

The Lombard Army in the Laws



In the year 568, the Lombard people, a Germanic tribe renowned in the Roman world for their **military prowess**, embarked on an invasion of the Italian peninsula. Led by **King Alboin**, they swiftly established themselves in the recently conquered and weakened Roman province, giving rise to the **Lombard Kingdom of Italy**, the first independent political entity on the peninsula. This kingdom held sway over Italy for almost two centuries until the Carolingian conquest, significantly influencing its territorial and political landscape throughout the medieval era.

The Lombard society rested upon a **warrior caste of "free men"** and, thus **stratifying the population** into distinct social classes. Periods of internal turmoil ensued as the Lombards grappled with the **clash between their Germanic traditions**, characteristic of post-Roman barbarian kingdoms, and the organized **structure of Roman Catholic society**. In response, Lombard kings assumed a **legislative role**, issuing edicts and laws aimed at managing conflicts and defining the roles of kingdom inhabitants. These measures fostered a **degree of unity and coherence** during turbulent times and many were later incorporated into Carolingian legal codes and capitularies.

Despite outward appearances of unity, Lombard society remained deeply entrenched in **familial and kinship ties rooted with landowning**. This emphasis on family contributed to the **autonomy** of free individuals and to regional ducal powers, laying the groundwork for vassal relationships and **early feudalism**, although the king retained preeminence within the kingdom.

However, this era is often regarded as a **"Dark Age"** in Italy, much like in other parts of Europe during the establishment of Frankish, Vandal, and Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, primarily due to the **lack of written records**. The available narratives consist mainly of **legal texts** written in Latin, as Lombardic was an oral language, along with political and diplomatic documents that were often utilized as propaganda tools. Despite this limitation, certain **ecclesiastical texts and judicial testimonies regarding land agreements** offer glimpses into the Lombard kingdom, supplemented by **archaeological discoveries**. Scholars increasingly view this period as pivotal in Italian history, marking **the transition from the late Roman world to the European medieval era**.

We will begin by providing an overview of the Lombard conquest of Italy, tracing the transition from a nomadic "barbarian" people to the establishment of a great kingdom. Following this, we will delve into the political structure of this kingdom, examining the distribution of authority between the elected king and the local kin groups represented by their dukes. Our analysis will explore how the king wielded his authority to consolidate royal power through legislation affecting both societal norms and the relationship between the church and secular authorities. Subsequently, our focus will be on the army itself, exploring its composition, organization, and insights gleaned from laws regarding soldiers, their equipment, and the mobilization process. Finally, we will scrutinize the Lombards' final military campaigns, aimed at gaining the last Byzantine territories in Italy and integrating the southern duchies into the kingdom, and thus reinforce the royal power. Additionally, we will examine the collaboration with the Frankish army against Arab incursions in Southern Gaul and Southern Italy, and then the conflicts against the emerging Pepinid dynasty.

Quick overview

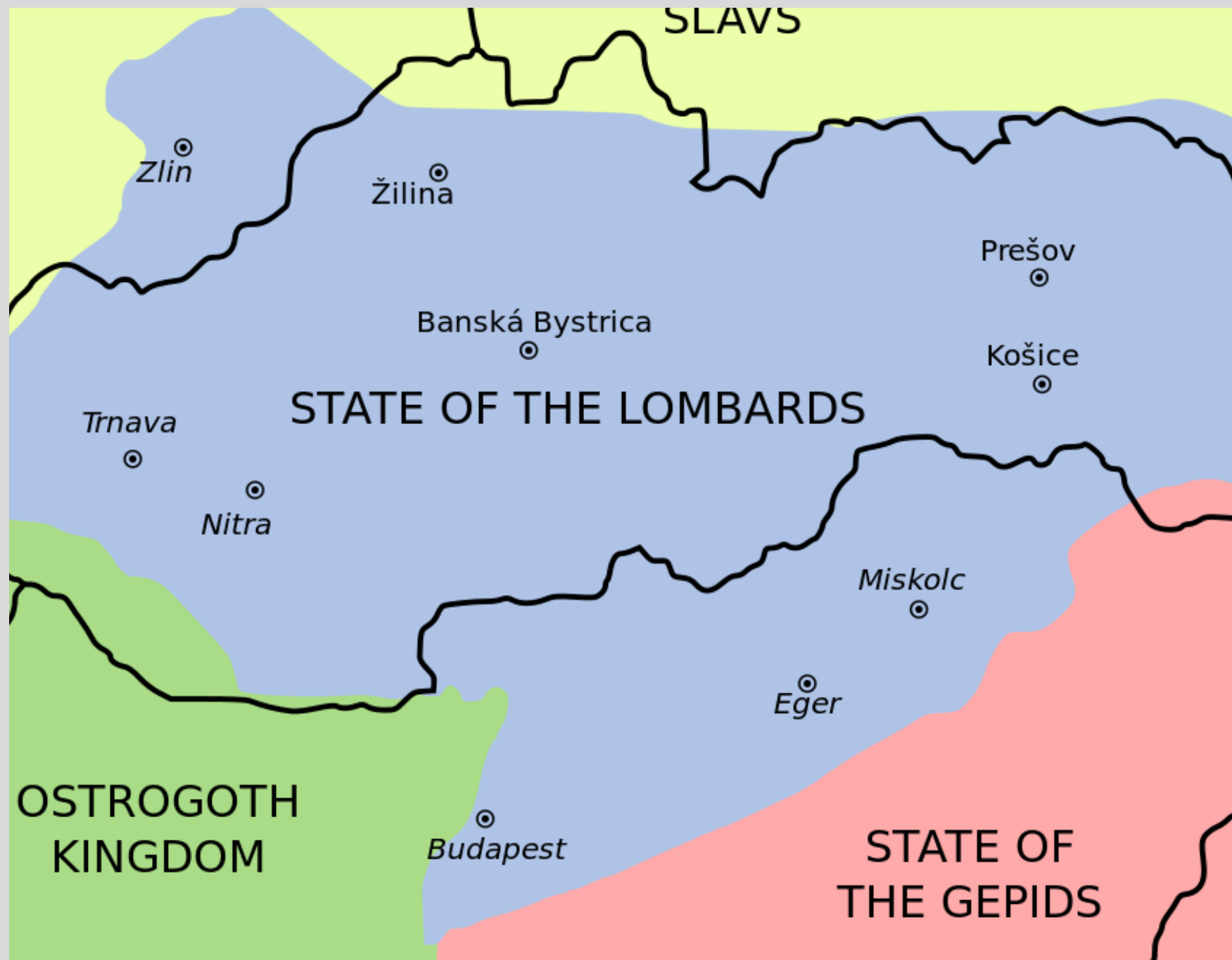
The Lombard conquest of Italy and the establishment of a new kingdom

- The origins of the Lombards
- The conquest of Italy
- the establishment of the Kingdom
- The reinforcement of royal authority

The Lombard army

- The power of the king
- The power of the dukes
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The origins of the Lombards



The origins of the Lombard people are shrouded in limited historical sources, mainly derived from mythical stories written during the Lombard Kingdom like the “Historia Langobardorum of Paul the Deacon, written in the eighth century or the “Origo Gentis Langobardorum”. Like many Germanic tribes, this nomadic group is believed to have originated from Scandinavia, particularly Denmark, Northern Germany, and the Baltic Sea region. During the broader migration of Germanic peoples from the 4th to the 7th centuries AD, they migrated into the ancient Roman province of Pannonia, corresponding to present-day Hungary.

In Pannonia, the Lombards encountered other tribes, notably the Gepids, with whom they engaged in numerous conflicts before emerging victorious. It is from this triumph that they supposedly adopted the name "Lombard," according to mythical tradition. Over time, they assimilated with other Germanic tribes and absorbed various cultural elements, leading to their ethnogenesis and the emergence of a prominent "barbarian" group recognized by neighboring kingdoms and the Roman state.

Their military reputation was acknowledged by the Eastern Roman Empire, which enlisted them as foederati during the Gothic wars and tasked them with protecting Roman routes in the Balkanic area. This interaction with the Roman world brought about significant political, military, and social changes as the Lombards assimilated elements of Roman culture. They embraced the Latin language and Christianity in its Arian form, prevalent among Germanic tribes at the time.

By the 6th century AD, the Lombards had firmly established themselves in Pannonia but faced new threats from the arrival of the Avars, a group originating from Central Asia. In 568 AD, under the leadership of their king Alboin, the Lombards migrated into Italy, initiating their conquest of the Italian Peninsula. This migration and subsequent settlement in Italy left a profound imprint on the region's history and culture, shaping the development of medieval Italy

The passing of the Ostrogothic King Theodoric in 526 marked the start of a decline for Gothic Italy, which had enjoyed a period of prosperity marked by reduced taxes, urban restoration and the revival of Roman traditions. Theodoric's death brought instability due to issues surrounding his succession and the subsequent murder of his daughter and heir, Queen Amalasantha. These events accentuated an anti-Roman sentiment among the Gothic warrior caste and undermined the economic and political coherence of Italy



The Italian Context

The "renovatio imperii" carried by Justin I and Justinian led to the Gothic Wars, ultimately resulting in the reintegration of the Province of Italy into the Eastern Roman Empire. However, these campaigns left Italy ravaged by warfare, famine, and plague, leading to widespread impoverishment and the disparition of the Roman elite. The imposition of a heavy administration and tax system on this now peripheral province, coupled with imperial interference in the Roman papacy led to growing discontent against Byzantium.

The Lombard Conquest of Italy

It was in this context that the Lombard migration to Italy and the conquest of the Byzantine territories took place. Led by King Alboin, Lombard soldiers quickly established themselves in northern Italy, creating strongholds to control the territory. After the conquest of Milan, they occupied the Friuli region and gradually expanded over the South and conquering Pavia in 572. The Byzantines resisted in central and coastal Italy, creating Exarchate of Ravenna and the “Byzantine corridor” that connected Ravenna with Rome and divided the Lombard kingdom into two parts.



The Lombards' entry into Italy occurred during a period of weakness for imperial forces, allowing them to establish themselves with minimal military and social resistance. Byzance had to deal with border's attacks by the Avars and the Persian Empire and the devastation of the Gothic wars and imperial restoration had weakened Italy's social fabric, making Lombard occupation preferable to imperial bureaucracy.

The Lombards encountered little institutional or cultural resistance, shaping a new society marked by hostility to imperial institutions, maintenance of Arian Christianity, and autonomy to centralized rule. It was a classical process in the establishment of late roman barbaric kingdoms (Franks, Anglo-Saxon, Vandals)

The now established the basis of their new kingdom under king Alboin. Even if the royal power remained the symbol of the unity of the peoples, great warriors figure with king groups relationship implement themselves as local leaders. They are the dukes and according to german traditions of free-mens and warrior, are quite autonomous.

Alboinus Rex



King Alboin assassination in 572 led to a period of turmoil for the Kingdom. The newly established dukes hesitated and refused to elect a new king; thus beginning personal conflicts against each others for supreme power. It is the "inter-regnum" or the rule of the dukes. As powerful regional rulers who governed semi-autonomously within their territories, they often had hereditary titles and exercised significant authority over their domains, including military, administrative, and judicial matters. They played a crucial role in governing their territories, establishing local administrations, maintaining law and order, and providing defense against external threats. They had their own courts, issued laws, and collected taxes within their domains, further consolidating their authority and leading to a kind of proto-feudalism. They reflected the weak central authority, the decentralization of power, the fragmented nature of the kingdom.



The rule of the dukes came to a close with the ascension of King Rothari in 636, elected by his lineage to the last Lombard king and external threats posed by a resurgent Byzantine army. During his reign, royal authority was fortified as the king assumed the responsibility to legislate over Lombard-Roman society. In fact, the creation of the kingdom brought about numerous conflicts between the population adhering to Roman law and Lombard freemen following a blend of Germanic personal customs. In order to establish order in the Lombard State, Rothari initiated the creation of several laws consolidated into what became known as the "Edict of Rothari." This collection comprised a fusion of classical Latin laws (distinct from Justinian's code) and Lombard traditions, serving as a foundation for subsequent royal decrees under Rothari's successors.

Rothair's Edict of 643 was the first written Lombard law code, which marked a significant shift in legal consciousness and authority among the Lombards. The written code addressed new legal challenges unique to Lombard experience in Italy, such as offenses against travelers, regulation on land holding and rules for inheritance, collective offenses against individuals, and crimes committed on church property. These laws reflected the changing character of Lombard society, although some older customs, like the blood-feud, persisted even if they were in a kind prohibited. Lombard law, like other Germanic codes, treated women juridically inferior to men, yet the spelling out of these rules may indicate evolving roles or attempts by women to change their status in the eyes of the law. However, law codes alone do not provide a complete picture of Lombard society; despite their influence, the Lombards did not create Italy but adapted to its existing Roman origins, incorporating elements of Roman culture and Catholicism. In essence, the Lombards utilized what remained of Roman culture and institutions, and added their own Germanic element with a regulation turned toward the autonomy of the free men. It is also important to note that, in order to assert his legitimacy, Rothar placed himself in the continuation of Lombard royalty; and that the Edict was ratified by an assembly of warriors reunited at Pavia.

Rotharic succeeded in centralizing the Lombard kingdom and married, a Catholic princess, which facilitated the gradual conversion of the Lombards from Arianism to Catholicism, even if the great majority remained arian. However, a unified Lombard state was never fully realized due to ongoing defiance by the dukes and the local networks.

Others kings like Grimwald continued the centralization efforts, but disputes over succession and local authority persisted. Liutprand, who ruled from 712 to 744, was one of the most influential Lombard kings, consolidating territory and maintaining peace with the Franks. He also strengthened royal control, but faced resistance from the dukes.



The Lombard King

In the Lombard Kingdom, like many Germanic kingdoms in the barbarian tradition, the king held absolute authority over the military. He bore the crucial duty of safeguarding the realm and its territories from both external threats and internal unrest, as well as leading the army into battle. It was his prerogative to summon soldiers to war and command military campaigns. To fulfill this role effectively, the king established direct royal officials tasked with securing the borders, enforcing the law, and organizing military mobilization. These officials swore allegiance directly to the king and can be likened to royal vassals, or, more practically, to the future missi of the Carolingian era. Additionally, soldiers enlisted in the army were exempt from other obligations as they fell under the direct responsibility of the king. Amidst conflicts between the dukes and the royal authority, the figure of the king emerged as the apex of the social hierarchy in the Lombard Kingdom of Italy. Laws protecting the king's life, representatives, and possessions were among the few crimes punishable by death, reflecting the supreme importance placed on preserving the monarch's authority and security.



Rothair Edict (643)

- 1. On him who plots against the life of the king: "That man who conspires or gives counsel against the life of the king shall be killed and his property confiscated"
- 2. On him who takes counsel with the king regarding the death of another: "He who receives counsel from the king concerning another's death or kills a man by the king's order, shall be entirely without blame. Neither he nor his heirs shall suffer any payment or trouble at any time from that one [the man conspired against] or his heirs. For since we believe that the heart of the king is in the hand of God, it is inconceivable that anyone whose death the king has ordered could be entirely free of guilt. [
- 3. On him who attempts to flee outside the province: "He who tries to flee outside of the country shall be killed and his property confiscated"
- 4. On him who invites enemies within the province "He who invites or introduces enemies into our land shall be killed and his property confiscated" .

- 5. On him who hides a spy: "He who hides a spy (scamarm) within the land or gives him provisions shall either be killed or shall pay 900 solidi as composition to the king."
- 6. On him who raises a revolt in the army : "That one who while on campaign raises a revolt against his duke or against him appointed by the king to command the army, or that one who raises a revolt in any part of the army, shall be killed."
- 36. On him who breaks the peace (commits scandalum) in the palace when the king is present: "He who dares to create a disturbance (scandalum) within the king's palace when the king is present shall lose his life unless he can redeem his life from the king"

The Laws of King Ratchis (745-746)

- 13. On protection of the frontiers: " It is our command that, with the help of Christ, our boundaries will be maintained and guarded in order that neither our enemies nor our people can send spies through them or allow fugitives to go out and in order that no man can enter them without a letter sealed by the king. Every judge should use such care and vigilance with regard to the frontier committed to him both in his own actions as well as in those of his local officials and gate wardens that no man can go out without a letter sealed by the king."

The dukes

The dukes served as additional military leaders within the Lombard Kingdom. With considerable authority and control over their territories, they wield significant power in the absence of direct royal oversight. While the king held ultimate authority over the army, the dukes exercised practical leadership within their duchies. Like the king, they were responsible for the defense of their duchies within the kingdom. This included protecting the territory from external threats such as invasions and raids by neighboring powers, as well as maintaining internal order and security and justice. They commanded their own "vassalic" forces in times of conflict and were responsible for organizing and leading local militias, levies, and other armed forces to support the king's military campaigns and providing resources, and logistical support. Although they pledge allegiance to the king upon his election, their support is not solely dictated by royal decree; instead, it relied on their willingness, especially into the southern duchies.

Rothair Edict (643)

- 6. On him who raises a revolt in the army: "That one who while on campaign raises a revolt against his duke or against him appointed by the king to command the army, or that one who raises a revolt in any part of the army, shall be killed."
- 7. On him who abandons his colleague during a battle. "He who during a battle with the enemy abandons his com- rade or makes him astalin, that is, betrays him and does not remain with him, shall be killed. "
- 20. On him who holds his duke in contempt: "If any soldier refuses to go to his duke for justice, he shall pay twenty solidi as composition to the king and to his duke."

- 22. Any soldier who refuses aid to his duke when that one is Pursuing justice, shall pay twenty solidi as composition to the king and to the duke
- 21. On him who refuses to go out with the army: "Anyone who refuses to go out with the army or with the guard shall pay twenty solidi as composition to the king and to his duke
- 23. If a duke treats his men unjustly, the gastald shall aid the injured man. The gastald shall find out the truth and bring [the case] to justice in the presence of the king or at least before the duke

The composition of the Lombard Army

As we seen, the Lombard society revolved around what we refer to as the "free-men" – the original Lombard warriors who bore arms and became landholders following the conquest of Italy. Organized into kinship groups led by mounted chiefs (the dukes), they formed the nucleus of the Kingdom's social hierarchy and thus its military. However, it's important to note that in Lombard society, as in other Germanic societies, these warrior-landowners enjoyed freedom and autonomy. Unlike the permanent armies of the late Roman era (except for the king's direct agents or the duke vassalic troops), the army was an ad hoc force summoned by the king in times of crisis. Despite a strong individual tradition, not all of these free-men were obligated to serve in the military, although theoretically, they were expected to answer the king's summons.

Rothair Edict (643)

- 23. Concerning the duke who mistreats one of his men: " If a duke treats his men unjustly, the gastald shall aid the injured man. The gastald shall find out the truth and bring [the case] to justice in the presence of the king or at least before the duke."

Laws of King Liutprand (726)

- 83 .Concerning judges and how many men they may leave behind from the army: "When it is necessary for all of our judges to go out with the army, they shall leave behind six men-each of whom has no more than one horse-and then altogether they shall have six horses for their beasts of burden. Of lesser men (minimis hominibus) who have neither houses nor land, each judge shall leave no more than ten men, and these men shall each perform three works [services] weekly for that judge until the judge returns from the army. The schultheis shall leave three men (of the sort who have horses) and they altogether may keep three horses for their beasts of burden. Of lesser men he shall leave five men who shall work for him until he returns and, as we have said concerning the judge, they shall each perform three services per week. The forester (saltarius) shall leave [one man and] one horse, and of lesser men to work for him, he shall leave one, and that one shall work for him as is read above"

The Laws of King Aisfulf (750)

2. Concerning those men who can afford armor: "All men who can afford it should at least have a coat of mail. Lesser men (minores homines) who can afford it should at least have a horse, shield, and lance. Men who do not have an animal to ride and cannot afford one should at least have a shield and quiver. should have a coat of mail and the other military equipment, in addition to horses. If he has more than this number [of manses], he should also have horses and the remaining armament. Those men who do not hold manses but who hold forty iugera of land should have horse, shield, and lance. With regard to lesser men, it is pleasing to us that if they can afford it, they should have a shield as well as a quiver and bow and arrows

The Laws of King Ratchis (745-746)

4. Every freeman should provide himself with certain military equipment.: "We decree that every freeman (arimannus) should carry a shield and lance for himself when he rides out with his judge. And when he comes to the palace with his judge, he shall be likewise equipped. We order this to be done so because the times are uncertain and it cannot be known what orders he will receive from us or where they will be asked to ride. The man who fails to do this shall pay twenty solidi as composition to his judge. If the judge whose freeman (arimannus) delays to comply with this order does not compel [him to do so], as we have said above, he shall pay his wergeld as composition to the king's court. With regard to iron weapons and other arms or horses, let it be done as commanded before in our decree."

Lombards wars

During their reign in Italy, the Lombards expanded their control over the entire peninsula, ultimately defeating the Byzantine forces with the fall of Ravenna in 751. They subsequently united the kingdom with the semi-independent southern duchies of Benevento and Spoleto. While many of these conquests were led by kings, some involved prolonged territorial conflicts between the dukes and their neighboring territories. However, this eventual unification of the kingdom marked the pinnacle of Lombard rule; their military prowess was strong and their diplomatic strategies were acknowledged. They even send supporting troops to the Frankish ruler Charles Martel in his war against the Arab conquest in Spain.



The Frankish Conquest

After numerous territorial and judicial disputes with the Pope, the Lombards absorbed the remaining Byzantine Duchy of Rome into their Kingdom. Seeking political legitimacy, the new Pepinid dynasty, which supplanted the last Merovingian Frankish king, intervened to support the papacy. This action opened a series of wars with the Lombards, culminating in Charlemagne's annexation of the Kingdom of Italy into his realm. Consequently, the Lombard Kingdom of Italy ceased to exist, except for its Southern Duchies, and became part of the Carolingian Empire. Despite this incorporation, Lombard identity and laws were preserved.

