THE USES OF THE PAST IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Contents

Memory, identity and power in Lombard Italy

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In 1222, a notary from Piacenza, Johannes Codagnellus, told a very uplifting story. Many centuries ago, he wrote, Longobards (*Longobardi*) under their king Gisulf had invaded this part of Lombardy. But in a terrible battle, another people called the Lombards (*Lombardi*) succeeded in defeating the invaders and putting them to flight.[1] In a northern Italian commune troubled by successive interventions of emperors from Germany, the public may have been pleased with such an example of self-assertion. They may not have been aware of the paradox implied in this way of 'using the past': in the sixth century, in this part of Italy the Roman Empire had succumbed to a 'Germanic' invasion by the Longobards, whose name was later turned into 'Lombards'. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, 'Germanic' Roman emperors invaded a country defended by 'Romanic' Lombards. Johannes Codagnellus had to stretch his material considerably, but his solution to 'double' the Lombards makes perfect sense in this contradictory situation.

Nowadays, Lombard origins are being used against another kind of 'Roman' interference, to argue for a secession of Padania from the bureaucracy in Rome which governs Italy. Such modern ideological contexts make early medieval barbarian 'histories', like those of the Lombards, an uncomfortable topic, full of risks and misunderstandings, but also more relevant to the contemporary world than most topics in early medieval history. They are also a field of scholarly polemic. Two conflicting modes of interpretation have stirred numerous debates. One school has brought together an impressive stock of ethnographic and mythological parallels to prove the basic authenticity of the material in

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[1] Johannes Codagnellus, *Liber Rerum Gestarum*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, *Neues Archiv* 16 (1891), pp. 475–505, esp. p. 479. See J. W. Busch, 'Die Lombarden und die Langobarden', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 29 (1995), pp. 289–311.

these histories, even where it is legendary.[2] Others have argued for the more or less fictional character of these texts.[3] The polemic has focused on two connected issues. One is the factual accuracy of the histories, especially those passages that deal with the remote period before the integration of Goths, Lombards or Anglo-Saxons into the late Roman world. Did Goths or Lombards come from Scandinavia, are the successive stages of their migration rendered correctly, and, probably more interesting, how reliable are the fragments of information about pagan beliefs and archaic societies in these histories? The second issue is more fundamental to the theme of this volume: did origin myths and histories have a function for the ethnic communities in which they were written down, or were their authors 'storytellers in their own right'[4] who only sought to entertain and to edify their contemporaries? Or, in short, what were the uses of the past in the early medieval *regna*? And, to add a further question: how did these uses shape the texts? Did they encourage codification or manipulation of historical narratives?

In the case of the Goths, Herwig Wolfram has proposed a rather complex model of the use of historical narrative in the *Getica*, a sixth-century Gothic history by Jordanes, and there has been a lively debate ever since.[5] Lombard texts have been studied less carefully. Those scholars who dealt with them mostly concentrated on the pivotal figure of Paul the Deacon who wrote his *Historia Langobardorum* towards the end of the eighth century, not long after the Carolingians had taken possession of the *regnum Langobardorum*.[6] But it may be misleading in this

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[2] This approach was chosen by most pre-1945 German scholars. A more critical, but still optimistic view is found in post-war German scholarship (for instance R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes* (Cologne, 1961); 2nd edn (Cologne and Vienna, 1977) and in many contemporary Italian works. For the Lombards, see, for instance, S. Gasparri, *La cultura tradizionale dei Longobardi* (Spoleto, 1983).

[3] This point of view became popular in Anglo-American scholarship after the 'linguistic turn', and in early medieval studies with Walter Goffart's *The Narrators of Barbarian History AD 550–800. Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988). For a review of the debate, see W. Pohl, 'Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung', in K. Brunner and B. Merta (eds.), *Ethnogenese und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterforschung*, Veröffentlichungen des Institut für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 31 (Vienna, 1994), pp. 9–29.

[4] Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, p. 428.

[5] H. Wolfram, *Die Goten. Von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts*, 3rd edn (Vienna and Munich, 1990); published in English as *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1988); Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*; P. J. Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford, 1996); P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge, 1977).

[6] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* [hereafter: *HL*], ed. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, MGH SRL (Hanover, 1878), pp. 12–187. Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*; W. Pohl, 'Paulus Diaconus und die *Historia Langobardorum*: Text und Tradition', in G. Scheibelreiter and A. Scharer (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 32 (Vienna, 1994), pp. 375–405, with further literature.

case to study just one author or one text, or even historiographic texts alone.[7] Distinguishing according to a *typologie de sources* or between literary genres may be helpful in understanding how a text works, but it does not explain how discourses are formed and diffused, and which texts contribute to the construction of identities. Social memory not only consists of narratives, but also, for instance, of implicit or explicit knowledge of how to act under certain circumstances.[8]

Therefore, the whole body of texts that deal with the Lombard past has to be studied. Who was interested in Lombard memories, and how were they perceived and constructed? Answering this question requires going back to the manuscripts, for three reasons. Firstly, only the manuscripts can show with some precision how interest in certain texts develops. More than a hundred extant manuscripts of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* survive, and their specific geographical distribution allows a profile of interests in the Lombard past to be drawn, in spite of all hazards of *Überlieferungschance*, chances of transmission.[9] Secondly, this large body of copies of one text is surprisingly heterogeneous, and its variants often correspond to specific interests. The nineteenth-century editors of the MGH volumes of the *Scriptores Rerum Langobardorum* and the *Leges Langobardorum* did an excellent job, but they tried to reduce the multiplicity of textual variants to an *Urtext* so that the actual manuscript traditions, the many-faceted process of *récriture*, were obscured.[10] Thirdly, our editions pay little attention to the way texts were arranged and combined in a manuscript. Many texts were copied into manuscripts that contain one or several other texts, thus establishing a textual configuration that could change the significance of each individual text. Sometimes, but not always, these manuscripts were organized according to affinities of genre. By separating historiographic from legal texts in two different volumes, according to the established typology of sources, the MGH editors drew much clearer lines than the texts themselves suggest, and split Lombard social memory into two parts. This chapter proposes to look at it as a whole.

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[7] A recent, interesting attempt to discuss the historiography of Lombard origins before 800 in context is S. Cingolani, *Le Storie dei Longobardi. Dall'Origine a Paolo Diacono* (Rome, 1995).

[8] We may, of course, choose to regard even a lawcode as a virtual narrative that establishes what could, and what should happen. For social memory, see J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992).

[9] For the term: A. Esch, 'Überlieferungs-Chance und Überlieferungs-Zufall als methodisches Problem des Historikers', *Historische Zeitschrift* 240 (1985), pp. 529–70; for an outline of the transmission of the *Historia Langobardorum*, Pohl, 'Paulus Diaconus'.

[10] F. Bluhme (ed.), MGH LNG 4; Bethmann and Waitz (eds.), MGH SRL.

In the year 643, the Lombard king Rothari promulgated the first Lombard lawcode.[11] The prologue explains that his aim was 'to correct the present law, improving and amending all earlier laws by adding that which is lacking and eliminating that which is superfluous' (*Necessarium esse prospeximus presentem corregere legem, quae priores omnes renovet et emendet, et quod deest adiciat, et quod superfluum est abscidat*). The process is described in some detail in the so-called epilogue, chapter 386 of the *Edictus Rothari*: 'We have ordered these laws to be written down on this parchment, thus preserving them in this edict so that those things which, with divine aid, we have been able to recapture through careful investigation of the old laws of the Lombards known either to ourself or the old men, we have put down in this lawbook.' The text describes the process of legislation as a complex practice of social memory. 'With the greatest care and most careful scrutiny, obtained by heavenly favour, after seeking out and finding the old laws of the fathers which were not written down' (*cum summo studio . . . inquirentes et rememorantes antiquas leges patrum nostrorum, quae scriptae non erant*), the lawbook was improved and established 'with the equal counsel and consent of our most important judges and with the rest of our most happy army' (*pari consilio parique consensum cum primatos iudices cunctosque felicissimum exercitum nostrum augentes constituimus*). The wording makes it clear that the additions did not require a different procedure from the laws derived from memory.[12] The king gave order to write the resulting edict on parchment: *in hoc membranum scribere iussimus*. Again, the 'subtle' process of preserving memory is highlighted: 'so that those things which, with divine aid, we have been able to recapture through careful investigation of the old laws of the Lombards known either to ourself or to the old men of the nation' (*quod . . . per subtilem inquisitionem de antiquas legis langobardorum . . . memorare potuerimus, in hoc edictum subiungere debeamus*). Finally, the edict had to be confirmed by a formal procedure, by a 'gairethinx' according to the customs of the Lombards: *per gairethinx secundum ritus gentis nostrae confirmantes*. All subjects had to observe the new lawcode: *ab omnibus nostris subiectis custodiatur*. In chapter 388, Rothari provides for a carefully controlled distribution of the lawbook: 'We add this general order lest any fraud be applied to this

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[11] An English translation, with introduction, was published by K. Fischer Drew, *The Lombard Laws* (Philadelphia, 1973), c. 386 on p. 128. A recent Latin-Italian edition with commentary: C. Azzara and S. Gasparri (eds.), *Le leggi dei Longobardi. Storia, memoria e diritto di un popolo germanico* (Milan, 1992).

[12] Fischer Drew, *The Lombard Laws*, p. 128, oddly translates 'cum primatos iudices cunctosque felicissimum exercitum nostrum augentes constituimus' as 'and with the rest of our happy nation assisting, we have established'.

edict through the fault of the scribes: if any contention arises, no other copies of this code shall be accredited or received except those which have been written or recognized or sealed by the hand of our notary Ansoald who has written this in accordance with our command' (*Et a hoc generaliter damus in mandatis, ne aliqua fraus per vicium scriptorum in hoc edictum adibeatur: si aliqua fuerit intentio, nulla alia exemplaria credatur aut suscipiatur, nisi quod per manus ansoald notario nostro scriptum aut recognitum seu requisitum fuerit, qui per nostram iussionem scripsit*). Repeated invocations of divine clemency and favour complete one of the most detailed descriptions of the process of social memory by any early medieval king.

Rothari's Edict, its sources and the act of legislation have stimulated numerous debates. The respective roles of the king and the people of the Lombards, and the rituals involved in their interaction spurred some controversy. For a long time, the *gairethinx secundum ritus gentis nostrae* was envisaged as an ear-shattering ceremony in which the whole of the Longobard army banged their spears on their shields to signal their approval. Some time ago, Ennio Cortese argued convincingly that the laws also provide for liberation of slaves or even sales of property *per gairethinx*, and therefore might not at all imply grand displays of martial shield-clattering.[13] The ritual employed by the first Lombard legislator thus may not have been as archaic as often envisaged. A similar question concerns the 'old laws of our fathers'. Chapter 386 has often been taken as proof of the existence of a Germanic oral judicial tradition and its direct confluence into the written lawcode, although some scholars have argued that, in spite of its claim, Rothari's Edict was copied from an existing written collection.[14] Here, I would like to disentangle myself from the looming problem of orality versus written memory by proposing a simple hypothesis: this question is central only if you automatically associate oral tradition with archaic origin, authenticity and purely 'Germanic' character of this tradition in content and form; and identify literacy with classical (or clerical) erudition, manipulation and dilution of the original text, but also with its transplantation into a Latin culture. I do not think that this bipolarity makes much sense. Latin and Germanic language, traditionalist and legislative rhetoric, and the attitudes

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[13] Ennio Cortese, '*Thinx, gairethinx, thingatio, thingare in gaida et gisil*', *Rivista di Storia del Diritto Italiano* 61 (1988), pp. 33–64.

[14] Cf., for instance, B. Paradisi, 'Il prologo e l'epilogo dell'editto di Rotari', *Studia e Documenta Historiae et Iuris* 34 (1968), pp. 432–57; A. Cavanna, 'Nuovi problemi intorno alle fonti dell'Editto di Rotari', *Studia e Documenta Historiae et Iuris* 34 (1968), pp. 269–361; G. Dilcher, 'Langobardisches Recht', in A. Erler and E. Kaufmann (eds.), *Handwörterbuch zur Deutschen Rechtsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1978), vol. 2, cols. 1607–18.

and rituals of late Roman judicial and 'Germanic' warrior cultures were, by the middle of the seventh century, too entangled to understand them as fundamentally different ways of dealing with the past. The year 643 was hardly the first instance when the Lombards encountered literacy, although it very likely marks the most ambitious attempt so far at integrating all available cultures of memory. Orality and literacy often seem to be quite inseperable on the basis of our evidence, and the 'milieu of memory' at the Lombard court certainly relied on both written and oral tradition.

   Rothari's Edict does not set out to differentiate between what is old and authentic, and what is not; on the contrary, it suggests that there was no essential difference in dealing with both old and new law, for which it proposes a model for the correct interaction of *milieux de mémoire* and *lieux de pouvoir*, of memory and power.[15] This included the *antiqui homines*, but also the notary Ansoald, the *primati iudices*, the army, and, of course, the king in his palace at Pavia. A similar interface between memory and power is found in the prologue of the Edict. Again, we find a reference to the 'old men' from whose memory the text drew, this time because 'we found it useful for the memories of future times to write down the names of the kings, our predecessors' (*utilem prospeximus propter futuris temporis memoriam, nomina regum antecessorum nostrorum, ex quo in gente nostra langobardorum reges nominati coeperunt esse, in quantum per antiquos homines didicimus, in hoc membranum adnotari iussimus*). History and law obviously required similar strategies of memory. The Lombard past figures prominently in the prologue of the Edict: there is a list of seventeen kings and another list of ten ancestors of Rothari. And there is the protocol where the king's legitimacy is reinforced by two basic historical arguments. Firstly, he is explicitly presented as the seventeenth king, *Ego . . . septimo decimum rex gentis Langobardorum*, just like Romulus and, in the Amal genealogy constructed by Cassiodorus, Theodoric's grandson Athalaric.[16] And secondly, Rothari refers to the providential arrival of the Lombards in Italy under King Alboin: 'In the eighth year of my reign, the thirty-eighth of my age . . . and in the seventy-sixth year after the arrival of the Lombards in the province of Italy, since they were led here by divine power under Alboin, in those days king and my predecessor' (*anno deo propitiante regni mei octabo, aetatisque tricesimo octabo, indictione*

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[15] Cf. P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire* (3 vols., Paris, 1984–6).

[16] Wolfram, *Goten*, p. 42. Cassiodorus was an advisor of the sixth-century Gothic king Theodoric and wrote a History of the Goths in which he praised the ruling Amal dynasty, later used by Jordanes in his *Getica*.

secunda, et post adventum in provincia italiae langobardorum, ex quo alboin tunc temporis regem precedentem divina potentia adducti sunt, anno septuagesimo sexto feliciter). For Paul the Deacon (*HL* 4,42), this was an occasion to quote Rothari's prologue: 'This Rothari, king of the Lombards', he writes, 'put the laws of the Lombards that were only retained by memory and practice into written order, and decreed this manuscript to be called edict. This was the seventy-seventh year after the Lombards had come to Italy, as that king attests in the prologue of his edict' (*Hic Rothari rex Langobardorum leges, quas sola memoria et usu retinebant, scriptorum serie conposuit codicemque ipsum edictum appellari praecepit. Erat autem iam ex quo Langobardi in Italiam venerant annus septuagesimus septimus, sicut idem rex in sui edicti testatus est prologo*). The chronology of the two texts differs by a year.

There is another reference to historical information in the lawcode in Paul the Deacon (*HL* 1,21). After mentioning that King Wacho (d. 540) subdued the Suevi, he goes on to say: 'If anybody considers that as a lie and not as the truth of the matter, he should reread the prologue of the edict that king Rothari composed of the Lombard laws, and almost in all of the manuscripts he will find it written just as we have inserted it into this history' (*Hoc si quis mendacium et non rei existimat veritatem, relegat prologum edicti, quem rex Rothari de Langobardorum legibus conposuit, et pene in omnibus hoc codicibus, sicut nos in hac historiola inseruimus, scriptum repperiet*). For Paul's late eighth-century contemporaries, it must have sounded unlikely that the Lombards had ever subdued the Suevi, which in their view could only be the Alamanni; the Pannonian Suevi the text refers to had long been forgotten.[17] There is an element of imprecision in Paul's statement because it is not Rothari's prologue he refers to but a text called the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. Basically, however, Paul is correct, for this text is exclusively known from three of the extant manuscripts of the Lombard laws. It is also closely related to Paul's more elaborated treatment of the origin of the Lombards, and it even contains the information about the Suevi that Paul sought to prove by it.

The *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* is a brief text of a few pages and basically consists of a king-list with comments.[18] Its only elaborate narrative is the famous legend in the beginning that explains how the Lombards got their name. The Winnili, lead by Gambara and her two sons Ibor and Agio, faced battle against the powerful Vandals whose leaders Ambri and Assi appealed to Wodan to give them victory.

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[17] From the sixth century, the Alamans were also called Suevi; but at that time other Suevi still existed in Pannonia.

[18] Ed. G. Waitz, MGH SRL, pp. 1–6.

Gambara, in turn, asked Wodan's wife Frea for help. On her interven-
tion, Wodan promised victory to those whom he would see first on the
battlefield. To make their side look more conspicuous, the women of the
Winnili disguised themselves as warriors, with their long hair tied to
their chins like beards. And thus Wodan really saw them first, asking:
'Who are these longbeards?' And Frea responded: 'As you have given
them a name, give them victory as well.' Put into the context of
Germanic mythology, the story offers a wide range of interpretations.
For instance, in later Scandinavian sources, *Langbadhr*, the Longbeard, is
one of Wodan's epithets, and it is hard to believe that this and other
parallels are mere coincidence.[19] A careful analysis of the text should not
cut it off from Germanic mythology, although most of what we know
about it comes from thirteenth century Scandinavian sources; nor
should it be read exclusively in this context.

However authentic such narratives may or may not have been, the
whole complex of *lex* and *origo* was clearly intended to help give coher-
ence and identity to a political and ethnic community like the Lom-
bards.[20] The creation and preservation of ethnic groups was one of the
contexts that required the production of texts, not just historiographic
texts, but also laws and other forms of text designed to give meaning and
lasting expression to a polity defined by an ethnic name. We may call
this process of remembering what was essential about the common past
a 'tradition'. But we have to be careful not to be misled by the implica-
tions that this term may carry. Ethnic 'traditions' are not necessarily
broad, continuous and largely anonymous streams of social memory of
which the texts that have come down to us represent but chance
fragments. Long-term memory is not a natural process automatically
shared by the members of a community.

Rothari's prologue and epilogue, and the prologues of the additions
to the lawcode issued by the later kings Grimoald, Liutprand, Ratchis
and Aistulf, repeatedly stress the efforts necessary to keep memories
alive: *inquirere, rememorare, condere, corregere, constituere, scribere, confirmare,
recognoscere, discere, emendare, renovare, adnotare*; the later prologues also use
*adiungere, corrigere, revocare, innovare, instituere, inserere, adicere, auferre, minuere,
subtrahere, purgare, ampliare, addere, (ad)augere, augmentare, supplere, conicere,
annectere, affigere, annotare, reminiscere, pertractare, considerare, recurrere, definire,
statuere, imponere*. Of course, we are dealing with rhetoric, but the insis-

[19] W. Bruckner, *Die Sprache der Langobarden* (Strasburg, 1895), p. 33.
[20] Cf. H. Wolfram, 'Origo et religio. Ethnic traditions and literature in early medieval texts', *Early
     Medieval Europe* 3 (1994), pp. 19–38, and below.

tence with which this rhetoric develops the theme of preserving and changing the *edicti corpus* is remarkable. Grimoald set out to add (*adiungere*) the single matters that could be remembered so far and had not been included yet (*quod adhuc . . . memorare potuerimus de singolas causas, quae in presente non sunt adficte*). Liutprand's first prologue explored the theme of memory and oblivion in a series of binary oppositions: *auferre – adicere, minuere – ampliare, subtrahere – addere.* The prologue for his eighth year underlined the process of systematic revision of all previous clauses: 'We have investigated earnestly and carefully those particular matters which were covered in the earlier issues of this lawbook; now with all the people assisting, we have taken care to add, to clarify, or to establish the present rules contained in the following passages' (*dum singola, quae in anterioribus titulis huius edicti leguntur, studiosae hac subtiliter perscrutassemus, assistente omni populo, presentem, quam sequens sermo monstraverit, addere, elucidare sibe statuere previdemus legem*).[21] His later prologues proposed to resolve the conflict between custom (*consuetudo, usus*, or in the Germanic term used in Liutprand 77 and 133, *cawarfida*) and deliberation (*arbitrium*).[22] The Benevantan prince Adelchis (d. 878), in his prologue of 866, recounted the process of legislation once more; the ancient kings had taken care to blot out (*pumice frangere*) what was superfluous, and to add what was necessary. This rich language that describes how one could deal with written memory shows how flexibly the process of memory and oblivion could be perceived in the early Middle Ages. The *subtilis inquisitio* employed by Lombard legislators is at the root of much of what people in the early Middle Ages knew about their past (and of what we know about it). The Lombards in Italy provide a good example for an analysis of the ways in which such memories took shape.

Who was interested in defining the Lombards, what material did they use, and what effect did their constructions have? What we can reconstruct on the basis of such questions is not so much a broad and continuous flow of tradition but a few knots in an interrelated network of memory. Before 800, three of these knots emerge clearly.[23] The first documented interest in Lombard history goes back to the days of

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[21] Similarly in the prologue to the ninth year 'pertractantes omnia et recurrentes antiquioris edicti capitula'.

[22] Liutprand 77, in a specific context, explicitly refers to ancient custom that was now written down 'Ideo autem hoc scripsimus, quia etsi adfictum in edictum propriae non fuit, tamen omnes iudices et fidelis nostri sic dixerunt, quod cawerfeda antiqua usque nunc sic fuisset.'

[23] For the context of Lombard history, cf. J. Jarnut, *Geschichte der Langobarden* (Stuttgart, 1982); C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy* (London, 1981); R. Harrison, *The Early State and the Towns. Forms of Integration in Lombard Italy AD 568–774* (Lund, 1993); and W. Pohl, *Die Langobarden* (Munich, forthcoming).

Secundus of Trento and Queen Theodelinda around 600. The cleric from Trento, Secundus, seems to have been the queen's spiritual advisor and is known to have baptized her son, the future King Adaloald, in the basilica of St John the Baptist at Monza that Theodelinda founded. Paul the Deacon mentions in several instances that he could rely on a, now lost, *historiola* of the Lombards written by Secundus. He also admired the frescoes of 'some of the deeds of the Lombards' that Theodelinda had had painted in her palace at Monza. Only from these paintings, he says, did he know about the types of dress the Lombards once wore, which had changed long since.[24] It seems that Lombard ethnic memory and Roman administrative practice in Italy began to converge very soon after 568, and that Secundus was one of the Roman specialists who helped Lombard rulers with this task.

The second stage in the making of Lombard memory was the age of Rothari and his notary Ansoald, with the promulgation of the Edict that was to form the core of Lombard law in the year 643. Rothari, in spite of steering a different course in his religious policy, later respected the tradition of Theodelinda by choosing to be buried in her basilica of John the Baptist at Monza. Paul the Deacon later expressed his approval of the Arian legislator king in an anecdote: Rothari's grave is protected from a thief by St John the Baptist in person, who says: 'He may not have been orthodox, but he commended himself to me' (*HL* 4,47). It is quite probable that the Latin text of the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* was compiled at about the same time as the Edict, for the two king-lists are closely related. However, in the surviving form it seems to have been completed some twenty to thirty years later, during the reign of either Grimoald or Perctarit, the two last kings mentioned in the version that can be reconstructed on the basis of the three extant manuscripts. Most scholars thought that it could have been compiled on the occasion of Grimoald's additions to the lawcode, but more likely it was updated under Grimoald's ousted predecessor and later successor Perctarit. It contains all the necessary information to trace Perctarit's genealogy back to Theodelinda and the prestigious Lething dynasty in the first half of the sixth century, whereas it does not mention that Grimoald was related to Alboin and the dukes of Friuli (as Paul states). Whatever the case, Fredegar's *Chronicle* written in the same period attests that around 660 the story of how the Lombards got their name was also known in Burgundy. He records a battle of the Lombards with the Huns, at which

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[24] W. Pohl, 'Telling the difference: signs of ethnic identity', in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 17–70.

the women tie their hair to look like beards to frighten the enemy, whereupon a voice from the sky which they *fanatice* suppose to be that of their god Wodan exclaims: *Haec sunt Longobardi*.[25]

It is remarkable that the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* does not seem to have been updated after Perctarit, by either of the successive kings who added to the lawcode. The surviving early manuscripts do not show great interest in the text by those who copied the Edict, either. Neither the St Gall codex that originated around Pavia or at Bobbio in the seventh century, nor the north-western Italian manuscripts of Vercelli and Ivrea written sometime before and sometime after 800 respectively, nor a Vatican codex from Verona dating to the ninth century contain a trace of the *Origo*.[26] Only three tenth- and eleventh-century manuscripts have the text.[27] Paul the Deacon's extended version of the origin myth was much more successful: his *Historia Langobardorum* is still preserved in over a hundred manuscripts. However, a comparison of the *Origo* and the initial sections of Paul's history shows that the Deacon remained rather faithful to his model. This comes as no surprise, for we know that Paul also copied other sources very faithfully, for instance Gregory of Tours.

After the pairs Secundus/Theodelinda around 600 and Ansoald/ Rothari around 650, we reach the decisive stage in the making of Lombard memory: the late eighth century, the time when Paul the Deacon settled down at Montecassino to write the *Historia Langobardorum*, sometime after Charlemagne had brought the Lombard kingdom under control. Paul is not connected to a single royal figure but to a

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[25] Fredegar 4,65. For Fredegar, cf. I. Wood, 'Fredegar's fables', in G. Scheibelreiter and A. Scharer (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung 32 (Vienna, 1994), pp. 359–66. Cingolani, *Le Storie dei Longobardi*, pp. 38–41, argues that Fredegar's brief version is closer to the original, and that the fuller story in the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* (including Gambara and Frea) is due to later additions. Cingolani is correct in claiming that the Fredegar version, being the oldest to be attested, should receive more attention. But it is not very likely that, for instance, the Vandals came to supplant the Huns in a seventh-century version, when one might have at best remembered that they had once crossed the Rhine and lived in Africa. Likewise, there may have been stronger pagan survivals among seventh-century Lombards than we are aware of (cf. Pohl, 'Deliberate ambiguity: the Lombards and Christianity', forthcoming); but it is unlikely that the story about Frea and Wodan was only thought up to be added to a semi-official text under Christian kings.

[26] A hand-list of manuscripts of Lombard law is in preparation for the MGH, to be edited by Christoph Meyer, Charles Radding and Walter Pohl. So far, see Bluhme's list in MGH LNG 4.

[27] For these manuscripts, see below. From the manuscript evidence, it would be possible to argue that the *Origo* is only an abbreviated version of the story found in Paul the Deacon, which was annexed to some late manuscripts of the law. But this is not very likely. We would have to regard Paul's reference to the text found in the Edict as a lie that prompted others to fabricate exactly what he had pretended to have found; furthermore, the end of the king-list with Perctarit and several archaisms in the text would have to be explained.

number of power centres: the duchy of Friuli at Cividale where he grew up, the royal court at Pavia where he held office under the last Lombard kings, the duchy of Benevento where he served as an advisor to the *princeps* Arichis II and his wife Adelperga in times of confrontation with the Franks, and last but not least the Carolingian court in whose orbit he spent some years. His *History* therefore offers an almost uniquely broad horizon and displays remarkable skill in reconciling contradictions.[28] We know that he used both the *History* of Secundus and the lawcode containing the *Origo Gentis*. His personal fate also seems to have been linked with Theodelinda's basilica at Monza, as can be guessed from a curious story (*HL* 5,6). When the Byzantine emperor Constans II invaded Italy, he asked a hermit whether he would be able to subdue the Lombard kingdom. The hermit answered that he would be repelled by the personal protection of St John the Baptist for the Lombards. Only at a time when unworthy people would seize the basilica at Monza could the Lombard kingdom be shattered. We may infer that Paul blamed Desiderius, the last Lombard king, for giving the basilica into the wrong hands, squandering the kingdom's supernatural protection. For the historian of the Lombards, the very core of Lombard identity lay in the hands of John the Baptist, not in those of Wodan, King Alboin or any of his successors.

The Carolingian conquest did not end the interest in Lombard origins and Lombard law, but rather inspired attempts to promote its diffusion in writing. Sometime in the 830s, Eberhard of Friuli commissioned the monastery of Fulda and specifically the brilliant young scholar Lupus of Ferrières to compose a handbook of several laws he could use in office in Friuli. Cividale del Friuli, by the way, also was an early centre of diffusion of Paul the Deacon's *History*; one of the earliest surviving manuscripts can be seen in the museum at Cividale. The lawbook Lupus composed is mentioned in Eberhard's famous testament and went to his son and later king of Italy, Berengar.[29] The original is lost, but two extant manuscripts document the work Lupus had done. One is the Modena copy (O.I.2); it contains the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, although not immediately preceding the Lombard laws.[30] The

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[28] Pohl, 'Paulus Diaconus'.

[29] Cf. C. La Rocca and L. Provero, 'The dead and their gifts. The will of Eberhard, count of Friuli, and his wife Gisela', in F. Theuws (ed.), *Rituals of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2000).

[30] The date 991 given in the literature for Modena O.I.2 is derived from a calendar that may have been annexed to the manuscript some time after it had been written, and is therefore unreliable. I plan to come back to the problem in a forthcoming study.

other codex is a version that was written at Fulda (and is now at Gotha). It also contains a short *Origo* of the Lombards, probably compiled before the death of King Pippin of Italy, in the first decade of the ninth century, but from a Christian and Carolingian perspective, omitting most of the origin myth and introducing a strong sense of providence instead.[31]

In some ways, written expressions of Lombard identity became more important after the Lombard kingdom had lost its independence. Lombard tradition was used in many ways to reassert separate identities, to propagate ways of coexistence with mighty neighbours or to find comfort in defeat. Thus, Paul the Deacon was posthumously styled as a hero of southern independence who thrice tried to murder Charlemagne and was only pardoned because of his genius and erudition – a legend that became widely diffused in the south. His figure as commentator of the *Regula Benedicti*, as grammarian and poet, and as historian of the Romans and Lombards loomed for centuries over the monastic communities of the south so often threatened by foreign intervention. A growing corpus of Lombard historiographic and legal texts became a chief asset for the major monasteries in the country, like Montecassino, San Vincenzo, Farfa or Nonantola, in defending and extending their rights. Donations, forged or real, by Lombard kings and dukes played such an important part in the ceaseless efforts to preserve and enlarge their wealth in the recurring political crises that monastic communities were eager to accumulate any historical information that might prove useful. Paradoxically enough, they came to see their own story in a continuum going back, in the last instance, to Wodan and Frea. This conjunction of the origin of the Lombards and the identity of Benedictine convents, of ethnic and monastic memory, goes back to the historical synthesis Paul the Deacon achieved.

The strategies of monastic memory in central and southern Italy often work as a filter through which our surviving information from the seventh and eighth centuries has passed. Patrick Geary has described the transformation of early medieval memory on the basis of French and German material in his book *Phantoms of Remembrance*.[32] Brigitte Pohl-Resl is currently studying this process from the point of view of twelfth-century chronicle-cartularies like the *Chronicon S. Sophiae* or the *Regestum* of Farfa. My own research has concentrated on a number of manuscripts that assemble a variety of mainly ninth- and tenth-century texts

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[31] The MGH edition calls it *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani*: MGH SRL, pp. 7–11.
[32] P. J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance. Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 1994).

collected by the monks of Montecassino that deal with their troubled relationship with the powers that surrounded them. These mostly rather short texts comprise chronicles, king-lists, letters, poems and epitaphs, treaties, accounts of miracles and of pious donations, glossaries of Lombard law, accounts of chronology and other texts, right across the genres. In different, but related selections, they are found in a commentary to the Benedictine Rule from the 920s, in a manuscript of Lombard law dating to *c.* 1000, and in a collection of historiography (Erchempert and the *Chronicon Salernitanum*) preserved in a copy from *c.* 1300 but essentially put together in the course of the late ninth and the tenth century.[33] Most of the 'texts of identity' preserved in these collections refer to the period between 750 and 900, whereas relatively little of what mattered for the compilers goes back to the time before 750. But they used some basic information on St Benedict and on the early history of the duchy of Benevento derived from Paul the Deacon, an annotated Lombard king-list, and, of course, the lawcode including the *Origo*. The two manuscripts that, apart from Eberhard's version, contain both the lawcode and the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* are from the Beneventan area: one probably compiled at Montecassino around 1000 (and now at Cava de' Tirreni), the other one written at Bari in the eleventh century (now in Madrid).[34] It is of course not surprising that in this part of Italy, where Lombard rule had survived (although in smaller and smaller units), the interest in Lombard origins should be more marked.

Conspicuously enough, the period around the year 1000 witnessed a renewed interest in Lombard law and traditions in most parts of Italy. Maybe it is no coincidence that the last event recorded in the king-list in the Codex Cavensis is the succession of Arduin of Ivrea to the Lombard throne after the death of Otto III in 1002. The first decades of the eleventh century also show a veritable explosion in the references to Lombard law in private charters. In the troubled residence of Pavia, a law school began to study, comment and synthesize Rothari's Edict and its successive additions. Some of the manuscripts of the so-called 'Lombarda', a systematic version of the lawcode that ultimately emerged from their studies, again contained *origines* of the Lombards. The editors of the MGH called these *Historiae Langobardorum Fabulosae*. Indeed, they hardly resemble the old version of the *Origo*. Gambara, the wise woman

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[33] Lawbook: Cava de' Tirreni 4; Rule: Montecassino 175; Histories: Vat. lat. 5001. The results of this study will be published elsewhere.

[34] G. Cavallo, 'Per l'origine e la data del Cod. Madrid. 413 delle Leges Langobardorum', *Studi di storia dell'arte in memoria di Mario Rotili* (Naples, 1984), pp. 135–42.

at the dawn of Lombard origins, becomes the one who leads the Lombards into Italy and defeats Narses in battle.[35] Interest in Lombard roots by lawyers obviously did not necessarily imply a codified version of their history. It may well be that among the manuscripts of Lombard law at hand in Pavia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, none contained the version of the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* as we know it.

This brief outline of the way in which texts about the Lombards were transmitted and reshaped should demonstrate that no simple model fits the process of 'memory and oblivion' in the early Middle Ages. The same text could be subject to any treatment from restrictive control to fundamental rewriting. Rothari, by restricting the use of lawbooks to those copies that had passed through his notary's hands, established a regulation for his own lifetime. But his codification was still faithfully copied half a millennium after his death, and survived more or less intact to our day, in a dozen manuscripts. On the other hand, the lawcode was also abridged, glossed, commented, revised, put in different order, and cited in histories and charters. The same happened to the text of the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, which was both copied and taken as a point of departure for a variety of historiographic texts; and, even more so, to Paul the Deacon's *History of the Lombards*. Successful medieval texts often oscillate between codification and restrictive use on the one hand, and growth and transformation on the other. This is not surprising as medieval societies always represented a plurality of interests capable of finding textual expression. The surviving texts are traces of a plurality of writings. Totalizing concepts of historical memory are no use in describing them. Uses of the past were not restricted to a uniform collective subject, a kingdom or a people in strict control of its memory and tradition. Specialized writers, whose roles as authors, compilers, copyists or correctors are often not easily distinguishable, made their point and could leave their mark.

On the other hand, reshaping the past was not the monopoly of a few autonomous individual subjects who could freely create it. Firstly, each of the successive stages of the 'making of a memory' was closely linked with the centres of Lombard power. Every single one of our authors had close links to royal or ducal courts and was instrumental in more than writing history. The Lombard history of Secundus was paralleled by the paintings in the queen's palace that were part of royal representation, and he certainly was an important advisor in her controversial strategy

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[35] This is a mistake that may well follow from a superficial reading of the *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani*.

of strengthening the Christian character of the Lombard kingdom. Rothari's Edict uses the historical material in the prologue and in the *Origo Gentis* that became attached to it to make a strong statement about the Lombard monarchy. Paul the Deacon, a man who had spent long years in the inner circle of the Lombard court, became an important promoter of reconciliation between Lombards and Franks under the auspices of Catholicism. Lupus of Ferrières worked for the duke of Friuli. Only eventually, proud monasteries tried to use the past to hold the powers of the present at bay, and established some control over the sources of written memory

Secondly, none of these authors could write without taking a limited, but qualified public into account. However limited its diffusion in its written form, the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* was surprisingly well preserved even in its embarrassingly pagan aspects. Fredegar, writing outside the Lombard kingdom at about the same time, was conspicuously more reluctant to take all the pagan lore on board and distanced himself from those who *fanatice* attributed a simple voice from heaven to the god Wodan. Paul the Deacon did call the Wodan myth of the origin of the Lombards a *ridicula fabula*, but still he faithfully rendered it, in much the same words as the *Origo Gentis* had done more than a century before. A thoroughly Christianized version of the Lombard origin legend was only created in the early ninth century by an Italian admirer of Charlemagne. It can hardly be a coincidence that of the two lawbooks compiled by Lupus of Ferrières, this Christian version is found in the *Codex Gothanus* written at Fulda, whereas the Italian version that Eberhard of Friuli used still contained the traditional text of the *Origo*. Even Walter Goffart, who presented Paul the Deacon as an autonomous author, admitted that his audience might have missed the familiar pagan legends.[36] But that means that there was an audience who knew the story before reading it, and one to whom those legends mattered. It is in his frequent attempts to bridge contradictions or take the edge off embarrassing material that Paul's complex treatment of the Lombard past becomes most obvious.

Thirdly, we see that the different knots in our web of tradition are linked in a complex way. Various attempts to explain their relationship by simple models of derivation have failed. The great Theodor Mommsen believed that the *Origo Gentis* was just an excerpt from Secundus, from whose *Historiola* Paul copied the integral version, but not even

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[36] Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History,* pp. 382–3.

Mommsen's authority could make this hypothesis stick.[37] Of course Paul the Deacon knew most of the earlier texts we know, but he knew more than these. And the *Origo Gentis* is likely to differ from Secundus in important respects. The transmission of Lombard histories can only be conceived allowing for a few knots unknown to us, for instance the sources for most of Paul's account of Lombard history from Rothari to Ratchis. Some of it must have been material preserved at or near the Lombard court.[38] A century later, this type of material was not available any more, either to Andreas of Bergamo or to Erchempert who continued Paul's work.[39] For their account of the fall of the Lombard kingdom, they had to rely mainly on the *Liber Pontificalis*, which accounts for some bizarre changes of perspective, especially in the *Chronicle* of Andreas. Another example of (more recent) losses of material is the fact that today not a single manuscript of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum* survives from southern Italy, although it is used in all of the Beneventan manuscripts that represent the specific southern Italian blend of ethnic and monastic memory; it appears in library catalogues; and we even know that a renegade monk of San Vincenzo stole it from his monastery. On the other hand, two manuscripts of the *Historia Langobardorum* from Eberhard's Friuli survive to this day, but none is mentioned in his testament. It thus seems obvious that both the surviving manuscripts and medieval library catalogues represent only a small percentage of what was originally there.

We have departed from the hypothesis that one of the functions of the texts about the Lombards was to reinforce their identity. This is in line with current narratology that analyses 'texts of identity' from the point of view of literary criticism, psychology, ethnology and, of course, history.[40] What can we really learn about the construction of Lombard identity from these texts? Certain recurring narratives and images seem to have been regarded as central to the social memory of a community that styled itself as 'the Lombards'. They explained where they had come from, why they were called Lombards, how they had subdued

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[37] T. Mommsen, 'Die Quellen der Langobardengeschichte des Paulus Diaconus', *Neues Archiv* 5 (1880), pp. 51–103.

[38] Assuming that official court historiography and oral tradition preserved by court poets was Paul's source: D. Bullough, 'Ethnic history and the Carolingians: an alternative reading of Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*', in C. Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman (eds.), *The Inheritance of Historiography* (Exeter, 1986), pp. 85–105.

[39] Eds. L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, MGH SRL, pp. 220–30, 231–264.

[40] Cf., for instance, J. Shotter and K. J. Gergen (eds.), *Texts of Identity* (London, 1989); G. C. Rosenwald and R. L. Ochberg (eds.), *Storied Lives: the Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding* (Yale, 1992).

most of Italy.⁴¹ They also related primordial deeds and instances of divine protection, although the agents of the latter changed, from Wodan and Frea to John the Baptist and Michael the Archangel. Implicitly or explicitly, these narratives called for certain types of behaviour to retain the extraordinary position of the Lombards. Some of them were quite universal: audacity in battle, sacrifices for the community, obedience to laws, love of freedom, veneration of saints. The late tenth-century *Chronicon Salernitanum* relates an incident in which a man called Rampho urges his *princeps* not to accept paying tribute: 'Have you never read, my lord, how our fathers left their homes because of the tribute the Vandals asked from them?' (Vat. Lat. 5001, fol. 23v). This is a direct reference to the Lombard origin myth, 350 years after it was first written down.

Some of these narratives call for virtues that are a little more specific. For instance, female counsel was valued highly, not only in the Gambara story. Social prejudices had to be set aside in times of crisis, when slaves were expected to join the ranks of the free Lombards. This point corresponds to the openness of Lombard identity in the texts: nowhere do we get a restrictive definition of who is a Lombard and who is not. Instead, we repeatedly hear how groups of non-Lombard origin become Lombards, for instance Alzeco's Bulgarians in the seventh century, a story that recurs in many Beneventan manuscripts.⁴² What we would regard as a fundamental question of identity, the relationship between the Lombards and the Roman majority in Italy, is hardly ever addressed, and neither is the question of language. That does not mean that no differences were perceived at all, for instance in law or social status. But obviously these differences were not conceptualized on the basis of clear ethnic definitions.⁴³ Rather, to be Roman or Lombard or sometimes both seems to have been an option open to many in specific situations, for instance whether to write charters in the Lombard or the Roman way.⁴⁴

In many respects, perceptions and concepts of Lombard identity vary in our texts. For instance, the *Origo Gentis* offers hardly any Christian interpretation of Lombard history. Paul the Deacon balances it against a strong Christian context without giving it a providential meaning,

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⁴¹ The *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani*, p. 8, explains this in the following manner: 'Originem et nationem seu parentelam langobardorum, exitus et conversationem eorum, bella et vastationes quae fecerunt reges eorum, et patrias quas vastarunt.'

⁴² *HL* 5,29.   ⁴³ Pohl, 'Telling the difference'.

⁴⁴ B. Pohl-Resl, 'Legal practice and ethnic identity in Lombard Italy', in Pohl and Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction*, pp. 205–20.

whereas the history in the *Codex Gothanus* sees God's hand at work in the Lombards' arrival in Italy. Paul's rather ambiguous and complicated agenda that left room for very different successive interpretations proved most successful. Just as the Carolingians changed Merovingian history, he emarginated other views of the Lombard past where he did not integrate them. Even nowadays, he is our chief witness if we want to know who the Lombards were. No doubt this blurs our perception considerably. On the other hand, his broad perspective is adequate to a process whose initial stages he describes. In the Lombard period, Italy was a country of multiple ethnic and political identities. Lombards and Romans, Greeks and Franks became integral parts of a political universe that could not define itself as a clear-cut ethnic community. In Paul's early days, it seemed for a while that the Lombards might establish a political synthesis of the different groups in the peninsula. Paul's *Historia Langobardorum* reflects this concept when its historical moment had already passed. By the time he wrote it, it was already clear that he had to allow not only for increasing ethnic, but also for political diversity. Thus, it became as much a book about the future as a book about the past.

Paul the Deacon, and some other writers to a lesser degree, may in this sense have created Lombard history for us. Does this mean that this history cannot be perceived independently from their creation? Nowadays, historians love to talk about invented pasts, which is important as an antidote against academic attitudes that regard historiography as a simple reflection of past realities that may just be more or less accurate. The war between Lombards and Longobards reported by Codagnellus is invented to a considerable degree. But even to him, the distant Lombard past was not infinitely malleable. Medieval historiographers mostly dealt with truths that were already there, with an order of discourse about the past that gave meaning to the narrative modules they arranged or produced. Even invented pasts could not be created freely, they had to be likely enough to have come to pass. In the 1960s, the melodramatic Italian film 'Alboin, King of the Lombards' showed how Alboin made his Gepid wife Rosamund drink out of her father's skullcup, and she conspired to murder him. Thus far, the film was quite faithful to Paul the Deacon's narrative of Alboin's death. But it ended with the final victory of the Gepids over the Lombards, presented as a happy ending. Whoever wrote histories in the Middle Ages, even *historiae fabulosae*, could not have made the Gepids win. They could make Gambara lead the Lombards to Italy instead of Alboin, or they could

picture the Lombards as being there already when the Longobards came. But still the Lombards had to win, for a simple reason: Italy was a Lombard, not a Gepid kingdom, and the region around Milan and Pavia was called Lombardy. After all, people knew what their past had led to.