



Christopher Heath

The Narrative Worlds of Paul the Deacon

Between Empires and Identities
in Lombard Italy

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For Alice and Drogo

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Pollheimer (eds), *Sermo doctorum*; Shane Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition Between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the Variae*; and E.T. Dailey, *Queens, Consorts, Concubines: Gregory of Tours and Women of the Merovingian Elite*. Such studies continue to add to and deepen our understanding of the narrative worlds of the early medieval West.

Christopher Heath
Levenshulme, November 2015

List of Abbreviations

- Capo** L. Capo (ed.), *Paolo Diacono: Storia dei Longobardi* (Vicenza, 1992)
- Carucci** A. Carucci (ed.), *Erchemperto: Storia dei Longobardi* (sec. IX) (Salerno, 2003)
- Chiesa** P. Chiesa (ed.), *Paolo Diacono: Uno scrittore fra tradizione longobarda e rinnovamento carolingio* (Udine, 2000)
- CISAM** Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo
- Colgrave** B. Colgrave (ed. and trans.), *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Cambridge, 1986)
- Crivellucci** A. Crivellucci (ed.), *Pauli Diaconi: Historia Romana* (Fonti per la Storia d'Italia) (Roma, 1914)
- DBI** *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*
- EHR** *English Historical Review*
- EME** *Early Medieval Europe*
- Foulke** Paul the Deacon: *History of the Lombards*, W.D. Foulke (trans.) (Philadelphia, 1974)
- Gauthier** N. Gauthier, *L'évangélisation des pays de la Moselle* (Paris, 1980)
- GEM** *Gesta Episcoporum Mettensium*
- HEGA** J.F. King (ed. and trans.), *Bede: Historical Works: Volume I* (London, 1930)
- HL** *Historia Langobardorum*
- HR** *Historia Romana*
- MGH AA** H. Droysen (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Auctorum Antiquissimorum Tomus II: Eutropi Breviarum ab Urbe Condita* (Berlin, 1879)
- MGH SrL** G. Waitz (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, saec. VI-IX* (Hannover, 1878)
- MGH SrM** B. Krusch (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* (Berlin, 1888)
- MGH SsRG** F. Kurze (ed.), *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in Usus Scholarum* (Hannover, 1895)
- Narrators** W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988)
- NCMH** *New Cambridge Medieval History*
- PLRE** J.R. Martindale, *Prosopography of the Late Roman Empire: Vol. III 527-641* (Cambridge, 1992)
- TRHS** *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
- VSGM** *Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni*

Introduction

In thanking William Dudley Foulke (1848-1935) for his English translation of Paul the Deacon's (c. 725-c. 796) *Historia Langobardorum*, first published in 1907, the American president, Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) declared: 'What a delightful old boy the Deacon was; and what an interesting mixture of fact and fable he wrote'.¹ Paul's works, of course, can be analysed as more than just an 'interesting mix', but Roosevelt's reaction was testament to the abiding human value of Paul's narratives. In the same way that buildings can be read as 'ensembles of structures, images and performances rather than as isolated plans and elevations', so too the four prose narratives of Paul the Deacon can be considered as a vital window upon the thought and opinions of one of the most significant intellectuals of the Carolingian age.² 'Writing is [only] one way of giving shape to the past', but even so, despite the transit of 1200 years it is remarkable how much of Paul's narratives still frame and determine modern versions of early medieval Italian history.³ This book looks at the narrative structures of Paul the Deacon's principal prose works. It considers the ensemble of structures, images, ideas, and viewpoints together with their apparent ambiguities and contradictions.⁴

Paul's works have often been 'looted' by historians using isolated details to support empirical argument without adequate consideration of the contexts behind either the author or the works themselves. This is similar to the kind of exploitation identified by Heinzelmann and Wallace-Hadrill in respect to Gregory of Tours (538-594) and Bede (672/3-735).⁵ The difficulty that links all three of these early medieval writers is that, for modern commentators, much of their narrative histories remain the only extant witness to the events that they describe. Thus, at the outset, this study intends to avoid the extraction of empirical data from the narratives. Instead, it seeks

1 Foulke, *History of the Lombards*, p.vii

2 Goodson, *Material Memory*, p. 2. See also Waitz, *MGH SrL*, pp. 12-188. On translating see Gardiner, 'On Translating', pp. 43-51. Among the many Italian editions see Zanella, *Paolo Diacono* and Capo, *Paolo Diacono*. Also, Bougard, *Paul Diacre*.

3 Stock, *Listening for the Text*, p.1.

4 Pohl, *History in Fragments*, p. 343-374, at p. 347, 'ambiguity, paradox and contradictions constitute valuable methodological tools for the analysis of the past'.

5 Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Medieval History*, p. 96 and Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours*, p. 2. See also Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 381 '... the outcome has been that the *HL* tends to be a mine of material rather than a narrative ...' More generally see Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, pp. 3-4.

to demonstrate the dynamic creative tensions in Paul's works.⁶ Attention will be spent on the building blocks of Paul's prose narratives – in other words the foundations of his texts, the security of our versions of his works, and most importantly, his sources and how Paul set about consciously to organise and structure his work to convey meaning and significance. In this way, an emphasis on Paul's activities as a historian will allow us to concentrate on what was written, and what it tells us, rather than who his audience(s) may have been and what they thought or believed to be useful or significant.

The intention then is to bring Paul's narratives to the forefront of analysis. The question that 'runs' throughout this study is that of the text formation. In this respect, we'll consider in detail Paul's use of sources and how he utilised the materials at hand to craft his narratives. This will allow a better understanding of his responses to his subject matters and his development as a writer. Scholarship on Paul the Deacon has used his works as evidence to promote a wide range of ideas about the Lombard past and Paul's ethno-cultural responses to that past. In some respects this scholarship has asked the wrong questions. These questions, in particular, that of for whom Paul wrote the *HL*, remain ultimately unanswerable and have fashioned an inconclusive debate that has turned on the interpretation of selective elements of either Paul's life or works. The date and motivation of Paul's so-called *monacazione* is one important example of this approach, which projects a political significance upon his entry into the monastic community at Montecassino. In a similar way, even Paul's position as a writer remains problematic. Usually connected to earlier writers such as Jordanes (fl. 6th century), Gregory of Tours, and Bede as a composer of 'national' histories of the 'barbarian successor' kingdoms and peoples, Paul can rather be seen as the link between these writers and a subsequent Italian historical tradition that continued after his death with writers such as Andrew of Bergamo (fl. late 9th century), Erchempert of Benevento (fl. 9th century), and Liudprand of Cremona (c. 920-972).

Accordingly, Chapter 1 discusses the contexts of Paul's life and works. It commences with issues associated with the end of the Lombard kingdom in 774. This has been seen as a watershed for both the history of Italy and Paul's own life. It then considers recent comment on Paul's responses to the kingdom's fall and his relationships with his Lombard and Frankish patrons. Despite this patronage we shall see that he writes with a degree of

6 Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities*, pp. 1-7 and in particular p. 2 and Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, p. 26.

freedom and creativity that marks all his prose narratives. We shall observe that as Paul develops as a writer, so too does his ability to write to order and to exercise greater freedom in expression and choice in his works. This relationship between the words and the worlds of Paul will be considered at some length for it reveals a writer who was not necessarily motivated by ethnic allegiances alone. The question that arises, in short, is: how did the situation on the ground influence Paul's interests and choices when he set out to compose his narratives? A close analysis of his life will set the contexts for his written works, which are analysed subsequently.

Thereafter, in Chapter 2, his earlier and (generally) shorter narratives are considered in chronological order. At the outset it is not possible to be certain of the compositional dates of the works and thus their relationships to each other. However, the approach here places the *Historia Romana* first, followed by the un-datable *Vita Gregorii Sancti Magni* and concludes with the *Gesta Episcopum Mettensium*. Whilst it is likely that the latter work was completed during Paul's stay in Francia, there are few direct indications of when the previous works were composed. It is nevertheless evident that there is a clear line of development with and between these works. Patronal relationships remain as important and significant motivators.

Subsequently, in Chapters 3 and 4, we will consider the structural organisation of the *Historia Langobardorum* as a whole before we turn to each of the six books and analyse their structures and organisation. The two chapters analyse Paul's use of sources to see to what extent he was an independent writer. It will be evident that in a work of some length and complexity, Paul used a wide range of sources, both oral materials and written texts. Discussion of his source use allows an understanding of how 'bound' Paul was to his material. We shall see a mature author who is able to merge materials and compose lengthy anecdotal treatments at major points and episodes in Lombard history. In the reconstruction of ensembles and images, we shall not only restore how Paul constructed his works, but also re-connect isolated and detached details to promote a more accurate picture of '*Paulus pusillus filius supplex*'.⁷

7 'Paul, your humble son in supplication', *MGH SrL*, p. 16. For Paul's letter to Theodemar from which this quote arises, see Neff, *Die Gedichte*, pp. 69-74.