

The Short Oxford History of Italy

General Editor: John A. Davis

*Italy in the Nineteenth Century*

*edited by John A. Davis*

*Liberal and Fascist Italy*

*edited by Adrian Lyttelton*

*Italy since 1945*

*edited by Patrick McCarthy*

*Early Modern Italy*

*edited by John Marino*

IN PREPARATION, VOLUMES COVERING

*Italy in the Later Middle Ages 1000–1300*

*Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300–1550*

The Short Oxford History of Italy

General Editor: John A. Davis

---

*Italy in the Early  
Middle Ages*

476–1000

---

Edited by Cristina La Rocca

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



There is a great deal still to be done, however. To justify at least in part the thematic and regional gaps that will be evident in this volume, it has to be said that the new research has been more vigorous in central and northern Italy, while in southern Italy and the islands institutional themes like the structure of monarchy and of vassalage continue to dominate. These essays will also show how the period with which this volume ends—the one around the turn of the millennium—is studied in ways that look forward towards the development of the more complex ecclesiastical institutions that accompanied the later Reformation of the eleventh- and twelfth-centuries. In the case of the reconstruction of settlement patterns and rural landscapes, however, the cut-off point is, by contrast, the tenth century. These different chronologies relate in part to the timing of changes in particular areas. But it is not a matter of chance that the tenth century emerges in a somewhat fragmented and irregular form. It has an ambiguous status, being both the last century of the early Middle Ages and the beginning of the central part of the Middle Ages. Depending on each scholar's field of specialization, it is as a result either a period of final breakdown or the point of departure. Almost certainly it will be on this century that future research in all the fields discussed in this volume will come to be focused.

As this volume goes to print, I would like to take the opportunity to thank John Davis for his unfailing assistance with every aspect of the book's preparation, as well as Andrew MacLennan, Fiona Kinneer, Jo Stanbridge, and Matthew Cotton for their technical support and their great professional skills, the translators: Andrea Pennacchi (Introduction), Antonio Sennis and Nichola Anderson (chapter 2), Geraldine Ludbrook (chapters 3, 4, 5, 7), Jeremy Scott (chapter 8), Richard Davis (chapter 9), Eric Ingaldson (chapter 10), John Davis (chapter 11), and finally, all the authors for their punctuality and willingness. I hope that this volume will play a part in bringing to an end both the ethnic prejudice against the 'German invaders' and the more contemporary ethnic *topos* reflected in the words of an anonymous reviewer of this project: 'Italian scholars are not usually renowned for their brevity and even the most laconic of scholars would find it difficult to do justice to some of these complex topics in 5,000, 7,500 or even 9,000 words.'

Padova, October 2001

# Invasions and ethnic identity

Walter Pohl

## Romans and barbarians in late Roman Italy

To modern eyes Roman Italy had a very distinct identity, and its Romanness was expressed in numerous cultural features: architecture and crafts, mosaics and inscriptions, institutions and law, literature and education. Indeed, few pre-modern societies have left such lasting marks on the landscape, and in the memories of many generations to come. Still, as Andrea Giardina has argued, Roman Italy had not quite achieved an identity of its own, his book is appropriately titled *Roman Italy: Histories of an Incomplete Identity*. Early Rome had conquered an ethnically heterogeneous country, with *Veneti* and *Celts* in the North, *Etruscans* in the Centre, several regional peoples in the South, and *Greeks* along some of the coastlines. The Romans, in turn, cherished their mythical Trojan origins. Paradoxically, it was the very success of Roman expansion that left little room for the development of an ethnic Roman-Italian identity. In 48 AD, when the emperor Claudius opened the senate to non-Italians a ferocious debate ensued about the value of Italian *consanguinitas*, blood relationship, which proved to be too artificial to be convincing for many contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Romanness remained those who had the been: a political identity that easily accommodated those who had the means, and the conviction, to live by its rules. It was precisely this

<sup>1</sup> A. Giardina, *L'Italia romana. Storie di una identità incompiuta* (Rome, Bari, 1997), pp. 3–10.



tension between a strict definition of what it meant to be Roman, and a considerable flexibility as to who could become Roman, that made the Roman model so successful, even in times of crisis (for instance, in the third century). It also coexisted perfectly with civic, regional, or even 'ethnic' identities, many of which survived, however transformed, the centuries of Roman rule in Italy. Thus, for instance, Greek identities in the South going back to the pre-Roman *Magna Graecia* could provide a basis for Byzantine rule up to the eleventh century.

The barbarian invaders of Italy constitute another clear-cut image in the modern mind: fair-haired and blue-eyed heavy-drinking and riotous Germanic warriors, clad in filthy furs, whose plain but violent ways replaced the decadent sophistication of late Rome. The modern image of the barbarian goes back to the long tradition of ethnocentric stereotypes and perceptions in antiquity. The word 'barbarian' itself is of Greek origin, and meant those who could only mutter indistinct gibberish instead of speaking proper Greek. It was then used simply to describe non-Romans, so that barbarians came to be seen as uncivilized, violent, and treacherous, although critics of Roman decadence such as Tacitus and later critics of Christian sinfulness sometimes depicted them as uncorrupted and noble savages.

Like Gibbon watching the sun set over the Roman forum, generations of Europeans have wondered why Rome fell to those barbarians. Down to the present, historians remain divided, with Italian, French, and Spanish historians speaking of 'invasions', while German and English scholars call the same process 'migrations'. Did Rome 'decline and fall', or was it destroyed by invading barbarians? A less controversial and more inclusive concept is the 'transformation of the Roman world'. In this perspective the antagonism between Romans and barbarians was not the key issue as it had been in ancient, medieval and modern thought, and newer approaches have placed greater emphasis on the more complex processes through which the barbarians were integrated into changing late Roman societies. These processes were full of contradictions, conflict, and bloodshed; but more often than not the conflict was not between invaders and others, but developed along different lines.

Italy, as the heart of the empire, had always been a focus of migrations and communications in the Mediterranean and beyond. Italy needed its barbarians: it imported and attracted them. The number

of foreign slaves who came to Italy in the centuries of Roman rule can only be guessed at, but there is no doubt that their manpower was essential to the ancient economy. Prisoners of war were regularly sold as slaves; entire groups of defeated barbarians were settled as *laeti* or *dedicci* in late antique Italy and in other provinces. At the imperial court in Rome (and later, Milan and Ravenna), noble barbarians lived as hostages or refugees, and barbarian soldiers played an important role in the emperor's bodyguard. In fact, it was in the army that barbarians were increasingly welcome. Here, in late antiquity, soldiers of barbarian origin could also rise to the highest ranks. By the time of Theodosius I (d. 395), a majority of 'Roman' officers were in fact barbarians. The most successful among them, the Vandal Stilicho, became consul and patrician and dominated politics in the west after the death of Theodosius. From the third century onwards, internal conflicts and the needs of defence against barbarian incursions had increased Rome's need for soldiers, and many barbarians were prepared to face any risk in return for a share in Rome's goods and prestige. In times of relative peace, Italy saw little of its barbarian defenders. But slowly, they moved closer to the inner circles of power.

The gradual militarization of the Roman world meant that civil society increasingly lost its control over the armed forces. But much of the inner unrest of the fifth century was also due to the attempts by senatorial aristocrats to expand their power. The leading senators still enjoyed a unique position, with huge estates scattered across the empire, traditional careers in the civil service that gave access to the inner circles of power, and political networks that could be the basis for far-reaching alliances. But parallel to the conservative outlook of this ruling elite, a different Roman-barbarian culture of power also came into being. For a long time the army had been an agent of Romanization, but now it also encouraged the rise of sub-imperial identities. The *esprit de corps* cultivated in Roman army units paradoxically encouraged the growth of new ethnic identities within the late Roman system. As political control over the army declined, these more particular loyalties gradually became more important than obedience to the empire. The power of many commanders, for example the fifth-century Roman general and warlord Aetius, was now based on the personal devotion of their soldiers in ways that had some precedent in earlier Roman history. But when they died or were removed from their commands, the armies they had built around



1607 →

1500s  
Huns

their personal leadership were disbanded. Their position in court politics was also precarious and when Stilicho was overthrown in 407 a massacre of barbarians followed and the core of his troops joined Alaric's armies. Because Alaric, a Roman general of Gothic origin, succeeded in attracting different ethnic loyalties to his army, it proved less vulnerable to defeat or to a change of leaders.

The Goths were the most successful of these groups. Even though the two strongest Gothic powers north of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea had succumbed to the Huns around 375, the Goths enjoyed an unrivalled prestige as barbarian soldiers because they were both ferocious fighters and willing to adapt to Roman ways. Whether derived from genealogy, tradition, or imitation, Gothic identity opened the door to military careers in the empire. After the emperor Valens had lost the battle of Adrianople (378) against a Gothic-led alliance of recent immigrants, Rome had been forced to accommodate groups of Goths as quasi-autonomous federates in Roman provinces. Technically, these were components of the Roman army, but at the same time they were able to improve their position through negotiation and blackmail. Alaric, king of the Goths, who moved to Italy around 400 and sacked Rome in 410, was the first barbarian leader who successfully built up an autonomous, albeit precarious non-Roman power base in Italy which enabled him to negotiate a key role in western Roman politics for his Goths. But even his dazzling victories were not sufficient to guarantee a secure hold in the shifting sands of the Italian balance of power; his heirs would prove more successful elsewhere, establishing the Visigothic kingdom in Aquitaine and Spain. In Italy the political elite carefully avoided allowing the Goths to become too strong as a single group, although this required occasional purges in the army.

Other barbarian leaders chose a different strategy. They raised large and heterogeneous armies, and marched into Italy. This was the case of the Goth Radagaisus, whose forces were crushed by Stilicho at Fiesole in 406. Better known is Attila's invasion in 452, after his attack on Gaul had been halted at the Catalaunian Fields in the previous year. Attila assembled a huge army of several tens of thousands of Huns, Goths, Gepids, Heruls, and others, besieged and took Aquileia, and marched as far as Milan, which offered no resistance. Nobody in Italy could have stopped him at this point. But disease and lack of supplies became a problem, while his warriors were already laden

with booty. The example of Alaric, to whom the sack of Rome had brought little lasting success, may have served as a warning, but in any case Attila decided to return to Pannonia, where he died soon after. Papal propaganda soon attributed this to Pope Leo's intervention—a legend that has stuck (the scene can be admired on Raphael's fresco in the Vatican). The Huns had long been pictured by Christian preachers as the apocalyptic people of Magog who were sent as a scourge by God to punish the sinful—more a moral drama than a political event in fact. The incursion of Attila's Huns thus became one of the best-known events of the period, although it was in reality little more than an episode whose outcome showed that even an extraordinary concentration of military force was not sufficient to take control over late Roman Italy (which was almost certainly not Attila's aim anyway). Cities abounding in riches could still easily be plundered, as the Vandal king Geiseric proved when he mounted a sudden raid on Rome from the sea a few years later, in 455. But to gain mastery of the old heartland of the empire, it was necessary to employ the machinery that had been set up by the Romans to govern it.

### Odoacer and the kingdom of Italy

From 395 until 476, the western emperors were at the mercy of mainly barbarian commanders (the Vandal Stilicho, the Suevian Ricimer, the Burgundian Gundobad), and often the only option the emperors had was to play their generals off against each other. These barbarian generals held the title of *magister militum* as commanders of the field army as well as that of *patricius*. They received yearly subsidies that allowed them to entertain a large retinue of personal followers, called *buccellarii* after the superior type of bread they received compared to ordinary soldiers. In the highest ranks of this military aristocracy the difference between Romans and barbarians was slight; their families intermarried and they used similar strategies to compete for the same positions. The 'barbarian' Stilicho celebrated his consulate in the traditional Roman way on an elaborate ivory consular diptych, whereas Aetius, the 'last Roman', as Procopius called him, owed much of his success to a devoted retinue of Huns. The only difference



was that according to a tacit assumption, barbarians could not become emperors themselves. This was hardly a serious disadvantage, given that most emperors quickly met violent deaths, and the barbarian *patricii* often had the opportunity to 'make' new ones.

Before 476, the neighbouring powers tried in turn to draw this unstable political system into their orbit of power: the Burgundians and the Visigoths in Gaul, and of course the eastern Romans. But it was significant that Odoacer, the first barbarian to consolidate his rule over Italy, had no distinctive political allegiance or ethnic identity. Historians have debated whether he was a German or a Hun, a Heral or a Thuringian. But that is to miss the main point, which is that the ambiguity of the contemporary sources in this respect demonstrates that Odoacer's ethnic identity reflected the heterogeneous character of the Italian field army that he commanded. Odoacer came from Attila's court in Pannonia, a bustling power centre where aristocrats of very different origin, Huns, Goths, Gepids, and many other barbarian peoples as well as Romans, came together and established a network of power that would outlast Attila's death in 453 and the collapse of the empire of the Huns. Odoacer's father, Edica, was one of the notables at the Hunnic court, as were the fathers of Odoacer's predecessor (Romulus Augustulus, the last western emperor) and his successor (Theoderic the Ostrogoth). After 453, Edica established a small kingdom of the Sciri along the middle Danube; when the Ostrogoths shattered it in 469, Odoacer went to Italy, his brother Hunulf to Constantinople. After serving as an imperial bodyguard, Odoacer became commander of the federate troops in Italy, to a considerable extent composed of barbarians who had been conscripted from Pannonia.

In the summer of 476 the federate troops overthrew emperor Romulus Augustulus and his father, Orestes, and made Odoacer their king. The rebellion was not intended to overthrow the empire as such; Odoacer was simply another barbarian king striving for power within the Roman system. But there was a difference: the king sent the imperial insignia to Constantinople, stating that an emperor was no longer needed in the west since his authority no longer extended beyond Italy. Although still nominally subject to the eastern (or Byzantine) empire, Odoacer as a result became the supreme authority in Italy. But his kingdom, which had been set up by a federate army, had no specific ethnic identity. Odoacer rex as a result

acted as king of Italy, and took up residence in the imperial palace of

Ravenna.

Until very recently, modern historians have seen 476 as a critical moment in the fall of the Roman empire in the west, and hence as the point where antiquity came to an end and the Middle Ages began in Italy. But contemporaries showed no awareness of any fundamental change. Odoacer maintained the form and content of the Roman administration of Italy; there was little that was 'Germanic' about his kingdom except for the remote origins of many of his troops (which contemporaries simply called 'barbarian'). It was not until the sixth century, in the reign of Theoderic, that the Romans who for one reason or another opposed him turned to the emperor in Constantinople for support, and began to refer to the barbarian kings in Italy as an anomaly and as a threat to the identity of the Romans. It was at that time that the origins of the problem were dated to Odoacer, Jordanes, who wrote in Constantinople in the 550s, even described the coup of 476 as if it had been a fully-fledged barbarian invasion.<sup>2</sup> The truth was that Odoacer had brought a period of relative peace to Italy; and by contrast it was the emperor who in the end plunged Italy into another bloody war. Theoderic, king of the Goths, was one of his generals who had built up a powerful position in the Balkans at the head of his federate army; in order to remove this threat the Emperor Zeno ordered him to depose Odoacer and rule Italy in his name. Theoderic raised a huge multi-ethnic army and invaded Italy in August 489. After a siege lasting three years Theoderic entered Ravenna, where he treacherously murdered his predecessor and became king in Italy.

## Theoderic and the Goths (493-526)

Who were the Goths? Traditional scholarship assumed that the Goths probably were of Scandinavian origin, lived in modern Poland in the first two centuries AD, then moved to the steppes north of the Black Sea, where they split into Visigoths and Ostrogoths. At the end of their long migrations, the former established kingdoms in southern

<sup>2</sup> Jordanes, *Getica* c. 46, ed. Th. Mommsen (Berlin, 1882), p. 120.



France and Spain, the latter in Italy. But thanks to the groundbreaking work of Herwig Wolfram, we now know better. Numerous different groups of barbarians were referred to as Goths between the third and the sixth centuries: they included raiders and pirates in the Aegean, traders in the Crimea, peasants in the Balkans, enemies and allies of the Huns, units of the Roman army, and, last but not least, the followers of the dynasties that established the two Gothic kingdoms on Roman territory. These groups fluctuated, drew in people of very diverse origin, grew with success and waned with failure, and were in turn supported, kept at bay, or wiped out by the Romans. The term 'Goth' was frequently used by Roman writers, and in late antiquity it was often used for any non-Hunnic peoples who came from the eastern steppes. They were not regarded as Germans but were classed as Scythians, like the Huns. Then nineteenth-century philologists claimed that Gothic was a Germanic language, and consequently a new concept of Germanness was created that determined the ways in which the historical role of the Goths was interpreted.

Recently, it has been suggested that the term 'Goth' may have been just a convenient label for a privileged military elite enjoying the benefits of the Roman system rather than the inherited and carefully preserved identity of thousands of Ostrogothic soldiers. It is hard to imagine that the Goths were simply an invention, and if individual Goths were not explicitly called Goths in our sources this was probably because that would have been unnecessary. On the other hand, it is unclear how many of the Italian Goths of the sixth century were descended from Attila's Goths in the fifth, or even from Black Sea Goths in the fourth century. Their history was deeply fragmented, and Goths had fought (and died) in the front line on both sides in almost all of the major battles of the age (for instance, on the Catalaunian Plains). The prestige and privilege of the Goths drew new bands of barbarians to join them at different times. But knowing exactly where the parents and the grandparents of the Goths who followed Theoderic to Italy came from would tell us less about them than traditional scholarship assumed, because in Italy, to be a Goth was associated primarily with specific social roles that conferred privileges and gave rise to certain expectations.

The army with which Theoderic had conquered Italy probably consisted of some 30,000 soldiers, and when the women, children and slaves are included may have risen to some 100,000 people. In Italy it

was joined by some of Odoacer's troops. The Goths and their barbarian allies were, therefore, a small minority in a country whose inhabitants amounted to several millions. Why the huge Roman population accepted being governed by barbarians is beside the point, however. For a long time Roman armies had been largely composed of barbarians, while Roman tax collectors were widely seen as oppressors, so we can assume that the majority of the people had stopped worrying about who exactly governed them. Although the Roman aristocrats despised the barbarians, many also believed that they could use them to their own purposes. Indeed, Theoderic sought the support of the senators and employed Roman specialists in civil administration (like Cassiodorus and Liberius) to help the Goths to settle and guarantee their supplies.<sup>3</sup> Historians have recently debated whether the Gothic soldiers, who were mainly garrisoned in the cities, received allocations from tax revenues or land. It seems likely that initially the Goths were supported from tax revenues, but in the long run many of them also acquired landed property.<sup>4</sup>

Theoderic and his Roman advisers looked to create a lasting cultural mix in which the Goths would preserve their special status and prestige while adapting to the customs and culture of Roman society. A great deal of effort went into curbing any outrages that Gothic warriors might commit and to reassuring the Roman population that life would continue as before. There were only certain areas where the Goths refused to adapt. They continued to adhere to the Arian creed, referred to as the *lex Gothica* or Gothic law in our sources. It is no coincidence that the only extensive text in Gothic that has survived is the so-called Codex Argenteus, a sumptuous Gothic bible, which is the earliest known long text in any Germanic language. Goths had their own Arian churches (as can still be seen in Ravenna), and surviving documents written by clerics show that Gothic was spoken there.

Theoderic's reign (493–526) gave Italy a period of peace and relative prosperity. But consensus among the senators slowly eroded and as Justinian (527–65) consolidated his authority over the Byzantine

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cassiodorus, *Variar*, trans. S. J. B. Barnish (Liverpool, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> See W. Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans, A.D. 418–584: The Techniques of Accommodation* (Princeton, NJ, 1980) and W. Pohl, 'The empire and the Lombards: treaties and negotiations in the sixth century', in W. Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 75–134.



empire the opposition in Italy began to look to him for support. When in 535 King Theodahad deposed his co-ruler, Theoderic's daughter Amalasontha, Justinian took this as a pretext to attack. The Gothic war lasted for almost twenty years, and ruined a considerable part of the Roman infrastructure in the peninsula. The historian Procopius was an eyewitness to many of these events, and his detailed history of the war is one of the liveliest accounts of the situation in Italy in the period.<sup>5</sup> Procopius showed that as the war raged on the Byzantines came to be regarded as foreigners: not Romans any more, but Greeks. In their own propaganda the Ostrogoths depicted the Byzantines as invaders, and stressed that their army was an amalgam of barbarians: Heruls and Huns, Goths and Slavs, Armenians and Persians, Gepids and Lombards from Pannonia and Isaurians from Asia Minor,<sup>6</sup> Franks, Burgundians, and Alamans began to raid Italy on their own account. By 540 it seemed that the Byzantines had won the war; but the administrators and tax collectors from the east soon provoked such discontent that the defeated Goths were able to launch another successful offensive. The war dragged on in a seesaw of sieges; when a city was taken, the soldiers were usually granted safe conduct or even changed sides, but (as happened in Milan) there were many massacres of the civilian population.

By the time that the Gothic kingdom finally collapsed in 552/53, Italy was impoverished, and waves of plague continued to depopulate the country. Regional resistance continued, usually led by local barbarian commanders and often supported by the Franks, who had extended their control over almost the whole range of the Alps. It would soon become evident that this reflected a fundamental change in the political culture of Italy. The unity established by Rome that had firmly drawn together the different regions of Italy was fading away, and the Byzantine state, with its tax collectors and its barbarian soldiers, was incapable of maintaining it. Before the Roman legions changed things, Italy had been a conglomerate of cities and rural areas with widely differing climates, economies and deep-rooted regional and local identities. Now the senatorial elite with its wide-ranging interests had lost power. During the Gothic war townspeople

all over Italy had learnt that what little peace and security they could enjoy was sheltered behind their city walls. It may seem paradoxical that in a period in which most of the old cities were in decline, with ruins and empty spaces expanding inside the walls, their political weight should have grown. But their impoverishment necessarily diminished the resources that could be transferred to any central government, be it Byzantine or barbarian. The formidable military machinery that the late Roman empire had set up, and that had finally won back the old heartland of the empire after the Gothic war, could no longer be maintained without excessive taxation. As in all other provinces of the western empire, the simple fact that barbarian government was less expensive made Roman (by now, Byzantine) rule untenable.

## The Lombards

The failure of Byzantine rule to establish solid roots in Italy soon provoked another barbarian invasion. In 568, the Lombards under their king, Alboin, raised an army in Pannonia that also included Gepids, Suebians, Sarmatians, Bulgars, Saxons, Roman provincials, and others. With its multi-ethnic composition, its size, and the route it took to Italy it resembled Theoderic's army of some eighty years before. But unlike the Ostrogoths, the Lombards hardly encountered any serious resistance; although paradoxically Alboin's rule, and that of his successors, would be limited to a part of northern Italy only. The reason was that, without resistance, there was no need for the army to stay united and it dissolved: the Saxons went home, others began to raid Frankish Gaul, while two other groups marched off to the South and eventually founded the independent Lombard duchies of Spoleto and Benevento in the mountainous inland areas of the peninsula. The rest settled in the cities of the North, such as Cividale, Trento, Brescia, or Turin, where powerful dukes established strongholds with armed followers that represented a force any monarch would have to reckon with. The ethnic ties between the Lombards certainly did not result in unity; and for decades after 568 the Lombard dukes joined the Byzantines or the Franks as they pleased for short-term political benefits. For ten years there was no king, until a

<sup>5</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars*, vols. iii–v, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing (London, 1933–4).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 30, vol. v, p. 367.



concerted Byzantine-Frankish offensive prompted the restoration of the kingdom.

In contrast to earlier Roman or Gothic rule, the new structure of power limited the power of the king (and thus has often been interpreted as a structural weakness of the kingdom) while at the same time strengthening local ties and civic identities. This was reflected in the growing importance of the role of the bishops as civic leaders. In 594, for instance, the bishop and the citizens of Brescia, in a dogmatic controversy, directly challenged Pope Gregory the Great by requiring an oath that he would not condemn the so-called Three Chapters.<sup>7</sup> At about the same time, although independently, the dukes and cities of Bergamo, Verona, and Padua rebelled against King Agilulf (590–616). Elsewhere, both the 'Lombard' duke and the 'Roman' bishop supported the king, for instance in Trento, which was always threatened by Frankish attacks. Whereas Theoderic had relied on the Roman central administration to govern the country, the Lombards could only cooperate with those structures of civic administration that were still in place.

What happened to the Romans under Lombard rule? Many historians believe that Roman landowners were killed or driven into exile, and that the Roman population was enslaved by the new lords. There is little evidence to support that interpretation. In the cities of the kingdom, church organization continued to function as before, and funerary inscriptions provide evidence of the survival of many well-to-do citizens and artisans. In the years after 568 the level of violence and raiding was high, but the Lombards had come to stay, and to do so they employed the existing infrastructures. Instead of a few tens of thousands of Lombards commanding millions of Roman slaves, we should think in terms of local societies that became ethnically mixed. The principal change was that the civil lay aristocracy disappeared, a change that was taking place in all western European countries. In the long run, only two models for the elite remained: that of the warrior-landowner claiming some prestigious barbarian identity, and that of the 'Roman' cleric. Roman landowners may also have decided to rise into the ranks of the Lombard aristocracy, although that is a process that is better documented for Frankish Gaul and Visigothic Spain. Others could seek protection by the bishop, donating their estates

LOMBARD SOCIETY →

<sup>7</sup> Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum epistolarum* 4, 37, ed. D. Norberg (Turnhout, 1982).

to the Church and receiving them back as a permanent loan. Roman traders and artisans continued in business and came to be protected by royal legislation (for instance the *magistri commacini*, the builders). The court also needed Roman specialists in administration (like Secundus of Trento, the faithful adviser and historian of Queen Theodelinda); Latin continued to be the language of state. At the lower end of the social scale, there were both Roman and Lombard slaves between whom the Edict of King Rothari (643) decreed only minor differences in status.<sup>8</sup>

On the whole, most of the population, and especially the peasants, may have been better off under Lombard rule than before. Systematic taxation ceased, and the relative shortage of manpower eased the pressure on rural labour. The army was no longer financed through taxes, but was now supported directly from landed property. This meant that, for better or worse, the warriors were much harder to control, but it also meant that their interests as landowners eventually got the upper hand over their needs as warriors. The mobile mercenaries of the fifth century had been veritable soldiers of fortune, for whom armed conflict was the only source of income. That was why the Gothic armies repeatedly forced their reluctant leaders to start yet another war. In the eighth century, on the other hand, the Lombard kings had to introduce severe penalties for Lombard *milites* who did not follow the call to arms. An eighth-century Lombard nobleman in Tuscany even converted his house into a monastery and took his vows, apparently to avoid having to fight the Franks.<sup>9</sup> Lombard aristocrats now had a lot to lose. They still went about armed even in peacetime, unlike Roman aristocrats in times of empire, and drunken brawls or even complicated feuds might break out at any time. Lombard kings legislated against all sorts of probable and improbable infringements of public order (including throwing somebody from his horse, stealing a woman's clothes while she was bathing, or street-fighting in which women took an active part). But after the consolidation of the kingdom in c.600 times were relatively peaceful, and wars for the most part remained short and regional.

But the kingdom was now inseparable from the identity of the Lombard people. Whereas Theoderic's title had simply been *rex*, the

<sup>8</sup> Rothari 144 (builders): 194 (Roman slaves), pp. 75, 89.

<sup>9</sup> *Vita Walfreidi*, ed. K. Schmid (Tübingen, 1991).



full title of the Lombard king was *rex gentis Langobardorum*. Written histories and wall-paintings celebrated the deeds of the *gens* (the people), including the pagan myth of their origins that explained how the god Wodan had given them the name of 'longbeards' (for the seemingly paradoxical reason that their women had lined up on the battlefield wearing their long hair like a beard).<sup>10</sup> But apart from these abstract notions, what actually defined the Lombards is hard to say. Some Lombards wore beards and others did not; Paul the Deacon, the late eighth-century Lombard historian, noted that they had completely changed their dress since 600. By 650, burials with grave-goods had also been abandoned. Christianity had grown in influence even before the Lombards came to Italy, and by the end of the seventh century most Lombards were Catholics (perhaps with a tinge of syncretism in many cases). Churches and monasteries, most of them quite small, were now founded by the dozen. Although Lombards notionally lived according to Lombard law, eighth-century legislation allowed a choice of Roman and Lombard law in certain cases, so that legal distinctions began to be blurred. This is also attested in charters: in 758, a *Romania mulier* with the Lombard name Gunderada sold property with the consent of her husband (who had a Roman name) as Lombard law required.<sup>11</sup> Gradually Lombard language began to fade away; it is remarkable that no contemporary observer took any notice of this process, which must mean that it had no bearing on Lombard identity. For a long time, Lombard names remained an obvious sign of identity. But they were not used to perpetuate ethnic divisions but simply to delineate social status. Paul the Deacon, who was born into a noble Lombard family in Friuli in the 720s, was given the Latin name Paulus because he was destined for an ecclesiastical career; whereas his brother, the heir to the family estate, was given a Lombard name. While Lombards became Romanized, Lombard identity became more broad and spread to include inhabitants of many different origins. The result was that by about 1000, 'Lombardia' and 'Romania' had become regional identities within the otherwise relatively homogeneous Italian-speaking populations in different parts of the Po basin.

<sup>10</sup> Pauli, *Historia Langobardorum*, 1, 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> B. Pohl-Resl, 'Legal practice and ethnic identity in Lombard Italy', in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998), p. 210.

## Byzantine Italy

The region around Ravenna, still called Romagna today, remained the centre of Byzantine rule in Italy for almost 200 years after Alboin's invasion; it fell to the Lombard king Aistulf only in 751. In the late sixth century Byzantine possessions were still extensive, and included almost the entire coastline from Istria and the Venetian lagoon on the northern Adriatic to Apulia and Calabria in the South, the islands, and the west coast up to Liguria. Rome, and its hinterland, was the second Byzantine centre. Only gradually were some of these regions lost to the Lombards. But it was typical of the delicate balance of power in the peninsula that throughout the period the Byzantines should have maintained control of the overland communications between Rome and Ravenna through a chain of fortresses along the road that ran through Narni and Perugia and which also marked the border between the Lombard duchies of Tuscia (which owed allegiance to the king) and Spoleto (which followed a more independent course). Exact territorial demarcations of the different powers were more often the result of negotiated settlements than of sieges and wars.

In the North, only a few Byzantine border towns, such as Oderzo or Bresscello, suffered lasting damage in war. In the Centre and the South, where there were numerous smaller cities, the first decades after the Lombard invasion caused many of them to decline, and several bishoprics had to be abandoned. Here anti-Lombard rhetoric tended to assume sharper tones, as for example in papal letters: 'the enemies of God, the most sacrilegious Lombards' was the standard formula. Pelagius II (579–90) still hoped they would soon 'disappear like smoke'. But Gregory the Great (590–604) took a more realistic stance, and pressed the lay authorities to negotiate peace. He repeatedly had to ransom prisoners taken in the course of Lombard raids, who would otherwise have been sold off as slaves.<sup>12</sup> Still, in many regions under Byzantine control the disruption was minimal.

Until the beginning of the eighth century, the emperor maintained strict control over his remaining Italian possessions through the

<sup>12</sup> Gregorius Magnus, *Registrum*. Cf. Pohl, 'The empire and the Lombards'.



exarch (or governor, usually a Greek) and an elaborate hierarchy of officials. Unlike Lombard Italy, the tax system was retained, primarily to finance the army. Numerous Greek inscriptions show that there was an important Greek minority. Nonetheless, in many respects social changes in the exarchate were similar to those in the territories under Lombard rule. The senatorial aristocracy with its widely dispersed estates had virtually disappeared, and the ownership of landed property tended to become more regional. A new leading group composed of military officials with considerable (but still comparatively modest) landed property began to emerge. The civil lay aristocracy was in decline, while the Church, above all the bishop of Rome, took responsibility for an increasingly wide variety of administrative duties. This suggests that the impact of the Lombards on social change in Italy may have been more limited than has often been thought, but also that we should not exaggerate the long-term effect of Byzantine rule either.

In fact, no 'Byzantine' identity emerged. The Byzantines continued to call themselves Romans, *Rhomaioi*, with the result that the term *Romani* came to mean many different things: the Byzantine state and its agents; its Italian subjects; the citizens of the city of Rome; and the Romance-speaking population of Italy. No contemporary felt a need for more precise definition. When the Lombard king Aistulf, before he attacked Ravenna in 751, introduced penalties for any commerce with 'Romans', the intention was clear, but he did not specify which Romans he meant.<sup>13</sup> To the Italians, the Greek-speaking Byzantines were Greeks, like the Greek inhabitants of southern Italy. But otherwise ethnic designations were of little use in describing the complicated political geography of Italy. When King Ratchis warned his subjects in the 740s not to send unauthorized missions to foreign powers, he specified the foreign *gentes* as the Franks, the Bavarians, or the Avars, whereas in Italy he listed cities instead: Rome, Ravenna, Spoleto, and Benevento.<sup>14</sup>

As the Byzantines gradually lost control of Italy in the eighth century, a number of cities began to emerge as more or less independent powers. The largest and at the same time the most complicated case was the city of Rome, which had been defended by the popes against Lombard attacks using a mix of spiritual rhetoric and Frankish

support. The *res publica*, as the popes called it, was intended to represent a restored Roman state with authority in much of Italy under secular papal rule. Other cities were more modest. Long-distance trade gave the city-states of Naples, Amalfi, and to some extent also Gaeta the means to resist their neighbours throughout the ninth and tenth centuries. In the North, Comacchio and Venice controlled the regional salt trade, and towards the end of the ninth century Venice overcame her rival and, under the protection of the relics of St Mark, which had been stolen from Egypt in the 820s, established herself as the principal meeting point between central Europe and the Levant.

### Frankish rule and its impact

Soon after Clovis had created a powerful Frankish kingdom around 500, the Franks began to take an interest in Italian affairs. During the sixth century, in the period between the Gothic war and the consolidation of the Lombard kingdom under king Agilulf, there were repeated Frankish interventions in Italy. But with the decline of Merovingian rule, Frankish influence also faded, and it was only in the mid-eighth-century that the popes brought the Franks back into Italian power politics in their search for allies to block Lombard expansion. In the 750s Pippin III repeatedly intervened in Lombard northern Italy. In their annual campaigns against neighbouring peoples, the Carolingians had built up a military potential and dynamic that none of the neighbours could equal. Some, like the Saxons, resisted the Frankish attacks for a long time, but others, including the Lombards, quickly capitulated. Because of the pressure he tried to apply against papal Rome, the last Lombard king, Desiderius, provoked a Frankish invasion that early in 774 led to the capitulation of Pavia and the fall of the Lombard Kingdom. Now Charlemagne (768–814) was crowned king of the Lombards. Carolingian rule was diligently established, and irresistibly gained ground in most of Italy. The pope regained some degree of autonomy for his 'Republic of St Peter' while the southern Italian duchy of Benevento accepted Frankish overlordship but remained virtually independent except for the rare occasions when Frankish armies were near.

<sup>13</sup> Aistulf 4, p. 228.

<sup>14</sup> Ratchis 7, p. 220.



Carolingian rule in Italy did not constitute a very coherent whole. For most of the ninth century, since Charlemagne had installed his son Pippin as king of the Lombards, the kingdom of Italy was ruled as before from Pavia. At first Lombard nobles continued to have as say in public affairs, but increasingly aristocrats, warriors, administrators, and intellectuals from north of the Alps occupied the key positions. These were Franks, but there were also many Alamans, Bavarians, and others. Many of them continued to own estates and had relatives in other parts of the Carolingian empire, such as Eberhard, who governed Friuli for some decades in the mid-ninth century. He commissioned a Frankish intellectual, Lupus of Ferrières, to compile a comprehensive law-book for administrative use. Like several other collections, this one contained the different Lombard, Frankish, Alamannic, and Bavarian law codes, reflecting the heterogeneity of the new ruling elite in northern Italy. The Carolingian empire had introduced the principle that wherever they went its subjects could be judged according to their native law. Italians often did not distinguish between the different ethnic backgrounds of the agents of Carolingian rule. They simply called them *theotisci*, those who speak the vernacular, the language of the people (*theod*). This was the origin of what became the German self-designation, *deutsch*, but also the modern Italian term for the Germans, *tedeschi*. It excluded the Lombards (most of whom no longer spoke a Germanic language); only if one referred to the language they once had spoken was it called *lingua todesca*, as it was in the tenth-century *Chronicon Salernitanum*.<sup>15</sup>

Modern historians depict the period of Charlemagne and his successor to the empire, Louis the Pious (814–40), as an age of reform and of systematic attempts to make Carolingian government effective throughout the empire. That interpretation is based on the evidence of numerous capitularies, royal edicts, many of which were specifically issued for Italy; on the church councils and reform synods; on the *placita*, court proceedings for the settlement of disputes; and on the letters in which intellectuals and politicians discussed the needs and consequences of reform. Not only ideologically, but also in pragmatic ways, the Church became an integral part of the state. But how was Carolingian rule perceived in Italy? Italy played an ambiguous part in the political culture of the time. On the one hand, it was on the

<sup>15</sup> *Chronicon Salernitanum*, c. 38, ed. U. Westbergh (Stockholm, 1956), p. 39.

periphery of the empire, and in some ways came to be treated like colonial territory. On the other hand, it was a source of prestigious traditions and skills that were central to Carolingian self-representation: the imperial tradition with its symbols and its representative architecture; the papacy as a source for Christian legitimacy; Monacassino as the cradle of Benedictine monasticism; manuscript collections that opened up unique ways of access to ancient culture and erudition; and relics of martyrs and saints that conferred unparalleled spiritual treasures on the Frankish churches that acquired (and often stole) them. Thus, Frankish reformers often came to Italy to tell Italians to do what in fact the Franks had learnt only in Italy. And Frankish judges sent by the Frankish rex *Langobardorum* sat in judgement over Lombards using the Lombard law code. Carolingian rule and culture were familiar in many ways; it was its flavour of high-handedness and moral urgency that might give offence to the inhabitants of Italy.

The image of the Franks in contemporary Italian sources is therefore ambiguous. Some, such as Paul the Deacon in his history of the Lombards, subtly argued that the Lombard kingdom had already worked very well along the lines of Carolingian reform before the Franks came. Others, such as Andreas of Bergamo in the 820s, glorified insignificant Lombard rebellions that had happened about a century before.<sup>16</sup> Southern histories, such as the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, picture Charlemagne as a great and noble ruler, but place the resistance of Benevento on a higher moral ground. One case when tensions became apparent occurred in the late eighth century when there was a conflict between Lombard and Frankish monks in the monastery of S. Vincenzo al Volturno that at one stage even involved Charlemagne and the pope.<sup>17</sup> Many Franks may have despised the Lombards, but it is no coincidence perhaps that no source is so explicit in voicing prejudice as a letter by Pope Stephen III, written in 770/71, in which he protested against young Charlemagne's planned marriage with a Lombard princess, calling the Lombards 'perfidious and fetid', a people that did not merit to be counted among the peoples of the world and whose only kin were the lepers.<sup>18</sup> Such invectives may or

<sup>16</sup> Andreas of Bergamo, *Historia*, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover, 1878), pp. 222–30.

<sup>17</sup> *Codex Carolinus*, ep. 66 and 67, ed. W. Gundlach (pp. 583–7).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, ep. 45, p. 561.

↳ *Carols*



may not have been uttered occasionally by drunk warriors; but only papal rhetoric incorporated it in political discourse.

## Towards ethnic diversity: regional powers and invaders in the ninth and tenth centuries

In the course of the ninth century, aristocratic families that had come from north of the Alps rooted themselves firmly in their Italian environment. As Carolingian rule faded away some of them were prepared for a bid to take over the kingdom of Italy, and even the empire, among them the Unruochings, descended from Eberhard of Friuli, who came to power with Berengar I, and the Widomians, the family of the dukes of Spoleto. From the end of the ninth century, these and other families (partly from southern France) got involved in a series of regional conflicts and rebellions. The political instability of the *regnum Italiae* around 900 led to another invasion by the Hungarians (also called Magyars). They had occupied the Pannonian plain, modern Hungary, in the last years of the ninth century, and soon started raiding in Italy. Later writers, among them Liutprand of Cremona (d. 972), accused the last Carolingian emperor, Arnulf, of having incited them against his enemies.<sup>19</sup> They also depicted the Hungarians in terms of the apocalyptic images once used for the Huns: the biblical peoples of Gog and Magog let loose on the world in divine punishment. For some decades, Hungarian war bands regularly marched along the old Roman road through Venetia, soon called *strata Hungarorum*. But they were often also used as allies in one of the frequent episodes of internal strife. In 922 they marched as far as Apulia. But they were not invaders who came to stay or to conquer, they were raiders in search of booty and ransom. Yet unlike the many bands of steppe warriors before them, their power did not disappear when their raids stopped. Soon after Otto I had inflicted a decisive defeat on them in Bavaria in 955, their Christianization began. Theirs had been the last 'barbarian invasion' in the north of Italy.

In southern Italy, the powerful principate (as it was now called) of Benevento gradually gave way in the course of the ninth century to a

number of conflicting regional and local powers. The Lombard aristocracy, proud as it still was of its old ancestry, exhausted itself in endless petty wars. Naples and Amalfi took advantage of the situation; the Byzantines re-established themselves as a major power in the region. But yet another force was now preparing to exploit the chaotic situation: the Saracens. This, like 'Agarenes', was a biblical name given by Christians; in reality, they were Arab-led Muslim warriors of mixed origin based in North Africa. During the 840s they completed their gradual conquest of Byzantine Sicily and in 846 a major force sacked Rome, an event which had repercussions similar to those of the Gothic conquest of 410. For several decades a Muslim emirate controlled Bari and its hinterland. At the same time Saracen mercenaries were being employed in most of the regional conflicts among the Lombards. Their war bands did the most damage, and from a stronghold near Gaeta they sacked the wealthy monasteries of S. Vincenzo al Volturno and Montecassino. It was not until the tenth century that the raids subsided. The amount of disruption caused by Magyars and Saracens which also affected north-western Italy varied, however. Their raids were part of a general power struggle that was in many respects more ruthless than in the preceding period, but the damage done by the pagans was highlighted for several reasons; for instance, monasteries and churches regularly referred to it when they solicited confirmation of property or new donations from their lords.

It is no surprise that contemporary authors usually depict the Saracens as ruthless pagans, although sometimes a more differentiated image may emerge. When the emperor Louis II had reconquered Bari in 871, the emir was kept prisoner at Benevento, and soon seems to have been respected as adviser and friend by the Lombard *prinicipes*, who eventually even imprisoned the emperor.<sup>20</sup> In fact, chroniclers of the time do not present overbearing Franks, treacherous Byzantines, and greedy Lombards (with rare exceptions) in a much more favourable light than the Muslims. Erchempert (c.890), a Lombard monk from Montecassino, paints a bleak picture of a world full of enemies always capable of the most villainous deeds.<sup>21</sup> To him, all powers, including the pope and the emperor, had lost their authority.

<sup>20</sup> *Chronicon Salernitanum*, c. 125, ed. Westerberg, p. 122.

<sup>21</sup> Erchempert, *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover, 1878), pp. 234–64.

<sup>19</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Antipodosis* 1, 13, ed. J. Becker (Hanover, 1915).



The tenth-century Italian historians like Liutprand of Cremona and the author of the Salerno Chronicle sounded almost as pessimistic and a far cry from the high-sounding rhetoric of reform voiced around 800.

Italian identities in the period were often attached to cities, and frequently implied a strong sense of rivalry against other cities in the neighbourhood—Capua and Naples, Salerno and Amalfi, Siena and Arezzo are all cases in point. Broader ethnic identities remained rather uncertain, as a famous text by Liutprand of Cremona shows. Rejecting the western claim for empire, the Byzantine emperor Nicephoros challenged Otto I's ambassador, Liutprand: 'You are not Romans, but Lombards!' Liutprand replied: 'We, that is, Lombards, Saxons, Franks, Lotharingians, Bavarians, Suavians and Burgundians, regard "Roman!" as one of the worst insults.' This is, however, an expression of 'imperial' rather than Italian identity. In a similar catalogue (c. 54), Liutprand lists *Itali* instead of Lombards—'Lombards' had become another name for the inhabitants of Italy as a whole. Whereas the Franks, and the population of the empire, consisted of *Latini*, Latin speakers, and *Teutoni*, speakers of the German vernacular (cc. 33, 37, 40), no such language divisions were important among the inhabitants of Italy. Soon (and for the first time, in John the Deacon's *Historia Veneticorum*, written soon after 1000), *Teutonici* would become a collective name for all the people from north of the Alps. Liutprand's praise of them in deference to Otto I was only one side of the coin. Paradoxically, both the Saxon and the Byzantine emperors claimed dominance in Italy on the grounds that they represented Romanness. Both were met with a mix of flattery, prejudice, acquiescence, and enmity. They were not simply invaders, for they relied on a long-standing network of rights and claims, of alliances and strongholds in Italy. But likewise, they continued to be regarded as outsiders whose involvement in Italian politics was due to weakness and discord among the Italians.

Italy was in reality a complicated mosaic of competing powers. That did not necessarily impinge too heavily on the lives of its inhabitants (though with some it did). But it influenced perceptions.

Neither natives nor invaders nor foreign powers managed to create stable political configurations or corresponding identities. This is paradoxical since the legal and administrative foundations for statehood were well developed.<sup>23</sup> Still, the *regnum Italiae* (and more so, the Christian empire) had ceased to inspire much hope or respect, and regional powers had hardly been able to fill the gap. This instability would continue to attract foreign intervention. In the South, Norman mercenaries gradually established their power in the course of the eleventh century. From the second half of the tenth century onwards, a series of interventions from north of the Alps brought the Italian kingdom, and the holy Roman empire, under foreign control: Otto I, the eastern Frankish king, was the first of a series of 'Teutonic' rulers who descended on Italy to lay hold of its crowns, but who otherwise made their rule felt only indirectly for most of the time. In the precarious balance of power between invaders and local lords, the cities gradually expanded their political influence: the 'communal age' was dawning. In an Italian perspective, difference made itself felt much more than identity.

<sup>23</sup> C. Wickham, 'Lawyer's time: history and memory in tenth and eleventh century', in C. Wickham, *Land and Power: Studies in Italian and European Social History, 400–1200* (London, 1994), pp. 275–94.

<sup>22</sup> Liutprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana* 12, ed. J. Becker (Hanover, 1915); for an excellent analysis, see G. Gardino, *Il vocabolario politico e sociale di Liutprando da Cremona* (Rome, 1995), pp. 257–70.



this settlement, which in ninth-century charters will appear under the name *Civitas Geminiana*). However, even though this site had a certain institutional importance—first as the seat of a royal court and then as the temporary residence of a Carolingian count—this status has, so far, not been borne out by archaeological evidence (all that excavations of the 1980s revealed were the remains of a *castrum* built near the site by Godefredus, bishop of Modena, in 904).<sup>26</sup>

So, as we have seen, the attitude of contemporaries—known to us only through the ideas expressing the ideology of certain aristocratic groups—would seem really to be an expression of trends and aspirations. And this would appear to be true both when the opinions voiced are a criticism of the profound material and functional transformations that are taking place in cities and when they emphasize urban decline and decay in general. However realistic a picture they may give of the actual state of settlements at this time, such opinions also express the way contemporaries experienced and perceived the long transitional period that would end in the Middle Ages—and naturally they do so in a way that is not always totally unbiased and objective.

<sup>26</sup> S. Gelichi et al., 'Studi e ricerche archeologiche sul sito altomedievale di Citanova', in *Modena dalle origini all'anno mille. Studi di archeologia e storia*, i (Modena, 1989), pp. 577–60.

## 9

# Lay and ecclesiastical culture

Claudia Villa

## The Lombard domination: a past to legalize the present

The cultural history of the two centuries from the arrival of the Lombards in Italy to the collapse of their kingdom in 774 has long posed problems of evaluation. As early as the eighteenth century the Italian antiquary Gerolamo Tiraboschi (1731–94) noted the very limited quantity and quality of literary productions surviving from this era, which led him to question the judgement of Ludovico Muratori (1672–1750). Muratori had been more attentive to juridical aspects and so readier to think well of the two centuries of Lombard domination, and saw in the long period of peace evidence that the groups indentified as Lombards and Romans had been able to live and work together. Even a cursory glance at the period suggests that Muratori was hardly wrong to draw attention to the great legislative initiatives of the age and also to the educational leadership that was provided from the beginning of the eighth century within the Lombard kingdom given by the group of 'Italians', such as Peter of Pisa, Paul the Deacon, Paulinus Patriarch of Aquileia and, likely enough, Desiderius' courier Fardulfus, who had a radical impact on Frankish culture while they worked under Charlemagne. But Tiraboschi and others who have studied the Lombard period have also pointed out that what was produced in the way of literature amounted to little more than a few occasional poems.



For a more informed assessment of Italian culture in the early Middle Ages we can now turn instead to the results of excavations among the collections of ancient Latin codices in the libraries of the period. Because these manuscripts were solid objects skillfully made from sturdy parchment, they were able to survive many complex and now unknown adventures unharmed. These highly resistant materials made the manuscripts highly durable, and they passed through the hands of generations of mostly unknown readers. They were also brought together in collections where they were protected from the harm wrought by time and, most probably, preserved in good order with the aim of reproducing culture. In short, they were preserved because they were considered to be essential features of the educational process, and served for the teaching of grammar or history in a culture that relied heavily on tradition.

The codices that have come down to us from the period between the fifth and the seventh centuries have now become 'homeless': they are books that were produced and stored in places of which we still know too little. But as we shall see, these places were not only monastic centres. Indeed, among their users we find all those with literary training, such as judges, notaries, and others involved in the law and public functions, all of whom were professionally engaged in passing on tradition and written culture.

We should start by asking, however, how the authors of this period themselves understood the transmission of culture since this will enable us to establish the cultural canons and principal points of reference of Lombard culture. Dating from the late eighth century, Paul the Deacon's reflections on the arrival of the Lombards in Italy offers an initial overview. He narrated the events that took place in the sixth century when the Lombards had replaced the Goths, and he listed the men most worthy of being remembered, thereby implicitly establishing the canon of late antiquity which still today constitutes a starting point for our understanding of the early Middle Ages. After recounting an episode that demonstrated the qualities of King Alboin,<sup>1</sup> Paul immediately listed other great men of the period, naming the Emperor Justinian, the statesman Cassiodorus, the grammarian Priscian, the chronologist Dionysius Exiguus, and the poet Arator. Since every social group produces its own models,

POU THIS  
DIAZON

USERS

THE  
PARCHMENT

alongside Alboin Paul constructed a gallery of ancestors, and he chose among his predecessors outstanding examples of a legislating sovereign and great masters of the disciplines of rhetoric, grammar, mathematics, and prosody that were indispensable for the cultural development of the prince's counsellors and, at a lower level, of the functionaries of civil administration. Revealing very clear criteria of selection, this ideal gallery displays the values of a juridical and civil culture grounded in the study of grammar and rhetoric that was the foundation of Lombard civilization. And when his narrative reached the seventh century, Paul recalled the new masters of grammar, naming in particular Felix, who was honoured by King Cunipert, and his nephew Elavian, who was Paul's own master.

The panorama set out by Paul offers a useful starting point for reconstructing cultural developments in Italy from the middle of the sixth century to the end of the eighth. It is particularly important for an understanding of which places were equipped to ensure cultural continuity and the material preservation of books into the eighth century.

If we date the beginning of the early Middle Ages from the entry of the Lombards into Italy in 568, we would probably fix on the capture of Pavia. But if we had to choose a date that would serve to help us understand how books came to be preserved and the origins of the institutions that preserved them, then we should start not from the founding of the monastery at Bobbio in 612 but from the earlier and quite miraculous decision not to raze Pavia that was taken around 570. This was the moment when under Alboin's leadership the new conquerors decided to settle in the ancient Gothic capital, with the result that both the king's court and the administration of the realm ceased to be itinerant. Consequently, in trying to locate the origins of the sense of tradition that was shared by the Lombards we should recall that the people who now inhabited what had been Theoderic's palace were 'now confident of a better future'.<sup>2</sup> The mosaic representing the Gothic king that still presided over the royal tribunal in the tenth century was a symbol of this hope: in the application of the law and civil administration, justice represents a future founded on tradition.

AN IDEAL GALLERY

PAVIA  
HOW  
BOOKS  
WERE  
PRESERVED  
AND THE  
ORIGINS  
OF  
THESE  
INSTITUTIONS  
THAT  
PRESERVED  
THEM

<sup>1</sup> Pauli, *Historia Langobardorum*, I, 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 27.



Bobbio  
the royal palace at Monza, in which he was buried, and it was with his permission that St Columban founded the monastery at Bobbio. Nothing is known about the cultural activities at Bobbio in the first centuries of its existence, but it certainly included the recovery and accumulation of manuscripts which were brought here from many different places and which by the time of the Ottoman emperors, four centuries later, constituted one of the great libraries of the tenth century, whose catalogue still survives.

ROTHARI  
edict  
643

Thirty years after the foundation of Bobbio and seventy after the capture of Pavia, from the palace of that city Rothari published the famous edict of 643. This document bears witness to the legislative projects and juridical learning of the team of experts from whom originated the allusions to the Justinian Code that make the prologue to Rothari's edict one of the most important written documents of the seventh century. Rothari and his judges used juridical formulas and terminology that demonstrate their acquaintance with the parallel texts of Justinian and of Theodosius (*renovare, emendare*) as well as technical terms attested by Cassiodorus and Festus. One of the central themes was the idea of a renovation (*renovatio*), a concept deeply rooted in many spheres of medieval culture (*renovatio imperii, renovatio studii, renovatio librorum*) that expressed the desire to innovate without breaking with tradition, since the idea of *renovatio* is inseparable from the need for historical memory.

base of  
Renovatio

The legislative activity of the Lombard kings did not end with Rothari's edict but was carried forward by subsequent rulers down to the great juridical revival of the eleventh century. Grimoald and Liutprand, and especially Ratchis and Astulf, explicitly drew attention to the presence of the judges (*judices*) who aided them.<sup>3</sup> This is also connected with the important place held by the grammatical tradition which as a result of the influence of the monks of Bobbio, became a central feature in north Italian culture. Since legislation called for reflection on tradition and demanded discussion of custom

and practice, a training in grammar was indispensable for producing a class of specialists capable of interpreting the ruler's will and the intent of the legislation translating them in proper form. This same class was also called on to organize various forms of consensus, and

<sup>3</sup> Ratchis, *Prologus*: 'Here begin the laws established by King and Lord Ratchis of one mind with our judges'; 'in our council with all the judges'.

especially to produce laudatory verses, metrical epithaphs, and celebrations of civic life to accompany festivals and other public events. A good example of this is the *Carmen de Synodo Trinesis*, a celebration of King Cunpert, who acted as moderator at the synod held in Pavia in about 698 that brought to an end of the 'Schism the Three Chapters'.

What emerges is a picture of a culture that relied on the grammatical, rhetorical, and prosodic tools that can be found in surviving early medieval miscellanies. These were collections of classical materials that were brought together and rewritten for specific educational purposes. They enable us to understand why particular attention was given to spelling and the use of texts like the *Appendix Probi*, transferred into a codex in the seventh century, which was of importance for those who needed to distinguish the proper forms of late Latin which was already being severely undermined by Romance influences.

Appendix Probi

The sequence of legislating Lombard kings is particularly significant, and this also revealed the existence of civic centres or family traditions in which the officials who compiled and then enacted the written laws were educated. The oldest copies of the edict are from the seventh century, at St Gall (Stiftsbibl. 730) and from the eighth century, at Vercelli (Biblioteca Capitolare, 188). These are written in a fine ornamental hand, whose survival is an indicator of the tenacious hold of tradition, because this was the script used in the ancient manuscripts of the Digest of Justinian. The same style was also adopted in the oldest codex of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, which was executed in the author's lifetime and is now at Perugia. Even centuries later, the codices of the *Leges Langobardorum* carried effigies of the rulers, as can be seen in the important examples conserved at Modena (Biblioteca Capitolare, tenth century, O.1.2) and, for Benevento, in the early eleventh-century Cava manuscript (Archivio della Badia, 4).

legislating Lombard kings

copying  
codices  
probi  
Appendix Probi

It has to be remembered, too, that the transcription of juridical codices raised the possibilities of copying errors and of arbitrary changes. These were especially serious in the case of legal texts: the authors of Lombard laws were perfectly aware of this, and made it a requirement that copies of texts be reproduced only with the authorization of a royal notary. These concerns help explain why Carolingian philologists engaged so heavily in labours of extensive textual







service of the duke of Benevento, for whom he composed epigrams, dedicatory verses, and a *Historia Romana* for his pupil Adelperga, wife of Arechis and daughter of the Lombard king Desiderius.

If Benevento had a greater role than has hitherto been recognized in the transmission of classical culture, the royal seat of Pavia was soon to become another important point of reference. The close similarities between Lombard laws and those of the Anglo-Saxons have suggested that the latter imitated the former; and archaeological finds show that these exchanges would include books as well. The most important confirmation of the involvement of royal officials in the commerce in books comes from the Mozarabic prayer book which is now at Verona but around 730 was in the possession of a certain Maurozo Canaparius, an administrator of King Liutprand. From a little later, but still at Verona, the 'Veronese Riddle' appears to have been composed as a calligraphic exercise, in which the questioner describes the act of writing by way of a metaphor using linguistic forms that are recognizably Romance and adopting images that are part of the poetic repertory that we find also in Paul the Deacon's writings.

There is thus much still to be learnt about the role of the Lombard ruling class in the conservation of collections of books from late antiquity. All efforts to connect the Master Flavian with specific interventions in the grammar manuals and collections have proved in vain, but Paul the Deacon's testimony is in any case sufficient to establish the importance that the court gave to the grammarians who produced instructive texts which were perfectly in keeping with current needs and models of teaching and which finished up in the library of Bobbio. The metrical and rhythmic experiments in some of their epigrammatic writings indicate that these canny intellectuals were endowed with a practical culture that contained some elements of eclecticism.

Two late eighth-century miscellanies reveal what was required in the education of a good official. One is in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris (Lat. 7530); it comes from the Benevento area and has traditionally been connected with the teaching of Paul the Deacon. The other is in the State Library at Berlin (Diez B 66), and is a collection of texts that are almost exclusively from the North of Italy. These include Peter of Pisa's grammar, a small set of poems addressed to him, songs by Angilbert, a celebration, from between 792 and 796, of the victory of King Pippin of Italy over the Avars, and also a brief

dialect  
in Italian  
Anglo-Saxon  
poetry  
→ Roman  
→ PAVIA  
→ VERONA

Verona  
→ stages  
→ ruler  
→ 11th century  
→ on the  
→ evidence

words  
that stuck  
to rulers &  
lat. grammar  
and  
in Benevento  
(no case  
the verbs)

SPHINX  
to adjust  
appeals

PAULS, LAT. 7530 and BERLIN DIEZ B 66

passage with a classification of the writings in use among the Romans or the Anglo-Saxons. These materials suggest that the manual was in use at the court of Italy. This makes the astonishing list of classical authors it contains of special importance, since this corresponds closely with the much later collection in the Capitolare Library at Verona, which was the site of one of Theoderic's palaces that was later inhabited by the Lombard kings and by King Pippin himself. The two codices have a number of authors in common and are basically chancery manuals, and it is not surprising, in a society that produced two important hymns dedicated respectively to Milan and to Verona, to find in them instructions for writing the praises of cities. They also contain models for versification in the form of a sailor's song that seems to have been the model for the later 'Song of the Modena Watchmen'.

A society that employed the didactic instruments of late antiquity also took pleasure in quotation, and in re-creating grand styles for religious buildings and those associated with civil power. The decoration of the Tempietto at Cividale, the remarkable classicism of the temple of Clitunno or S. Salvatore at Spoleto, and the surviving fragments of court art at Arechis' Benevento show that the arts and architecture that the ruling class in Italy in the seventh and eighth centuries chose to patronize provide further evidence of the desire to conserve. They demonstrate deep familiarity with the ancient world, and make it reasonable to suppose that the conservation of classical writings had a similar function.

### The Frankish court

In the second half of the eighth century Italian-trained intellectuals were an important presence at the court of Charlemagne. Indeed, even before the fall of Pavia in 774, relations between the ministers of Austrasia and the Lombard court were so close, according to Paul the Deacon, that the young Pippin of Herstal was sent there as the pupil of Liutprand.<sup>5</sup> The prestige of the Lombard Italian cities in the eighth century was evident from the later connection

none  
desire  
to  
conserve  
in art  
or architecture  
resembl  
writing

DIACONIC  
INSTRUMENTS

<sup>5</sup> Pauli, *Historia Langobardorum*, vi, 53.



→ cultural exchange between Lombards and Franks

→ ANNO 660  
LITINA

collation of Latin Poems AND A 600-700 SARGENT'S REAS

ALBERT'S SONS

of the Anthologia St. Ambrosiana Veneris

GIROLDANO RAIMISSANO

RENOVATO UGROPOK

Some

→ Palat. Lat. 1547

VATICAN MS. Lat. 1529

between Charlemagne and Peter of Pisa, who was certainly retained by the court at Pavia, which also hosted the young Alcuin, who himself later met Charlemagne at Parma. The forced exile to one of the royal abbeys (Corbie or St Denis) of the last Lombard king, Desiderius, along with his followers—among whom we may very plausibly include Farulfus, later the very learned abbot of St Denis—was also part of this process of reciprocal cultural exchange. So too were the diplomatic missions and broader cultural projects that after 774 involved continuous and lengthy journeying on the part of high Frankish dignitaries such as Adalard and Wala, both cousins of the emperor and abbots of Corbie, not to mention Angilbert, later lay abbot of St Riquier, who was the first minister (*primicerius palatii*) to the very young Pippin, King of Italy, and, according to Alcuin, the pupil of Peter of Pisa. Angilbert's songs form part of the complex miscellany of the Berlin codex Diez B 66, along with other poems taken from a lost manuscript of the *Anthologia Latina*. For this reason, it is in the circle of these royal officials who were deeply interested in cultural issues, and hence constantly in contact with the books that have been preserved in Italy to the present, that we should look for the ownership of the main source for the *Anthologia*, the large and complex eighth-century uncial manuscript now held in Paris (Lat. 10318).

An education similar to that of the Lombard officials would have been appropriate for Carolingian officers. The first were the *scabini*, officials with specific juridical competence, the second were the *iudices*, responsible for reproducing and emending juridical texts, and finally the custodians of the lay archives. It has long been acknowledged that the Carolingian renaissance was nourished by books that had been conserved, and even studied and corrected, in Italy. Thus during what was described as the 'book revival' (*renovatio librorum*) in the ninth century, much of the cultural inheritance from the classical world that had survived up to that time was transferred into neat and clear Carolingian script. Seneca's *De Beneficiis* and *De Clementia*, in the exemplaria of the important manuscript that is now in the Vatican Library (Palat. Lat. 1547), illustrates this process. The codex was the work of a group of copyists who were active at the beginning of the ninth century in northern Italy, perhaps in the area in which St Ambrose's liturgy was in use. Recent studies have shown that the manuscript underwent careful revision before being copied into what

is now the Vatican Reg. Lat. 1529, which was soon in use in the school of Heiric at Auxerre. The subject matter of Seneca's texts must have reflected very closely the concerns and interests of civil administrators, and the attention paid to Seneca in the second half of the ninth century in northern Italy is also demonstrated by another manuscript that is now in the Querini Library at Brescia (B II 6). This was the result of a philological operation designed to re-establish the pristine state of the text, by putting back together two sections of the *Letters to Lucilius* that had hitherto survived in parallel traditions. It is interesting to note that the first section of letters in the Querini text is closely related to the codex produced in the first third of the ninth century that is now in the Laurentian Library in Florence (76.40) and has recently been linked with the court of Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious.

The most wide-ranging testimony we have of the strong commitment to the creation of a network of centres of learning comes from Lothar's capitulary of Olona, issued in 825, which lists the cities that had teaching centres in which students could enrol. This document also gave recognition to Pavia, which had invited the Irish master Dungal as a teacher: he subsequently bequeathed his books to Bobbio and was probably the author of the corrections in the important 'oblungus' text of Lucretius that is now at Leiden (Voss Lat. F. 30).

A culture of power also emerges from the very important miscellany of classical poetical texts, among others poems by Horace that is now in the City Library at Berne (n 363). In the marginal notes there is a mass of references to contemporary figures such as Aganon, bishop of Bergamo, and Angilberga, wife of the Emperor Louis II. The traces in the margin of Servius' scholium on Virgil seem to have been left by a reader who had the task of gathering information on Roman marriage customs at a moment at which Lothar II's concubinage and his repudiation of Theutberga meant that matrimonial issues were of immediate concern to members of the royal family including Angilberga herself. The presence in the codex of a song in praise of the Milanese bishop Tado also links the scribe of the Bernese manuscript with the monastery of St Ambrose in Milan where the Carolingian kings of Italy were buried. The mid ninth-century cultural initiatives associated with Louis II and Angilberga have not yet been fully studied. In this period important foundations like the monastery of S. Salvatore at Brescia,

→ ms on Seneca (collation of text) philological operation

→ APPROPRIATE OF LITINA

→ each genre quondam (parenthetical) and several (poems)

→ Roman in the Vatican Spuriae II 17, p. 10