian uprising³³. Emperor Anastasius, the successor to Emperor Zeno, continued to take action against the Isaurians in 491, after he had consolidated himself on the throne, which ultimately led to the outbreak of discontent and an open armed revolt. Lilingis joined the uprising, if he was not one of its initiators. He was among its leaders, along with Longinus of Cardala, Conon – son of Fuscian, two Athenodors, and Longinus of Selinus³⁴. At the very beginning of their anti-imperial activities, the rebelling Isaurians managed to assemble a sizable force, consisting of both Isaurians and Romans. John of Antioch estimates them at 100,000, while Theophanes at 150,000. Both numbers are certainly greatly exaggerated³⁵. Rebel troops

²⁹ *PLRE* II, p. 20 (s.v. *Aetius* 4). It should be noted that there is no complete certainty that he held this office.

³⁰ Zeno appeared in Emperor Leo's court in around 465. Lilingis might have been at the time at least 15 years old. On the early career of Zeno – R. KOSIŃSKI, *Początki kariery Tarasikodissy-Zeno-na*, [in:] *Byzantina Europaea. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Waldemarowi Ceranowi*, ed. M. KOKOSZKO, M.J. LESZKA, Łódź 2007 [= *BL*, 11], p. 289–304.

³¹ On the role of John the Scythian in surprising the usurpation – M.J. LESZKA, *John the Scythian – a Slayer of Usurpers and the Isaurians*, *SCer* 10, 2020, p. 384–389.

³² THEOPHANES, *AM* 5985, p. 138. Theophanes mentions Lilingis as administrator of Isauria at the will of Emperor Zeno when describing the outbreak of the Isaurian uprising at the beginning of Anastasius' reign. It does not make it possible to determine from when he held this office, nor whether he held it at the outbreak of the uprising or was deprived of it shortly before that event.

³³ On the Isaurian uprising, see, e.g. C. CAPIZZI, *L'Imperatore Anastasio I (491–518). Studio sulla sua vita, la sua opera e la sua personalita*, Roma 1969 [= *OCA*, 184], p. 53; 94–99; K. FELD, *Barbarische...*, p. 332–338; F. HAARER, *Anastasius I...*, p. 11–28; M. MEIER, *Anastasios I. Die Entstehung des Byzantinischen Reiches*, Stuttgart 2009, p. 75–83.

³⁴ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5; THEOPHANES, *AM* 5985, p. 137–138.

³⁵ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5; THEOPHANES, *AM* 5985, p. 137 (this author states that the uprising forces were comprised of barbarians); cf. MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, a. 492;

plundered a number of cities in the provinces bordering Isauria. In response to these events, Anastasius sent troops to Isauria at the head of which he put John the Scythian and John Kyrτος³⁶. The first clash between the rebels and the imperial forces occurred in Phrygia at Kotyaeum (today Kütahya)³⁷. Despite having greater numbers³⁸, the Isaurians were defeated, suffering significant losses. Among the casualties was Lilingis³⁹. The Isaurian troops retreated to their own territory after losing the battle, without resistance from the imperial troops, which may mean that despite the setback, the Isaurian forces were still considerable and that they retained combat value. Theophanes writes that the imperial forces could have finished off the defeated enemy had they not been busy collecting spoils⁴⁰. John of Antioch, unlike Theophanes, mentions that the imperial army pursued the Isaurians as far as Taurus, but as we can presume, without major success, because he only notes the fact that at the foot of Taurus, they stopped for the winter layover.

Broadly speaking, that was how this stage of the insurrection (in which Lilingis took part) transpired. As I have mentioned earlier, he became one of its leaders and, what is important, co-commander of the insurgents' forces⁴¹. This shows that he was respected among his peers and had military experience, which is consistent with what we know about him in the context of the events of 484. This is unequivocally pointed out by Jordanes, who states that Lilingis distinguished himself among the Isaurians both in war and in council⁴².

The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius with scholia, III, 35, ed. J. BIDEZ, L. PARMENTIER, London 1898; IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*, XVI, 3; JORDANES, *Romana*, 355; THEODOROS ANAGNOSTES, *Kirchengeschichte, Epitome* 449, ed. G.C. HANSEN, Berlin 1995 [= GCS.NF, 3].

³⁶ The sources (THEOPHANES, AM 5985–5986, p. 138; IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, XVI, 3) mention as one of the leaders also *comes scholarum* Diogenian (known as Diogenes), a relative of Empress Ariadne. On the participation of John the Scythian in suppressing the uprising – M.J. LESZKA, *John the Scythian...*, p. 389–393; on the role of John Kyrτος in the fighting against the Isaurians – IDEM, *Jan Kyrτος – pogromca Izauryjczyków*, [in:] *W kręgu antycznych politei. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Janowi Ilukowi*, ed. W. GAJEWSKI, I. MILEWSKI, Gdańsk 2017, p. 207–212.

³⁷ On Kotyaeum, see K. BIELKE, N. MERSICH, *Phrygien und Pisidien*, Wien 1990 [= TIB, 7], p. 154.

³⁸ According to John of Antioch, the imperial forces numbered about 2,000 soldiers. Among them were reportedly Huns, Goths, and Beses (IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5; IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*, XVI, 3). F.K. HAARER aptly points out (*Anastasius I...*, p. 24, note 69) that emphasizing such a great disproportion of forces is intended to highlight the uniqueness of the Roman victory. The question of dating the battle – E.W. BROOKS, *The Emperor Zenon and the Isaurians*, EHR 8, 1893, p. 234; F. HAARER, *Anastasius I...*, p. 25, note 73.

³⁹ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5; THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 138.

⁴⁰ THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 138.

⁴¹ Lilingis' role as commander of the rebel troops is explicitly mentioned by Theophanes (THEOPHANES, AM 5895, p. 138), who mentions that he was assisted in this task by Athenodorus and Conon. Cf. IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5.

⁴² JORDANES, *Romana*, 355.

Lilingis participated as co-commander in the first rebel clash with the emperor's forces at Kotyaeum. As mentioned earlier, the Isaurians, despite outnumbering the imperial forces⁴³, were defeated, suffering major losses. Lilingis met his death in the battle⁴⁴. It surely must have affected the morale of the Isaurians, especially since he was reportedly the first to die in it⁴⁵, which contributed to the victory of the Byzantine forces. Contrary to Jordanes' opinion, the defeat at Kotyaeum – in fact, the only battle of his career that we know of in which he commanded – does not speak well of his leadership talents, but it is probably a testimony to his personal valor and accords well with the opinion about him found in *The Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor; the Byzantine chronicler describes him as a bold, daring man⁴⁶. On the other hand, Marcellinus Comes characterizes Lilingis as *slow on foot but the keenest horseman in war*⁴⁷. The slowness must have been the result of a disability. This is explicitly stated by John Malalas when he refers to him as *χωλός* (crippled, lame)⁴⁸.

Our knowledge of Lilingis – an illegitimate child, a man who, despite his physical infirmities, seems to have played a significant role in the Isauria of the 480s and early 490s – is not considerable. It is possible that from 484, he held the position of the Isaurian *comes* and was so successful at it that he probably retained it until the end of Zeno's reign and gained authority among his tribesmen, which resulted in his participation as one of the leaders in the Isaurian uprising.

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⁴³ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5; IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*, XVI, 3.

⁴⁴ IOANNES ANTIOCHENUS, *Fragmenta*, 239.5; THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 138; JORDANES, *Romana*, 355; MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, a. 492; IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*, XVI, 3.

⁴⁵ MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, a. 492; cf. IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*, XVI, 3.

⁴⁶ THEOPHANES, AM 5985, p. 138: ἀνὴρ θρασύτατος. This character trait of Lilingis could have been paired with impulsiveness (βίαιος) attributed to him in the Book of Suda (*Suidae lexicon*, p. 471, B 279).

⁴⁷ Translation B. CROKE – MARCELLINUS COMES, *Chronicon*, a. 492, p. 30. Cf. JORDANES, *Romana*, 355: *somewhat slow on foot because of the weakness of his body, but on horseback a daunting warrior* (trans. JORDANES, *Romana and Getica*, trans. P. VAN NUFFELEN, L. VAN HOOF, Liverpool 2020 [= TTH, 75], p. 206).

⁴⁸ IOANNES MALALAS, *Chronographia*, XVI, 3.

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Mirosław J. Leszka

University of Lodz
Faculty of Philosophy and History
Institute of History
Department of Byzantine Studies
ul. Kamińskiego 27a
90-219 Łódź, Polska/Poland
miroslaw.leszka@uni.lodz.pl

