

DATA SHEET

History of the Longobards (synthesis)

From the chronological point of view, the history of the Longobards can be divided into a preliminary phase (that of the Scandinavian myth of the origins) and four historic periods.

The mythological phase of the Longobard epic unrolled in an area which - in the absence of certain scientific elements - is difficult to identify. Anyway, the area is included in the so-called "Nordic Circle" (Southern Sweden and Norway, Jutland, Danish islands and the plains of northern Germany), which includes territories inhabited by several Germanic tribes. So far, this has made it extremely difficult to indicate with a sufficient approximation the origin of the tribe of the Winnili (the future Longobards). However, the most accredited hypothesis points towards the present Swedish region of Scania.

Corresponding to the four epochs in which Longobard presence is ascertained are four geographical macro-areas of settlement:

- Northern Germany,
- Central-Eastern Europe
- and Italy, which is divided into two geographical and temporal strips:
 - one that extends over a large part of the peninsula and referring to the Longobard kingdom, from 568 to 774;
 - and the territories of the Longobard Principalities in the South after the end of the Kingdom, that is from 774 to 1077 (year of the Norman conquest of the South of Italy, which brought the long Longobard period to a close).

Each stage marks a different phase in the evolution of Longobard civilization can be identified: from the semi-mythical and tribal stage to the maximum cultural expression achieved in the period of their rule in Italy. The peak of Longobard culture is scientifically recognized today as the **first foundation of European Culture**.

So the **PRELIMINARY PHASE** is the Scandinavian phase of the myth of their origin which sees the tribe of the Winnili (*Winniles*) transform into the tribe of the Longobards, and which ends at the beginning of the 1st century BC with their migration towards the Germanic shores to the south of the Baltic and along the final course of the river Elbe.

In the **1ST HISTORIAL PERIOD** (1st century BC - 5th century AD) Longobard proto-history witnessed the real birth of the Longobard people who provided themselves with the first hierarchical structures, shifting their focus from farming to warfare and growing in consideration among the other Germanic tribes. Until the second half of the 4th century when - moving up the river Elbe - they began to transfer towards central and eastern Europe.

In the **2ND HISTORIAL PERIOD** the Longobards, settling first on the banks of the Danube, between Lower Austria and southern Moravia, occupied the Roman regions of Pannonia I and Valeria where they came into direct contact with the Byzantine Empire and with the Arian form of Christianity. It was in these territories that a profound transformation came about in the Longobards who, after the wars won against the Huns (redeeming themselves after a first defeat), the Eruli and the Gepids, became one of the great powers of the time and acquired more and more evolved knowledge and techniques.

The **3RD HISTORIAL PERIOD** begins in 568 when the hero-king Alboin (Albwin) led all his people (composed of Longobards, Saxone, Gepids and elements of many other tribes that had been assimilated over time) to the conquest of Italy. In the peninsula the Longobards would create 35 duchies and found their own Kingdom; they would accept Roman Catholicism; they would build palaces and places of worship; they would issue their first written laws; they would succeed in blending their traditions with Greek and Roman culture and with Byzantine-Oriental and Slav influences, determining the birth of the first foundation of European Culture. The Kingdom would end in 774 with the defeat by the Franks under Charlemagne.



The 4TH HISTORIAL PERIOD, after the end of the Kingdom, saw the duchies in the South of Italy transformed into autonomous Principalities (Benevento, Salerno and Capua). Their existence was supported by the desire of the Longobard dukes and princes to transfer to their domains the entire heritage of the Kingdom, far from the reach of Charlemagne and the later Frankish emperors. In the southern lands, the Longobards would have to cope with the never fading ambitions of Byzantium and with the new Saracen threat. New places of power and worship would arise; there would be an increase in the devotion to the Archangel Michael, patron saint of the Longobard nation with Saint Martin; the power of the great abbeys of Montecassino and San Vincenzo al Volturno would grow. The arrival of the Normans, their conquest of Salerno and the death of the last prince (1077) would mark the end of Longobard power. But not of its precious heritage.