

Meet the Langobards:568-774 CE

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Overview

- Who are the Langobards (aka the Lombards)?
- Where did they come from?
- What did their stuff look like?
- What lasting imprint did they leave on the Italian cultural landscape?

Background

- Langobard/Lombard - terms used interchangeably to refer to people
- Langobards enter Italy in 568 CE; conquered by Charlemagne and the Franks in 774 CE.
- Langobard Kingdom encompassed most of the Italian peninsula by 774
 - Langobardia Maior: northern part of Italy
 - Langobardia Minor: Spoleto and Benevento
 - Excluded Venice, Papal possessions (Rome to Ravenna), Calabria, and Apulia

Big Ideas:

- Italy transitions from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages
- Unique fusion of Germanic and Byzantine ideas and aesthetics
- Material culture (“stuff”) shows links to Byzantine Empire, Vendel Scandinavia, Saxon Britain, Merovingian Kingdom, and the Avars.

Histories and Myth

Main written sources:

- *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, Anonymous, 7th c. CE (680s)
- *Historia Langobardorum*, Paulus Diaconus (Paul the Deacon), late 8th c. CE
 - Originated on the “Island of Scandanan”
 - People are first known as the Winnili
 - Gambara and her sons lead a migration to the south
 - Winnili are later known as the Langobardi, supposedly named by Odin and Freya
 - Possibly from proto-Germanic *langaz + *bardaz = long beard

Migrations (supported by archeological and textual evidence)

- 1st c. CE: Mouth of the Elbe River (modern day Germany, near Hamburg)
- 4th-5th c. CE: Bohemia, Moravia (Czech Republic)
- 6th c. CE: Pannonia (Hungary)

Italy: Conquest or ‘It’s Complicated?’

- Ostrogoths occupied Italian peninsula since the 490s
- Byzantine reconquest in 552 CE w/ “barbarian” mercenaries: Gepids, Heruli, Langobards

- Byzantine general Narses invites Langobards into northern Italy—either to spite the Emperor (invasion) or to secure and repopulate the area (stabilization)
- Langobards and allies cross the Julian Alps into Friuli in 568 CE

Leadership & Politics

- Fara (Langobard word) - kin-group, lineage, expedition, travelling party, war-band??
- Dux (Latin term adopted by Langobards in 6th c.) - military leader, chieftan, leader of a Fara
- Langobard kings install a Dux in important urban centers that they control.
- Beginnings of feudal system established
 - role of Dux transitions from chieftan or war-band leader to military/defensive control over cities and the surrounding territory.

Law

Edictum Rothari - 643 CE, King Rothari

- First written compilation of Langobardic legal custom
- Initially did not apply to Roman residents
- Very detailed catalogue of compensation for injury (like Anglian/Saxon wergild system)
- Establishes division of military authority (dukes) and rural and urban civic authority (reeves and 'gastalds')

Social Structure (approximate)

King	
Dux (duke)	Gastaldus (city official) ;Reeve (rural official)
Gasindus (retainer to dux)	
Arimannus (freeman, warrior class, small landowner)	
Aldius (half-free, household servant)	
Slave	

Langobardic Language

- West Germanic language/dialect, same family as Alemannic, Bavarian, and Thuringian
- Handful of 6th century inscriptions in Elder Futhark
- No complete extant text.
- Latin documents preserve personal names and untranslatable Langobard words
- Extinct by the 8th century C.E., Langobards adopt Latin
- Coincides with development of Vulgar Latin into early Italian

Traces today:

- Place Names (Toponyms): especially in northern areas prior to Langobard adoption of Latin
- Loan words: often day-to-day terms; legal terms often superseded once the Franks take over
- Proper names preserved in surnames

Proper names

- Dithematic (two-part) Germanic names
- Later may mix-n-match Latin and Langobardic components

Religion

- Tacitus (1st c. CE) states that they worshiped a Mother Earth deity known as Nerthus
- Name change from 'Winnili' to 'Langobardi' may correspond to a shift from Nerthus to worship of Odin.
- Conversion to Arian Christianity in late 5th/early 6th c. CE (vs. Nicene, now "mainstream")
- Catholicism becomes widespread under King Aripert I, 653-661 CE

Jewelry and Attire

"Feminine" attire:

- Brooches (feminine attire):
 - Four-brooch assembly:
 - Radiate-head (pair used to close outer garment)
 - S-fibula (pair used to close neck of inner garment)
 - Disc brooches: may contain recycled Roman cameos or stones
 - SPOLIA: recycling Roman material to convey prestige
- Earrings: Langobard women soon adopt Byzantine basket style earrings.
- Rings: Cameo (spolia), signet (masculine)

"Masculine" attire:

- Equal-arm fibulae
- Belt Hardware
 - triangular plate and counterplate, strap end, additional plaques and hangers
- Clothing
 - Loose tunic
 - Trousers
 - Leg wrappings
 - Carbatina-style one-piece shoes
 - Cloak
 - Belt

Weapons and Armor:

- Spear and Scramasax are most common in graves
- Swords: Most with organic hilt of bone, wood, or horn and pyramidal metal pommel
 - High status graves sometimes include ring-hilt sword
- Lamellar helm and armor - eastern style adopted from steppe people (Avars)
 - Plaque from Valdinievole depicting the coronation of King Agilulf
- Umbo (Shield Boss)

Vessels

- Glass drinking horns, often multicolored
- Ceramics: stamped pottery, beakers

Architecture

- Multipart UNESCO World Heritage Site: The Langobards in Italy: Places of Power (568 - 774 AD)
 - 7 religious buildings of different types: Cividale del Friuli, Brescia, Castelseprio, Spoleto, Benevento, Monte Sant'Angelo, Campello sul Clitunno
- "Romanesque" elements are continuation, not reintroduction
 - round arches
 - groin vaults
 - prominent towers,
 - decorative arcades

Further reading:

- Christie, Neil. 1998. *The Lombards: the ancient Longobards*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Ausenda, Giorgio, Paolo Delogu, and Chris Wickham. 2009. *The Langobards before the Frankish conquest: an ethnographic perspective*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.
- Paulus Diaconus, (trans. William Dudley Foulke). 1907. *History of the Langobards*. <https://archive.org/details/historyoflangoba0000paul>.

Museum collections viewable online:

- Museo Nazionale dell'Alto Medioevo, Rome.
- National Archaeological Museum, Cividale del Friuli.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- Walters Art Museum, Baltimore