

The myth - The Nordic origins

Original Germanic tribes

The so-called “Nordic circle” (*Nordischer Kreis*) is indicated as the original homeland of the Germanic tribes (second millennium BC). A vast area which - considering present-day names - comprises southern Sweden and Norway, the Jutland peninsula, the Danish islands and the plains of northern Germany.

The Germanic peoples of the early days were not one People, nor were the various tribes aware of a common ethnic root.

Likewise, today there is no certainty as to the probable existence of an original bloodline which, in any case, belonged to the great Indo-European family.



The Germanic peoples are distinguished according to three large groups: **North Germanic** (*Varangians* or Norwegian, Danish and Swedish *Vikings*), **East Germanic** and **West Germanic**, to each of which belonged a great number of sub-groups and tribes.

The North Germanic group also includes Norwegian, Danish and Swedish *Varangians* (also known as *Vikings*).

Classified in the East Germanic group were the tribes of the *Goths* (a group that included *Visigoths*, *Ostrogoths*,



Gepids, Thervingi, Greuthungi, Crimean Goths), the *Rugii*, the *Vandals*, the *Herules*, the *Burgundians*, the *Bastarnae*, the *Scirii* and the *Thuringians*.

Classified in the West Germanic group (which in turn was divided into the large groups of the *Ingaevones*, *Irminones* and *Istvaeones*) were the *Salians*, the *Franks* - to whom a great part of Longobard history is connected - the *Chatti*, the *Batavi*, the *Ubii*, the *Treveri* and also the *Suebi* (or *Suevi*), the *Saxons*, the *Quadi*, the *Marcomanni* and the *Alemanni*.

As regards the **Longobards**, the few ancient sources mention them sometimes as belonging to the Eastern Germanic and sometimes to the Western Germanic tribes (*Irminones*) group).

The Winnili

The sequence of the Longobard kings and dynasties appears for the first time in the prologue to the *Edictum Rothari* (643), which does not give any indications about the origins of the Longobards. The first text that mentions their origins is the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* written by an anonymous author in the seventh century. This would be one of the sources used by Paul the Deacon, in the eighth century, when he wrote his famous *Historia Langobardorum*.

The *Origo* has reached us in three Codices kept respectively in Modena (9th century text), Cava dei Tirreni (9th century) and Madrid (11th century).



ODIN AND FREYJA (EMIL DOEPLER, 1905)

According to that source, the first phase of the Longobard epic took place in the mythical region of *Scandanan* (which can perhaps be identified as Scania, the present-day region in Sweden). The original tribe was the *Winnili*. It is said that they were in conflict with the tribe of the *Vandals*. Through the intercession of *Gambara* - mother of *Ybor* and *Agio*, the first leaders - the *Winnili* tribe obtained favours from the goddess *Freyja* and, thanks to her, those of the god *Odin*, who granted them victory, after which they were always known as “Longobards”



(long beards). The story reveals the strong role of the Longobard women, who disguised themselves by covering their faces with their long, thick hair, so that the god would think that the group of Winnili warriors was more numerous.

The *Origo* tells us that, after defeating the Vandals, the Longobards left and arrived in *Golaida*, a region indicated today as the area of the Lower Elbe. This migration - like all the movements of the "barbaric" peoples - was due to the necessity to find new spaces in which to find all that was needed to support the tribe.

Corresponding to this phase was the shift from prevalently agricultural activities, under the protection of the Nordic goddess of fertility (Freyja) to warlike activities, consequently aligning with the worship of Odin, the warrior god of thunder.