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Paul the Deacon
History of the Lombards



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The History of the Lombards by

PAUL THE DEACON

(c. 720-c. 799)



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History of the Lombards (c. 796)

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PAUL THE DEACON



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Cover illustration: Detail from *Assassination of Alboin, King of the Lombards* by Charles Landseer, 1856.

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The Translation



Cividale del Friuli, a town in Udine, north Italy — Paul the Deacon's birthplace

History of the Lombards (c. 796)

Translated by William Dudley Foulke, 1907

The eighth century chronicler Paul the Deacon was a Benedictine monk, scribe and chief historian of the Lombards, a Germanic people that conquered most of the Italian Peninsula between 568 and 774. Previously, the Lombards settled in the Middle Danube in the fifth century, near what is now Austria, Slovenia and Hungary. Still earlier, they lived further north, near present day Hamburg. Roman-era historians in the first and second centuries AD mention the Lombards as one of the Suebian peoples, recording them as living on the Lower Elbe as early as the first century.

Paul's ancestor Leupichis emigrated to Italy in 568 in the train of Alboin, King of the Lombards, when he was granted lands near Forum Julii (Cividale del Friuli). During an invasion by the Avars, Leupichis' five sons were carried away to Pannonia, but one of them, his namesake, returned to Italy and restored the ruined fortunes of his house. The grandson of the younger Leupichis was Warnefrid, who by his wife Theodelinda became the father of Paul. He was born Winfrid, son of Warnefrid, in c. 720 in the Duchy of Friuli. Due to his noble family status, Paul received a good education, likely at the court of the Lombard king Ratchis in Pavia, where he learnt the rudiments of Greek. He is believed to have served as the secretary of the Lombard king Desiderius, a successor of Ratchis. After Desiderius' daughter Adelperga had married Arichis II, Duke of Benevento, Paul, at her request, wrote his continuation of Eutropius' *Summary of Roman History*.

Paul is believed to have lived at the court of Benevento for at least several years before 774, when Charlemagne captured Pavia, causing him to flee. For a brief period, Paul entered a monastery on Lake Como, but by 782 he had entered the great Benedictine house of Monte Cassino, where he made the acquaintance of Charlemagne. In c. 776, Paul's brother Arichis was carried off to Francia as a prisoner after a revolt in Friuli. When Charlemagne visited Rome five years later, Paul wrote to him on behalf of Arichis, who was subsequently freed.

As Paul's literary achievements drew the attention of Charlemagne, he became an important contributor to the Carolingian Renaissance. In 787 he returned to Monte Cassino, where he died on 13 April probably in the year 799. His epithet *Diaconus* indicates that he took orders as a deacon (a high ranking minister assisting a bishop) and some historians believe he was a monk before the fall of the Lombard Kingdom.

Paul's chief work is *Historia Langobardorum*, an incomplete history in six books, which he wrote after 787 and completed by 796. The chronicle covers the history of the Lombards from their legendary origins in the north of Scandinavia and their following migrations, notably to Italy in 568-69, up to the death of King Liutprand in 744. Comprising six books, it contains detailed information about the Eastern Roman Empire, the Franks and several other early medieval peoples of Europe. The history is written from a Lombardian point of view and is especially valuable for its depictions of the relations between the Franks and the Lombards. Among Paul's sources were the document *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, the *Liber pontificalis*, the lost history of Secundus of Trent and the lost annals of Benevento. He also heavily drew upon the works of Saint Bede, Gregory of Tours and Isidore of Seville.

Historia Langobardorum is a seminal work of history, offering the definitive, foundational narrative of the Lombard people — a Germanic group whose invasion of

Italy in the sixth century fundamentally shattered the Mediterranean unity of the Roman Empire and accelerated the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Paul's text acts as a vital bridge between the classical Roman world and the rising medieval European orders, offering a unique "insider" perspective from a Lombard patriot and scholar, who witnessed first hand the conquest of his people by Charlemagne. Beyond providing key information on sixth to eighth century geopolitical relations between the Franks, Byzantines and Lombards, *Historia Langobardorum* is valued for blending legendary, oral traditions with historical records, while illustrating the cultural synthesis of Germanic and Roman traditions in shaping modern Europe.

exercitū fortū resistebat. Iste exsistit
uq; hoc ē all. unūq; genē omniū. Iste
lanḡ creuer̄ et qd̄ alerat formā. In one
dient̄ honore emeruerat / unūq; unū
Sed cū occasione uleiscende sue cauti
reperit. et ita lanḡ ilico adūsus que. Iste
graua bella gesser̄. Unde cū cum
litib; quas uiuabat exsupantes rauen
ni cōpuler̄. Brexillus captus. mu
riq; solū adūsus destruxit. Post hec
aut̄ hū rex cū smaragdo paruo qui
tunc rauenne p̄erat usq; ad annū ter
tiū p̄cē fec̄. Huiusane dractras de
quo p̄misit unū amiculo sepe rauen
nantū milites adūsus lanḡ domi
car̄. Extructa classe lanḡ qui clas
sē urbē tenebant hoc aduante

A bifolium of an eleventh-century manuscript of 'Historia Langobardorum', which had later been used as a binding, detached from a Freising print, 1697



Portrait of Paul the Deacon from a tenth century manuscript, Laurentian Library Plut. 65.35 fol. 34r



Bronze statue of a Lombard warrior, eighth century, Pavia Civic Museums

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Map detailing Lombard possessions in Italy: the Lombard Kingdom (Neustria, Austria and Tuscia) and the Lombard Duchies of Spoleto and Benevento



A tremissis with the effigy of Liutprand, King of the Lombards from 712 to 744



Sketch believed to be of Charlemagne, c. 800

PREFACE.



MOMMSEN DECLARES THAT Paul the Deacon's history of Italy, from the foundation of Rome to the beginning of the time of the Carolingians, is properly the stepping-stone from the culture of the ancient to that of the modern world, marking the transition and connecting both together; that the Langobards upon their immigration into Italy not only exchanged their own language for that of their new home, but also adopted the traditions and early history of Rome without, however, abandoning their own; that it is in good part this fact which put the culture of the modern world upon the road on which it moves to-day; that no one has felt this in a more living manner than Paul, and that no one has contributed so much through his writings to secure for the world the possession of Roman and Germanic tradition by an equal title as did this Benedictine monk when, after the overthrow of his ancestral kingdom, he wrote its history as part of the history of Italy.¹

Whatever therefore were his limitations as an author, the writings of Paul the Deacon mark an epoch. They constitute the first step toward the making of modern history, and give him the right to be reckoned as a kind of humbler Herodotus of mediæval times. And in fact, although he is for the most part a compiler and without great originality, his work recalls in several ways the characteristics of the "Father of History." It contains a priceless treasure of legends and quaint tales, having their source, not indeed in Hellenic, Persian, Lydian or Egyptian traditions, but in sagas like those of the Norsemen, and it is written with a naive and picturesque charm that must commend it greatly to the lovers of literary curiosities. Paul has something of the gossipy nature of Herodotus, and although without gross superstition, he has much of the simple credulity and fondness for the marvelous which add to the attractiveness, while they detract from the authority of the work of his great Greek predecessor. As a veracious historian, Paul is perhaps not much better nor worse than the average of the monastic chroniclers of the time, for although he is a man of extensive learning, and although he gives us everywhere proofs of his good faith, and even of his impartiality in respect to the struggles between his own people and their enemies, he has not that critical judgment which the requirements of modern history demand.

Paul the Deacon was one of the best known authors of the Middle Ages. This is shown by the great number of the manuscripts of his works which still exist, by the abundant use made of them by subsequent authors, and by the early editions that appeared shortly after the invention of printing and indeed all through the 16th and 17th centuries.² But amid the more stirring events of modern times his work became to a large extent overlaid and forgotten. Muratori published Paul's "History of the Langobards" in the first volume of his Italian series in 1723, but it remained for German scholarship to bring it again to the attention of the world and to subject it to critical treatment in the way its importance deserved. Dr. Bethmann during the early part of the last century began an investigation of Paul's works which extended over a great portion of his life.³ He examined and compared a vast number of manuscripts, traveling for this purpose through various parts of Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and Italy, but died before his edition of the "History of the Langobards" was given to the press. His work was completed by Waitz in 1876 in the "Monumenta Germaniæ" in an edition in which one hundred and seven manuscripts are referred to and compared, and in which most of the sources of the history are referred to in

appropriate foot-notes. In the same year Dahn published a painstaking criticism of Paul's life and writings in his "Langobardische Studien." A complete discussion by Dr. R. Jacobi of the sources from which Paul derived his history appeared in the following year, 1877, which for thoroughness and accuracy is a model of German scholarship. Mommsen followed in 1879 with an able criticism of some of the most important features of Paul's work, published in the *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geshichtskunde*, Vol. V., p. 53. Some of his views as to the sources from which Paul had taken his history were contested by Waitz in a subsequent number of the *Archiv* in the same year, as well as by Schmidt in his monograph "Zur Geschichte der Langobarden." Further investigations were made concerning the "Origo Gentis Langobardorum," one of Paul's sources, by Brückner, Koegel, Kraus and others.

The "History of the Langobards" has been translated into German, French and Italian, but I was greatly surprised, when investigating some matters connected with the early history of Venice, in the Marcian library of that city, to find that no English version existed. Mr. Thomas Hodgkin, in Vols. V and VI of "Italy and Her Invaders," does indeed make liberal extracts, but the work is one which, from its importance, ought to be presented to English readers entire, hence this translation. I have prefixed to it an account of Paul's life and writings, with a historical and literary estimate of his work, and the translation is accompanied by explanatory notes. Waitz's text has been used.⁴

In Appendix I there is a brief discussion concerning the ethnological status of the Langobards. In Appendix II an account is given of the sources from which Paul derived his history. Appendix III contains Paul's poems in honor of St. Benedict, which are found in the original text of Paul's history, but have no proper connection therewith and have therefore been placed in the Appendix. They are altogether omitted in the German and Italian translations I have consulted, perhaps from the difficulty of rendering them in any intelligible form. The second book of the "Dialogues of Gregory the Great," however, gives the key to their meaning. I am quite conscious that the verses into which they have been rendered are not poetry, but insist that in this respect, as in others, my version follows the original pretty closely. They are only inserted from a desire to make the translation complete.

I have endeavored everywhere to keep as near the text as the essential differences between the two languages will allow.

I desire to acknowledge the courtesy of Thomas Hodgkin, from whose history, "Italy and Her Invaders," I have copied with his permission the three maps first used in this book.

RICHMOND, IND.,
Feb. 23, 1906.

ENDNOTES.

¹ *Neues Archiv*, V, p. 53.

² Waitz (*M. G. SS. Rer. Langob.*, p. 28 *et seq.*) gives a list of these manuscripts and editions.

³ Waitz (p. 12).

⁴ There is a more recent text by Giuseppe Vettach (*Archeografo Triestino*, 1898-99) based upon the Friulan MS. at Cividale. As this MS. is incomplete, it seemed better to follow Waitz's edition, which is an admirable one, and based upon all the MS.

EXPLANATION OF REFERENCES.



IN ALL EXPLANATORY notes as well as in the Introduction and the Appendices the following abbreviations are used:

“Waitz” indicates the edition of “Pauli Historia Langobardorum” in “Monumenta Germaniae, Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum,” from which this translation is made, and unless otherwise stated, the matters referred to will be found in connection with the book and chapter (the page not being given) corresponding to those of this translation.

“Abel” refers to the German translation entitled “Paulus Diakonus und die übrigen Geschichtschreiber der Langobarden,” by Dr. Otto Abel. (Second edition revised by Dr. Reinhard Jacobi, Leipsic, 1888; published as Vol. 15 of the series “Geschichtschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit,” and the matters referred to, unless otherwise stated, will be found either in the text or notes of the book and chapter corresponding to those of this translation.

“Giansevero” indicates the Italian translation entitled “Paolo Diacono, Dei Fatti de’ Langobardi,” by Prof. Uberti Giansevero (Cividale, 1899), and the matters referred to will be found in the book and chapter corresponding to those of this translation.

“Bethmann” unless otherwise stated refers to one of his articles, “Paulus Diakonus Leben,” “Paulus Diakonus Schriften,” “Die Geschichtschreibung der Langobarden,” contained in the tenth volume of the “Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde” (Hanover, 1849).

“Jacobi” refers to “Die Quellen der Langobardengeschichte des Paulus Diaconus. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte deutscher Historiographie,” by Dr. R. Jacobi (Halle, 1877).

“Mommsen” to an article “Die Quellen der Langobardengeschichte des Paulus Diaconus” by Th. Mommsen in Volume V, p. 53, of the “Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde” (Hanover, 1879).

“Hartmann” to the second volume of “Geschichte Italiens im Mittelalter,” by Ludo Moritz Hartmann, being the 32d work of the series “Geschichte der europäischen Staaten,” edited by Heeren, Ukert, Giesebrecht and Lamprecht (Gotha, 1903).

“Dahn” “Paulus Diaconus,” by Felix Dahn, Part I (Leipsic, 1876).

“Hodgkin” to “Italy and Her Invaders,” by Thomas Hodgkin (Clarendon Press, 1895).

“Zeuss” to “Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme,” by Kaspar Zeuss (Göttingen, 1904).

“Schmidt” to “Zur Geschichte der Langobarden,” by Dr. Ludwig Schmidt (Leipsic, 1885).

“Pabst” to “Geschichte des langobardischen Herzogthums” in Vol. II, p 405, “Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte” (Göttingen, 1862).

“Bruckner” to “Die Sprache der Langobarden,” by Wilhelm Brückner (Quellen und Forschungen, Part 75, Strasburg, 1895).

“Koegel” to “Geschichte der deutschen Litteratur,” by Rudolf Koegel, Vol. I, Part 1 (Strasburg, 1894).

“Wiese” to “Die älteste Geschichte der Langobarden,” by Robert Wiese (Jena, 1877).

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