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The Armament of Lombard Warriors in Italy. Some Historical and Archaeological Approaches

Early medieval Europe has often been branded as a violent dark age, in which fierce warlords, warriors and warrior-kings played a dominant role in the political structuring of societies. Indeed, one quite familiar picture is of the early Middle Ages as a period in which armed conflicts and military life were so much a part of political and cultural development, as well as daily life, that a broad account of the period is to large extent a description of how men went to war.¹ Even in phases of peace, the conduct of warrior-elites set many of the societal standards. Those who held power in society typically carried weapons and had a strong inclination to settle disputes by violence, creating a martial atmosphere to everyday life in their realms. A renunciation of military force might even threaten the existence of early medieval elites.² Furthermore, fortified towns, castles and other defensive structures were part of a militarised landscape.³ These general remarks also hold true for Lombard Italy.

The Lombards were to a certain extent the late-comers of the so-called “Migration Period”. They invaded Italy in 568 AD and established a kingdom that existed for more than 200 years.⁴ Ever since the beginnings of historical interest in the Lombards, their specific nature as a people under arms, constantly ready to conduct all forms of violence, has been emphasised. For example, Thomas Hodgkin (1831–1913), one of Britain’s most influential historians of the later nineteenth century, characterised the Lombards as follows: “Everything about them, even for many years after

they have entered upon the sacred soil of Italy, speaks of mere savage delight in bloodshed and the rudest forms of sensual indulgence; they are the anarchists of the *Völkerwanderung*, whose delight is only in destruction, and who seem incapable of culture”.⁵ This statement was but one in a long-lasting debate concerning one particular question that haunted (mainly) Italian historians and antiquarians especially in the nineteenth century – although it had its roots in the fifteenth century – regarding the role that the Lombards played in the history of the Italian nation.⁶ Simply put, the question was whether the Lombards could have contributed anything positive to the history of Italy. Even though Hodgkin’s harsh judgement is no longer shared by modern historians, a general impression of Lombard society as warlike and militarised remains.⁷

The aim of this contribution is to give a general picture of the armament used by warriors to conduct acts of military and non-military violence in the Lombard kingdom (568–774 AD) based on the traces that these weapons left in the written as well as in the archaeological sources.⁸ For a better understanding, some short explanations of military organisation will be provided.

When the Lombards entered Italy, they did not appear out of nowhere. They had been living on the periphery of the Roman Empire for several decades, and had occasionally come into contact with Roman authorities. Already before the Italian invasion, when still dwelling in *Pannonia*, Lombard warriors had been frequently engaged as Roman *foederati* in ongoing military conflicts in the Balkans, thus gaining some experience with

¹ Halsall 1998, 4: “It [the early medieval world], was a violent era; such can be said easily and without controversy. How violent, whether more or less violent than preceding and succeeding eras, is naturally less easy to state and, perhaps, less profitable to consider. Nevertheless, these questions feature strongly in the period’s historiography”. Braun/Herberichs 2005.

² Kortüm 2010, 118.

³ Christie 1995, 170-183; Brogiolo 2007.

⁴ The research literature is vast. Overviews can be found in Jarnut 1982; Gasparri 2012.

⁵ Hodgkin 1895, 156.

⁶ Falco 1952; Artifoni 2007; Wood 2013, 113-136.

⁷ Harrison 2008, 30: “The Lombards were a people of warriors, and war was a normal feature of life for all free men.”

⁸ There are only a few studies that have dealt explicitly with this topic; Moro 2004.

the Roman military.⁹ Large contingents of Lombards had been recruited for the “Gothic Wars” of the Emperor Justinian in the middle of the sixth century AD.¹⁰ Thus, research has recognised the Roman influence on the political-military organisation of the Lombards.¹¹

The few surviving sources indicate that the invasion and occupation of large parts of Northern Italy was not a difficult task for the Lombard warriors and, apparently, no large battles had to be fought. The Lombards advanced constantly, with the one exception that their leader Alboin needed almost three years to conquer Pavia, the city that the Lombards would, some decades later, establish as their capital.¹² However, no military resistance is reported at the many other north Italian cities.¹³ Likewise, in Middle and Southern Italy, the Lombards were able to occupy large territories resulting in the foundation of the two duchies of Spoleto and Benevento.¹⁴ Despite the lack of detailed information, there is no reason to downplay the hardship for the civilian population during the first years of Lombard expansion, when in many Italian regions warfare seems to have been an almost daily occurrence. However, the paucity of sources has led to a controversial debate about the fate of the Romans in Italy under the Lombards.¹⁵ In all efforts, the extent of destruction and loss of life described in an often cited and much discussed paragraph from the second book of Paul the Deacon’s *Lombard History* remains unclear. For this passage Paul, writing more than 200 years after the events, used two texts: Gregory of Tours’ *Decem libri historiarum* and the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great.¹⁶ However, it is one of the rare occasions that explicitly point to Lombard atrocities and to the sufferings of the Romans during

the interregnum that lasted from 574 to 584 AD:

“In these days many of the noble Romans were killed from love of gain, and the remainder were divided among their ›guests‹ and made tributaries, that they should pay the third part of their products to the Langobards. By these dukes of the Langobards in the seventh year from the coming of Alboin and of his whole people, the churches were despoiled, the priests killed, the cities overthrown, the people who had grown up like crops annihilated, and besides those regions which Alboin had taken, the greater part of Italy was seized and subjugated by the Langobards.”¹⁷

The Italian peninsula had already suffered from the Gothic War and the Roman re-conquest.¹⁸ Now, only two decades later, there was yet another confusing conflict situation, in which different Lombard, Frankish and Byzantine warlords – not to forget the ambitious Pope in Rome – struggled for supremacy. During this period, Lombard military campaigns are reported frequently. For example, when in 585 AD, the Lombard *dux* Droctulf defected to the Byzantines and had entrenched himself in Brescello, Authari and his warriors conquered the city and had its walls torn down.¹⁹ Droctulf, who would later become a famous Roman war hero, fled to Ravenna and was able to free the port of Classe from the Lombard occupation.²⁰ In 587 AD, King Authari sent Euin, *dux* of Trento, to Istria. His army plundered and burned the region and returned with a large booty.²¹ The island of Comacina in Lake Como was taken in 589 AD by the Lombards after a six-month siege.²²

Throughout the seventh century, reports of warlike conflicts become less frequent. The sources record three large battles fought by Lombard war-

⁹ Pohl 1997.

¹⁰ Christou 1991; Pohl 1996.

¹¹ Bognetti 1967; Gasparri 2015, 98: “L’organizzazione politica longobarda era dunque quella dei reparti militari federati dell’impero.”

¹² Gasparri 1987; Brogiolo 2000.

¹³ Indeed, some of the cities seem to have opened their gates to the Lombards in order to first protect their inhabitants and (maybe) second, in the hope of future cooperation from which they could benefit.

¹⁴ Azzara 2003.

¹⁵ Delogo 1990; Pohl 2012 a and b.

¹⁶ For Gregory of Tours being used by Paul see Mommsen 1880, 57; for the use of Gregory the Great’s writings, see Heath 2017, 128.

¹⁷ Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* [hereafter *HL*, the Latin text is easily accessible on dMGH] II,32 (trans. Foulke 1907, 87-93). On this passage see the detailed study in Pohl 2001.

¹⁸ Berndt 2019a (forthcoming).

¹⁹ *HL* III,18.

²⁰ *HL* III,19. After his death, Droctulf received a splendid burial in the in the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, where his lengthy epitaph survived to be recorded by Paul the Deacon.

²¹ *HL* III, 27.

²² *HL* III, 27. On this episode, see Carminati/Mariani 2016, 20-21.

riors against foreign enemies: two were victorious and one was lost.²³ Of course, one must also take into account that many small-scale military operations took place within the kingdom, in many cases triggered by the constant struggles for the Lombard throne, and the aspirations of power-hungry magnates.²⁴ The most prominent example is the usurpation of *dux* Alahis against King Cunincpert, a conflict that grew into a civil war, which inevitably led to a military conflict. The Battle of Coronate took place in 689 AD and resulted in Alahis and most of his warriors losing their lives.²⁵ From the middle of the eighth century onwards, new military conflicts arose. On the one hand, Lombard kings launched several campaigns against the Byzantines, leading to the conquest of Ravenna in 751 AD, while on the other, Frankish armies were increasingly involved and sent to Italy to support the Pope, who could no longer rely upon aid from the Emperor against Lombard military threats.²⁶ The growing danger of Frankish military interference apparently caused many Lombard military men to withdraw from their general obligation to serve in the army. King Aistulf (reg. 749–756 AD), ultimately in vain, tried to counteract this development by proclaiming a series of laws to restructure the Lombard army.²⁷ Whereas the immediate effects of this reform are unknown, the fact that the downfall of the kingdom in 774 AD faced no considerable resistance might indicate the fragmentation of the Lombard armies, whose warriors were apparently no longer willing to support their king or protect their kingdom.

For the reconstruction of the armaments and weapons with which Lombard warriors were equipped when going to war, different types of sources are available: written sources (Lombard

as well as Frankish, Papal and Byzantine) as well as funerary remains and even some visual representations.²⁸ They all provide insight into the Lombard *instrumenta bellorum*. The written material falls into two categories: “Lombard” and “non-Lombard” sources. The first category contains texts that can be – more or less directly – linked to the Lombard perspective. Among these are the anonymous *Origo gentis Langobardorum*, the aforementioned *leges*, several hundred charters, and also a few inscriptions. The “non-Lombard” sources include some Latin chronicles, the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours, the *Chronicle* of Fredegar, the Roman *Liber Pontificalis*, the writings of Gregory the Great, and a series of letters that have been collected as *Epistolae Austrasicae*. The range of sources can be extended by some Greek works, such as the histories of Procopius, Agathias, Menander, Theophylact Simocatta and a few Greek military handbooks. But undoubtedly, the most important narrative source is the *Historia Langobardorum*, written at the very end of the eighth century, by Paul the Deacon. He was a Lombard from Cividale del Friuli. At the time of writing, Paul was a Benedictine monk in the monastery of Montecassino.²⁹ It is hard to imagine that Paul himself had ever been trained in the use of weapons. On the other hand, he had a brother named Arichis, who was very familiar with the arts of warfare: namely, Arichis was involved in the rebellion against Charlemagne after the Frankish conquest of Italy in 774 AD.³⁰ At least we might assume that Paul, who served at different royal courts before he withdrew from public life, actually saw the weapons he explicitly mentions in his book. Generally, his *History* deals with the origins of the Lombards, their vast migrations, their settlement in Italy, and the deeds of their kings and dukes up to the death of Liutprand (d. 744 AD). In fact, it is the only narrative source of considerable length and without it, we would know far less about the Lombard history of Italy.

²³ First, the Battle of Scultenna in 643 AD between the army of Rothari and the army of the Byzantine exarch Isacius (The *Origo gentis Langobardorum* reports that 8000 Roman soldiers lost their lives); second, the Battle of Forino (Campania) in 663 AD between the army of Romuald of Benevento, son of King Grimoald, and the Byzantine army of emperor Constans II in which the Romans again suffered a crushing defeat (*HL* V,10); and third, the four-day battle at the *Fluvius Frigidus* in 664 AD, in which the Lombard warriors under the command of *dux* Lupus were beaten by Avar warriors, who thereafter heavily plundered in Friuli (*HL* V,19).

²⁴ Berndt 2019b (forthcoming).

²⁵ *HL* V,41.

²⁶ Pohl 2004.

²⁷ Halsall 2003, 83.

²⁸ There is no space to write sufficiently about ethnic interpretations of archaeological material here. It should therefore only be said that “Lombard Italy” is used simply as an indication of time here. The debate has different facets, see, for instance, Brather 2004; Bierbrauer 2005.

²⁹ The literature on Paul the Deacon and his works is vast. A good starting point is Pohl 1994; Heath 2017; for a reconstruction of his origins and family, see Jarnut 2012a.

³⁰ Jarnut 2012a, 47–48.

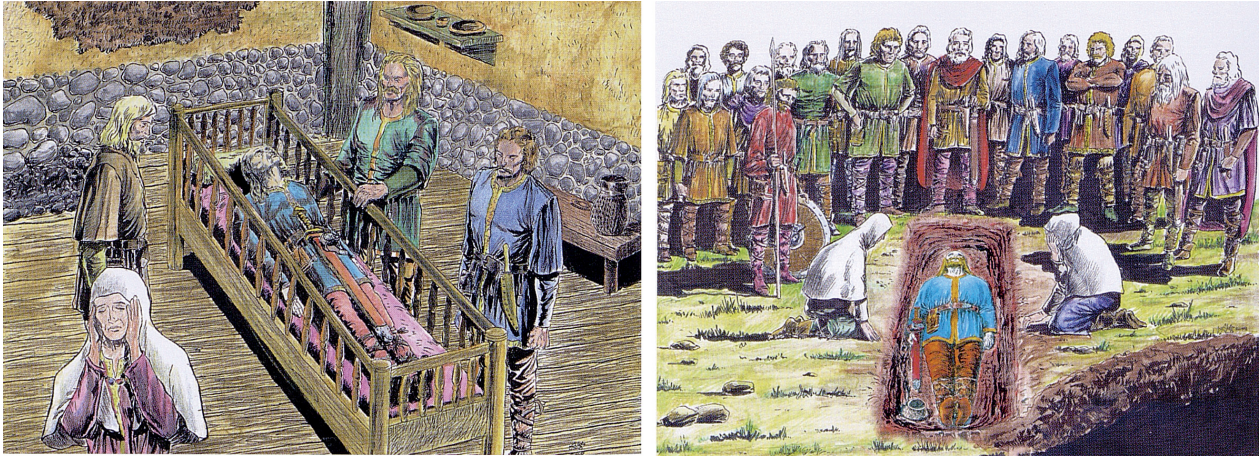


Fig. 1 Painted reconstruction of a Lombard burial (after de Vingo 2010, 64)

In all readings of this source, one should keep in mind that Paul was primarily a storyteller, not a military historian.

In addition to the written accounts, there is a remarkable amount of archaeological material, mostly stemming from excavations of cemeteries and mainly dating between the late sixth and the middle of the seventh century.³¹ The custom of burying the dead with grave goods disappeared in the later seventh century. We, therefore, lack such material evidence for roughly half of the Lombard period. Whilst the burials provide numerous examples of contemporary armament and thus give us an idea of the different types of weapons available, there are still some problems involved in the interpretation of such evidence. Various types of grave goods and assemblages, combined in different ways, have been found in the cemeteries in Lombard Italy, but it is not possible to determine with certainty why specific objects were placed in graves, what meaning these had for the burial communities, and what these objects might have symbolised for them. Recent research has pointed out that the deposition of grave goods was primarily a ritualistic act, wherein weaponry could, for instance, symbolise martiality, rank, age and other features.³² The wearing and use of weapons demonstrated power and therefore were suitable to both signal and perpetuate existing social differences, even at the moment of the funeral,

which was – as far as we know – in many cases a public event. (Fig. 1) Here, the local community gathered and the surviving relatives could represent their wealth and social status by equipping the deceased richly. In this context, the so-called *Prunkwaffen* are of particular interest, because they were not only made for combat but could also represent one's status, be used in rituals of power, and symbolise the individual's warlike skills. Furthermore, because men could also be buried with weapons as representations of their social status as warriors in times of peace, there is no reason to describe the society as one that was dominated solely by actual warfare.³³

Military organisation

Due to the survival of the Lombard laws (*leges Langobardorum*), we have some material which complements the rather vague descriptions of the narrative sources, and helps us to comprehend the developments that the Lombard military underwent in the course of the two centuries of their rule in Italy. These laws were for the first time codified and promulgated in the year 643 AD by King Rothari (reg. 636–652 AD),³⁴ and later ex-

³¹ Since the end of the nineteenth century, dozens of scientific excavations have been conducted with splendid results. A recent overview is provided by Brogiolo/Marazzi/Giostra 2017, 76–111.

³² Brather 2009; Bertelli 2005; 2007.

³³ Härke 1990 with a discussion on Anglo-Saxon graves.

³⁴ The edict was surely issued in order to enforce the allegiance of the Lombards to their king, and to strengthen the Lombard identity on the eve of a war against the Romans. However, when analysing its stipulations, one should keep in mind, that “there is little agreement in interpretation of the nature of Rothari's edict [...], and the extent to which it demonstrates the cultural milieu of Italo-Lombard society in the mid-seventh century.” See Everett 2000, 96.

tended and supplemented by following Lombard kings.³⁵ Combining the available information, the following rough picture³⁶ can be drawn: Initially, the Lombard *exercitus* was composed of all free men belonging to the *gens Langobardorum*, that is, at the time of the invasion all capable men who followed Alboin from *Pannonia* to Italy. However, already in the 570s this coherent picture is muddled by the fact that a considerable number of warriors defected from the Lombard army to place themselves in the service of Roman commanders, who obviously provided the necessary financial incentives for them to do so. For those who remained on the Lombard side, it seems that military service was mandatory. At the time of the invasion, the Lombards were organised in *fares*.³⁷ This highly debated term was once believed to denote “clan groups”; however, they were rather military followings. At the top of one *fara* was an individual commander, who seems to have had the power to act independently from the warrioring. This form of organisation soon fell out of use after the settlement of the Lombards and a ten-year interregnum. Neither the beginning of such changes, nor their details are clear. However, by the time of the reigns of Authari (reg. 584–590 AD) and Agilulf (reg. 590–615 AD), the Lombards were no longer keeping up the *fara*-system. Judging from the *leges*, landed wealth became increasingly important in the course of the seventh century. The *Edictum Rothari* presents the Lombards as landowners in many of its chapters. This indicates that at some time between the invasion of 568 and before 643 AD, Lombard warriors had made use of available opportunities to acquire land. Furthermore, these warriors (*arimanni* or *exercitales*) were now organised corporately as free men fighting for their *rex* or *dux*, for their people and their territory. At the same time, one can observe increasing social segregation.³⁸ Moreover, in the course of the seventh century the possibility arose that if a family or household had more than one son, only one of them was required to join the army as a recruit, whereas the other could stay at

home to take care of the family’s properties. He would also have had to take care of his brother’s equipment and military supply. In return, he was entitled to a share of the profits of war.³⁹

For the Lombard armies of the eighth century, there are a few chapters in the *leges* that provide insight into recruitment measures. For instance, King Aistulf enacted two laws which directly concerned military organisation. These chapters explain in some detail that the right to carry arms – or rather the obligation – was connected to that of a man’s wealth relative to other men. Aistulf’s laws, which some scholars interpret as traces of a fundamental military reform, divided Lombard landowners into different groups depending on the sizes of their properties. Richer ones were expected to hold ready one corslet, a horse, a shield and a lance.⁴⁰ The less wealthy had to be equipped and ready to fight with the same equipment, minus the suit of armour. Finally, the “poorer men” (*homines minores*, apparently people whose property was worth less than a plot of 40 acres of land) only had to have a shield, a quiver, and a bow and arrows at hand.⁴¹ Aistulf’s intention was to strengthen the military capacity of the Lombards during a time of rising conflict with the Byzantines. What becomes clear is that eighth-century Lombard Italy was organised along socio-economic rather than tribal lines.

At the head of the social as well as the military hierarchy was the *rex Langobardorum*, who was personally responsible for the appointment of the high military offices. The office of a *dux* was basically conferred for a lifetime and linked to supreme command over the available military men of the respective duchy.⁴² In the course of the seventh century, a competing elite emerged, namely the *gastaldi*, who – endowed with royal authority – assumed military, legal and administrative functions in the Lombard kingdom.⁴³ Both the dukes and *gastalds* combined military and civilian responsibilities. Furthermore, we know of a series of terms for subordinate military offices, such as for the chamberlain or constable (lomb. *marpahis*,

³⁵ Azzara/Gasparri 2005.

³⁶ The lengthy study of the Lombard military organisation by Bertolini 1968 is still the best starting point on this matter.

³⁷ Marius of Avenches, *Chronicle* ad a. 569; *Rothari* 177; *HL* II,9.

³⁸ Jarnut 2012b.

³⁹ *Rothari* 167.

⁴⁰ King Ratchis had already stated in a previous law that any *arimannus* was required to take a lance and a shield, when he accompanied his judge or went to the court. See *Ratchis* 4.

⁴¹ *Aistulf* 2-3. Halsall 2003, 83.

⁴² Gasparri 1978; Zerjadtke 2019, 167-184.

⁴³ Jarnut 1998.



Fig. 2 The so-called Visor of Agilulf (after Die Langobarden 2008, 375)

lat. *strator*), some kind of district governor (*rector, quem >sculdahis< lingua propria dicunt*), and the bearer of the royal lance, or the royal arm-bearer (*scilpor, hoc est armiger*). For other official titles, it is not possible to determine exactly which areas of responsibility they covered. This is the case with the *antepor*, the *cubicularius*, the *hostiarius*, or the *scaffardus*. In addition to these offices, the king must also have had various agents as representatives of his authority in his domains, the towns and villages. The *sculdahis* may have fulfilled certain judicial functions, but they were also responsible for military duties. The military character seems to have been preserved in the title of *centinus* or *centenarius*. Finally, *saltarii*, *decani* and *actores* are to be located at the lowest level of the military hierarchy, which probably had to fulfil policing duties in the broadest sense. The majority of the warriors were under the command of either a *dux* or a *gastaldus*, who led them in the event of war within the king's *exercitus* and united them under his supreme command. Aside from the traditional *exercitus*, special military forces (some of them bodyguards) existed around the mighty dukes and some rich landowners, and, of course, at the king's court. This force was called *gasindium*. These *gasindii* were to be found all over Lombard Italy as early as the seventh century, but most of our evidence comes from the eighth century.⁴⁴

Representations of armament

Besides the written sources and archaeological material, we also have a few artefacts that provide visual impressions of Lombard warriors. In this short contribution, two different items will be discussed.

The so-called Visor of Agilulf

The first one is the so-called Visor of Agilulf – a find one could call without exaggeration an icon of Lombard archaeology (Fig. 2). This gilded copper plate is said to have been discovered in 1891 in Val di Nievole in the province of Lucca, some 30 km west of Florence.⁴⁵ Originally, it could have been part of a splendid helmet.⁴⁶ Recognisable in the high relief are nine persons, framed by city towers. The visor's assignment to Agilulf, the king who reigned from 590 to 615 AD, depends on the reading of an inscription located to the left and the right of the ruler's head. However, it is slightly damaged by perforation, which evidently occurred in the context of a later secondary use. The inscription provides a series of letters and can most likely be read as *dominus noster Agilulf regi*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ La Rocca/Gasparri 2010, 282: "The purchase of the plate is relatively well documented. But darkness surrounds the period of its discovery."

⁴⁶ Frugoni 1998 argued against the *communis opinio*, that the plate would have been used as a helmet's visor.

⁴⁷ Guillou (1970, 210-213) proposed a completely different interpretation of the inscription. He read (vertically) *BA* for *Basileus* and *IVCTIN* for Justinianus

⁴⁴ Von Olberg 1991, 118.

In the relief, the enthroned figure has a prominent moustache and a long, pointed beard. He is sitting upon a seat that might be interpreted as an imperial *sella*, which derived from the ancient *sella curulis*.⁴⁸ With his right hand, he performs a gesture of speech with some associations of legislative power. He also has a sword placed on his left knee, held in his left hand, further hinting at his status as lawgiver. This sword has punched ornaments, and closer scrutiny reveals the elaborately wrought hilt and the carefully designed trapezoidal pommel. The craftsman might have had in mind a type of ring-sword that is known from different excavations, for example, from Grave 1 in the cemetery at Trezzo sull' Adda, dated to the early seventh century AD (Fig. 3).⁴⁹

The two warriors standing to his left and right – some researchers have claimed that they are the personal bodyguards of the king – wear *Spangenhelme* with ornately decorated crests and cheek flaps. They are heavily armed with lances and shields and wear strong body armour. In the vast research literature on this plate, one can find many different interpretations of the scene. Klaus Wessel argued that it depicted Agilulf's triumph over his Lombard opponents.⁵⁰ Wilhelm Kurze claimed a direct connection with the Lombard-Byzantine peace treaty of 610 AD that Agilulf and Emperor Phocas (reg. 602–610 AD) concluded after a long series of military confrontations.⁵¹ Otto von Hessen wanted to see in the picture the coronation act of Agilulf, which had taken place in Milan in May 590 AD.⁵² Gerhard Dilcher argued that the whole scene might be understood as the visualisation of the Lombard *gairethinx*.⁵³ He interprets the figures flanking the king as prominent Lombard warriors, represen-

hinting at a Byzantine context of the plate: "... this plaque probably represents Justinian II accepting the surrender of conquered Lombards" (Guillou 1970, 213).

⁴⁸ According to McCormick (1986, 289) the Visor of Agilulf "preserves the earliest known portrait of a Germanic ruler seated on a throne."

⁴⁹ Ring-swords were common from Italy to England and Scandinavia. Steuer 1987 has suggested that they might be linked to military followings.

⁵⁰ Wessel 1958.

⁵¹ Kurze 1980. He also suggested that the scene might have been copied from one of the (lost) wall paintings of the royal palace in Monza, which are mentioned by Paul the Deacon (*HL* IV,22).

⁵² Von Hessen 1981.

⁵³ Dilcher 2006, 449-458.

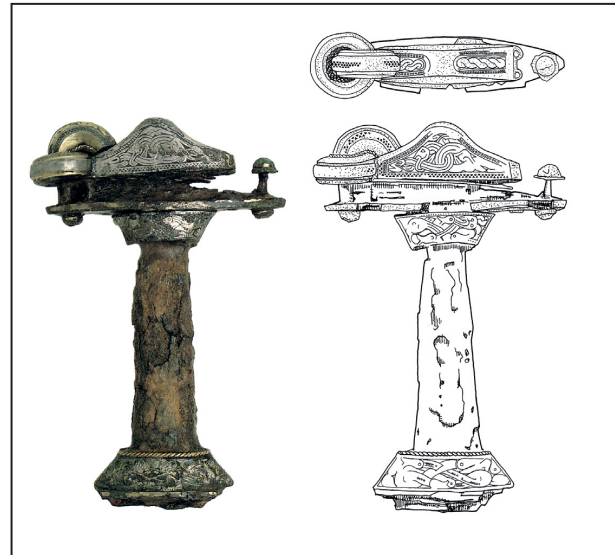


Fig. 3 Sword from Grave 1, Trezzo sull' Adda (after Roffia 1986 Pl. 3 and cover illustration)

tatives of the military assembly, leading him to conclude that they could only be *primates iudices*, meaning *duces* and *gastaldi*. It should be made clear, though, that we do not know exactly what went on during a Lombard *gairethinx*. However, what if the damaged inscription⁵⁴ disguises the original background of the scene? As argued, there are some features that clearly point to imperial representations: the *sella*, the legislative power associated with a gesture of speech (an *allocutio*, typical of imperial iconography), and also the two flying Victories and four figures, two of which are bringing gifts or tribute. It may be suggested that, if the plate was originally produced for the Lombard king, then the client had demanded that the craftsmen choose an imperial, Byzantine style of representing power.⁵⁵

Whatever the historical background of this plate may be, it shows in sufficient clarity the idealised relationship between the ruler and his most important supporters. Furthermore, it is remarkable that in this case a visual representation has been preserved that contains both warlike aspects and civil associations. The former includes the weapons, the warriors and the figures bringing presents or tribute to the ruler. The civil associations include the sword as a symbol of political power as well as the ruler's gesture demonstrating that he was someone who administered justice to

⁵⁴ It is possibly even in part a forgery, La Rocca/Gasparri 2010, 287.

⁵⁵ Kiilerich 1997 has argued similarly.



Fig. 4 Shield plate from Grave 5, Trezzo sull'Adda (photo kindly provided by C. Giostra; drawings after Roffia 1986 Pl. 40)

the people. Analysing this unique find has already conveyed an idea of the two-fold meaning that weapons could carry in Lombard Italy: their martial use, and their symbolic and ritualistic significance. Furthermore, the so-called Visor of Agilulf contains illustrations of the most important and prestigious contemporary weapons: sword, lance, and shield. That these items were indeed the most essential *instrumenta bellorum* is also clear from

various written and archaeological sources. For example, lances and shields are frequently presented in depictions of warriors on numerous shield plates that have been excavated in Lombard Italy.

Depiction of a warrior on a shield plate from grave 5, Trezzo sull'Adda

In 1978, Grave 5 (dated to the second quarter of the seventh century) from the cemetery of Trezzo sull'Adda was excavated. It revealed a full set of armament (parade-shield, *spatha*, sword belt, *scramasax*, belt-fitting, spearhead, spurs, bridle, two knives) and further lavish grave goods (the most significant of which is the golden signet ring of Ansvald).⁵⁶ Two of the iron shield fittings are decorated with scratched figures that clearly depict a warrior, even though in an almost “child-like” drawing (Fig. 4). What one can recognise is the warrior’s armament, consisting of a round shield and a lance with two appendages at the top. Furthermore, the warrior wears body armour (a chain mail?), and one is tempted to interpret his headgear as a helmet. Two horizontal lines in the middle of the body can perhaps be interpreted as a belt. Nonetheless, the warrior does not carry a sword. Such richly decorated shields can certainly be counted among the magnificent *Prunkwaffen* which would have made an impression on and off the battlefield.

Offensive weapons

The most important offensive weapons in Lombard Italy were swords and lances. They were carried by both infantry and cavalry. There is much less written evidence for other offensive weapons, such as bows and arrows, axes or daggers, even though these objects are found in graves quite regularly. A strict distinction between offensive and defensive weapons, as made in the traditional *Waffenkunde* since the nineteenth century, is of course somewhat arbitrary.⁵⁷ A shield, primarily created for the protection of the body, could also be used to wound an opponent, particularly if the shield boss was made of iron and had a pointed form. Even tools that primarily were used

⁵⁶ For a full description of the grave and all its grave goods, cp. Roffia 1986, 57-82.

⁵⁷ Boeheim 1890.

for peaceful purposes, such as flails or sickles, but also objects randomly at hand, like stones or sticks, could be used to inflict injury upon others. One episode in Paul the Deacon's *Lombard History* mentions a club (*clava*) being used as a deadly weapon. The duke of Cividale del Friuli, Ratchis, once attacked the Slavs:

“when the Slavs had suddenly fallen upon him and he had not yet taken his lance from his armor-bearer, he struck with a club that he carried in his hand the first who ran up to him and put an end to his life”.⁵⁸

Weapons, in the narrow sense, are tools designed preferably to be used against humans – material artefacts characterised by their specific functionality to harm or kill. Before the invention of firearms, the use of a weapon was closely tied to the physical constitution of its bearer, requiring strength, agility and dexterity. Hence, it was crucial for the collective success of an army and, of course, for the individual's survival, that warriors knew how to handle their weapons effectively. Namely, a weapon's destructive capacity depended to a greater extent upon the warrior's abilities than upon the characteristics of the weapon itself. Constant training was, therefore, key to the effective use of weapons.⁵⁹ These physical skills could also be acquired and maintained through peaceful activities, such as hunting. Unfortunately, there is no further information about the form and content of this training. There is nothing in written sources on Lombard Italy about drillmasters, recruits or manoeuvres. Therefore, a centralised organisation of training can hardly be assumed.

When fighting on horseback, the requirements increased even further. Cavalry men not only had to know how to wield their weapons – the most important one being the lance – but also had to merge with their horses into a unit in order to gain strength, vigour and speed. Because the horses had to carry the weight of the heavily armed warriors, special breeds were developed that were bigger and stronger than normal riding or transport horses. At the same time, war horses had to be trained to be completely subordinate to the will of their riders, and to not back off from the noise and dangers of the battlefield. Only through spe-

cial training was it possible to overcome the animals' natural instinct of self-preservation and to turn them into dangerous tools of war.

Swords

The sword is presumed to be the most esteemed item of Lombard military equipment. Typically, Lombard *spathae* had an average length of 75 to 90 cm, with both straight and two-edged blades. Archaeology has recovered hundreds of swords, *spathae* (Fig. 5b) and *saxes* (Fig. 5a) from Italian cemeteries, making possible some detailed studies. They were the most important weapons for close combat. The modern distinction between long and short swords was already established in Late Antiquity. In Latin the *terminus technicus* was *spat(h)a* for the double-edged long sword, which was also adopted into Greek. The generic Latin term for the short sword and long sword in Late Antiquity was *gladius*, which at the time of the Roman Republic denoted the short sword of the legionary, and *xiphos* in Greek. In narrative sources for Lombard Italy, swords are described using a multitude of terms. In Paul the Deacon's *Historia Langobardorum*, one can find no less than four different labels: *gladius*, *spatha*, *ensis*, and *muicro*. However, there are no indications as to which type of sword the author meant. Therefore, whether Paul had specific sword types in mind when he chose his words cannot be determined. The same applies to most of the other early medieval authors.

For Lombard Italy there are plenty of descriptions of the use of swords. One is in a story about an attempted assassination of King Liutprand, shortly after his accession to the throne in 712 AD. A certain Rothari, one of the king's relatives, is said to have entered the palace at Pavia with a hidden weapon. When he faced the king, Liutprand realised what was going on:

“When Rothari found out that he was detected, he straightway leaped backwards and un-sheathed his sword to strike the king. On the other hand, the king drew forth his own sword from his scabbard. Then one of the king's attendants named Subo, seizing Rothari from behind, was wounded by him in the forehead, but others leaping upon Rothari killed him there”.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *HL* VI,52.

⁵⁹ Wiemer/Berndt 2016, 144.

⁶⁰ *HL* VI,38.

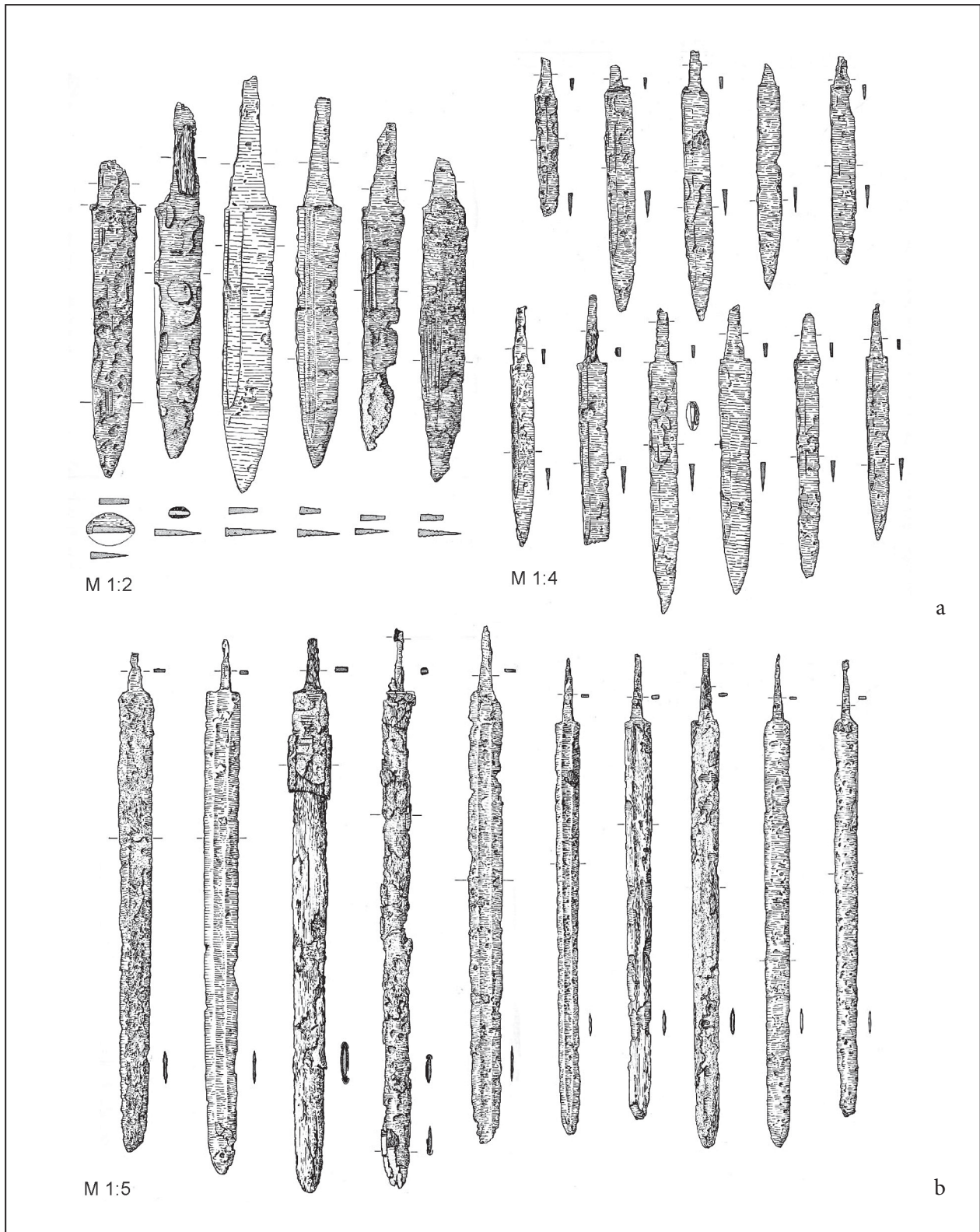


Fig. 5 Cemetery of Testona: **a** Seaxes; **b** swords (*spathae*) (after von Hessen 1971 Pls. 4-5, 10-11)

There are several narratives in Paul the Deacon's *Historia* that hint at occasions apart from the theatre of war, in which swords and other weapons were visible in public affairs. At the end of the second book, Paul reports in some detail the assassination of the warrior king Alboin in his palace at Verona. The king's body was interred under a staircase within an exterior wall of the palace. The passage following this account skips over roughly 180 years, moving into the lifetime of Paul. Here, he asserts that a certain Giselpert, a noble man who reigned as *dux* of Verona between 745 and 762 AD, opened the grave to take possession of Alboin's sword and other grave goods. From then on Giselpert is said to have "boasted with his accustomed vanity".⁶¹ What might have been the lesson that Paul wanted his readers or audience to learn from this anecdote? The story can perhaps be understood as an unconcealed critique of Giselpert's grave robbery, especially if we bear in mind that since the days of Rothari's edict, grave robbery had been punishable in Lombard Italy with a fine of no less than 900 *solidi*.⁶² In any case, the desire to possess the sword of Alboin encouraged Giselpert's non-compliant behaviour. What might have been this duke's impulse? Patrick Geary interpreted the unlawful appropriation of the sword as a means for Giselpert to claim the right to rule as a successor of the long-lost king. Furthermore, Geary pointed out that entering the grave was a way to access the "Other World", to encounter Alboin himself and to inherit his legitimation.⁶³ Clearly, Alboin's sword was a symbol of power, and Giselpert would henceforth have worn it proudly on public occasions.

Another intriguing example of the public presence of swords is the trial summoned by King Liutprand (reg. 712–744 AD) in order to resolve a difficult dispute over questions of secular and spiritual authority between Pemmo, the duke of Friuli, and Callixtus, the patriarch of Aquileia, who had been at odds with the local bishop of Cividale whom he had removed from his post. Pemmo, in response, arrested the patriarch. For

this, King Liutprand descended upon Friuli and appointed Ratchis, Pemmo's son, in his place. The duke was planning to escape with some of his followers. When promises were made that neither the *dux* nor his men would be harmed and would be treated fairly, they went back to the town to face the convened trial. Paul, who, as mentioned before, was a Friulian, may be regarded as a well informed commentator on this incident. He writes:

"Then the king, sitting in judgement, pardoned for Ratchis' sake Pemmo and his two sons, Ratchait and Aistulf, and ordered them to stand behind his chair. The king, however, in a loud voice ordered that all those who had adhered to Pemmo, naming them, should be seized. Then Aistulf could not restrain his rage and attempted to draw his sword and strike the king, but Ratchis his brother prevented him. And when these Langobards were seized in this manner, Herfemar, who had been one of them, drew his sword, and followed by many, defended himself manfully and fled to the church of the blessed Michael..."⁶⁴

At first glance, this story, which probably dates to the year 739 AD, gives us both an insight into the royal authority and strength of King Liutprand as well as the aspirations of Pemmo to defend the autonomy of his duchy. Paul clearly seeks to emphasise the warlike character of Friuli's Lombard aristocracy and their constant competition for honour. On closer inspection, however, it is also remarkable that the accused, Pemmo and his followers, obviously appear armed at the trial and that it was actually possible for them to threaten the king with deadly violence. We can thus conclude from this episode that Pemmo and his men were likely regarded as free Lombards, who not only had the right to carry arms, but also made use of this right even in public situations like a judicial trial.

The *Chronicle* of Marius of Avenches records in the entry for the year 569 AD the invasion of the Lombards and the associated horrors of the native population, whereby it is said that none too few died by the sword (*nonnulli gladio interempti sunt*).⁶⁵ This generalising and metaphorical use of the term *gladius* can also be observed in many letters of Gregory the Great. In one of them

⁶¹ *HL* II,28.

⁶² *Rothari* 15. According to Paul, the grave of King Rothari in San Giovanni Domnarum, Pavia, was also opened and plundered soon after his death; his *ornamenta* were stolen (*HL* IV,47), even though we can only speculate whether or not there had been weapons among this king's grave goods.

⁶³ Geary 1994, 64–65.

⁶⁴ *HL* VI,51

⁶⁵ Marius of Avenches, *Chronicon* ad a. 569.

(to Eulogius, the bishop of Alexandria, dated July 596 AD) he describes the “terrible things we are suffering from the swords of the Lombards, in the daily plundering or maiming or slaying of our citizens”.⁶⁶ The same tone can also be found in the *Liber Pontificalis*. The author of the *Vita Stephani II* describes King Aistulf as a lion who threatened the Romans with deadly violence through his sword.⁶⁷

Finally, richly decorated swords, the so-called *Ringknaufschwerter*, which have been excavated in the cemeteries of Lombard Italy, should be counted among the *Prunkwaffen* of outstanding Lombard warriors.

Lances

The other important offensive weapon of Lombard warriors was the lance. Three different terms for this weapon can be found in the sources: *lancea*, *hasta* and *contus*. *Kontos* was the Greek *terminus technicus* for a long stabbing lance, whereas *dory* could be used for any lance. The term *kontos* made its way into late antique Latin as a loanword. On two occasions, Paul uses the term *cuspis*, by which he means the lance tip or the opposite side of the lance tip, i.e. the end of the lance shaft.⁶⁸ With long lances it was possible to hit the opponent before he was able to attack in close combat, and to break the first line of defence of an opposing force. When riders rode towards their opponents and drove their lances into their shields, the lances could become impacted in them, requiring the riders to fight on with another weapon. The impact lance consisted of a heavy wooden shaft, which merged into a double-edged iron blade at the upper end. As the shafts of lances were made of wood, in most cases only the iron spearheads have been preserved. These tips exhibit a large variety of shapes (Fig. 6). As there is also great variation in their sizes, it is not always possible to determine whether the original weapon was a lance (to be thrust) or a spear (to be thrown).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Gregory the Great, *ep.* VI,58 (= VI,61 Martyn).

⁶⁷ *Vita Stephani II: Inter haec vero, permanens in sua pernicie praelatus atrocissimus Langobardorum rex, exarsit furore vehementi, et fremens ut leo, pestiferas minas Romanis dirigere non desinebat, asserens omnes uno gladio iugulari, nisi suae, ut praelatum est, sese subderent dicioni.*

⁶⁸ *HL* III,32 and VI,56 (*adversa cuspide*).

⁶⁹ In *HL* III,31 the Frankish *dux* Olo is killed by a projectile (*iaculus*) thrown by a Lombard warrior. Whether arrows and spearheads, which are occasionally found

One example of the use of the cavalry lance can be found in the fifth book of Paul the Deacon, in which the Battle at Forinus is described. In this battle, Roman soldiers of Emperor Constans II under the command of Saburrus, one of his *optimates*, fought against a Lombard army that was under the command of Romuald, the son of King Grimoald (r. 662–671 AD). A warrior named Amalong, who held the office of the king’s spear bearer, turned out to be the decisive hero of this encounter. Amalong skewered an opposing horseman with his lance from the saddle and lifted him over his head. On seeing this act of Lombard military prowess, the imperial soldiers allegedly panicked and turned to flight, marking the beginning of the end of this battle.⁷⁰

In Lombard Italy a specific lance was used as a *Herrschaftszeichen* (symbol of rule, according to the definition of Percy Ernst Schramm⁷¹). When the leading Lombard noblemen expected the death of King Liutprand in 736 AD, they elected his nephew Hildebrand as the new king. During the course of the ceremony, remarkably not staged in the royal capital but outside the city walls at a place called *Ad Perticas*, Hildebrand was handed a lance (*contus*). Paul explains that this was a customary ritual among the Lombards (*sicut moris est*). Then a strange incident occurred: a cuckoo flew over and sat on the lance tip. The elders (*prudentes*), who were present, immediately understood this as a sign that the decision to make Hildebrand king was wrong.⁷² Of course, they were later proven to be correct. Liutprand recovered and returned to the throne. The king was not pleased when he heard of his nephew’s elevation, even though, after recovering his health, he kept Hildebrand as his colleague. After eight years of joint reign, Hildebrand became sole *rex* in 744 AD, but died only a few months later. Apart from this story, there are no descriptions of the appearance of the Lombard royal lance in the written sources. Stefano Gasparri connected the strange appearance of the bird during Hildebrand’s royal inauguration with the funerary monuments at the nearby church of Santa Maria, where cenotaphs for Lombard warriors who had died far away from their homes were erected.

without context, can be used as war or hunting equipment is unanswerable, because arrows, as well as throwing spears, were also used for hunting.

⁷⁰ *HL* V,10.

⁷¹ Schramm 1954, 1–21.

⁷² *HL* VI,55.

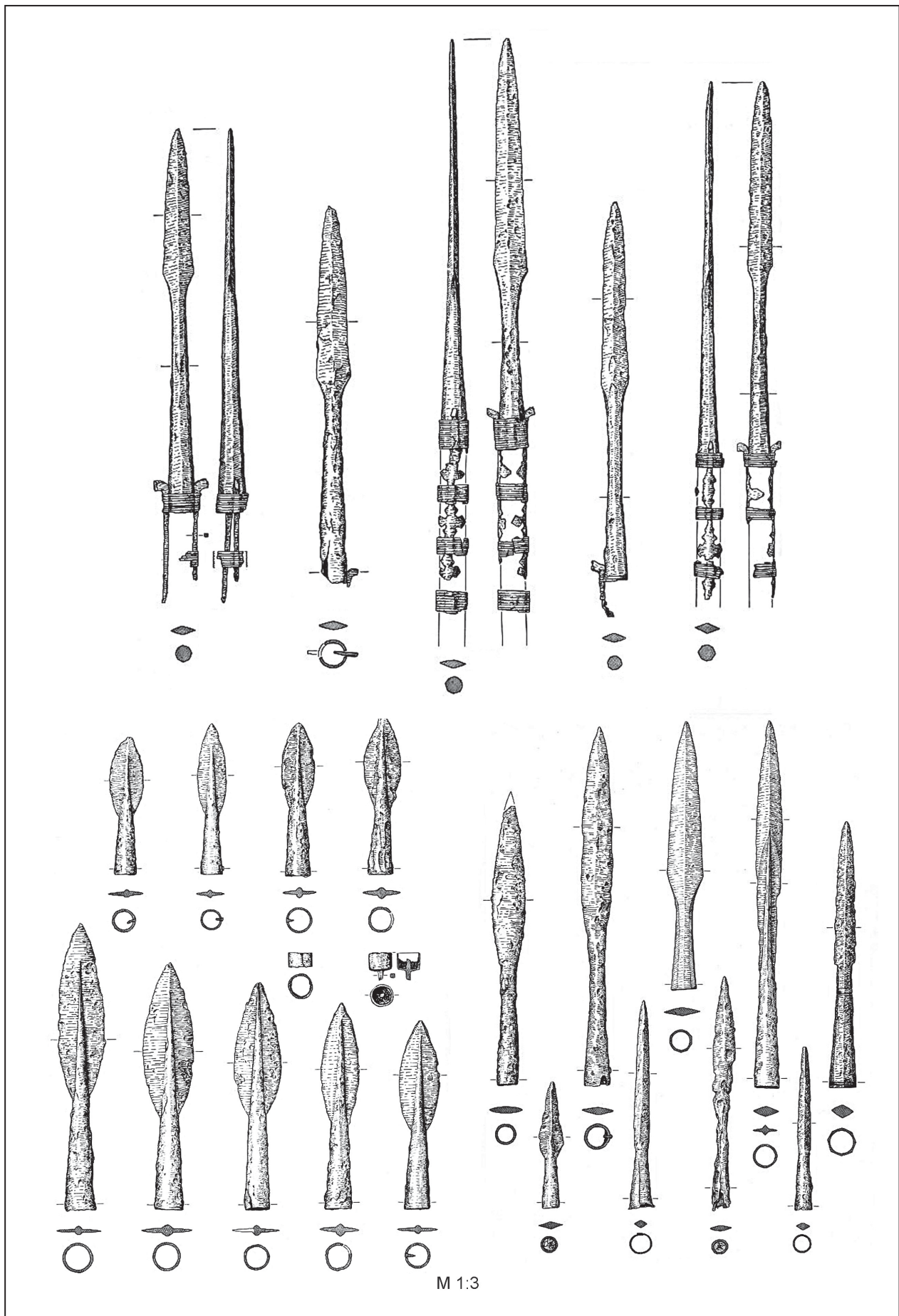


Fig. 6 Lances from the cemetery of Testona (after von Hessen 1971 Pls. 17. 18. 20)

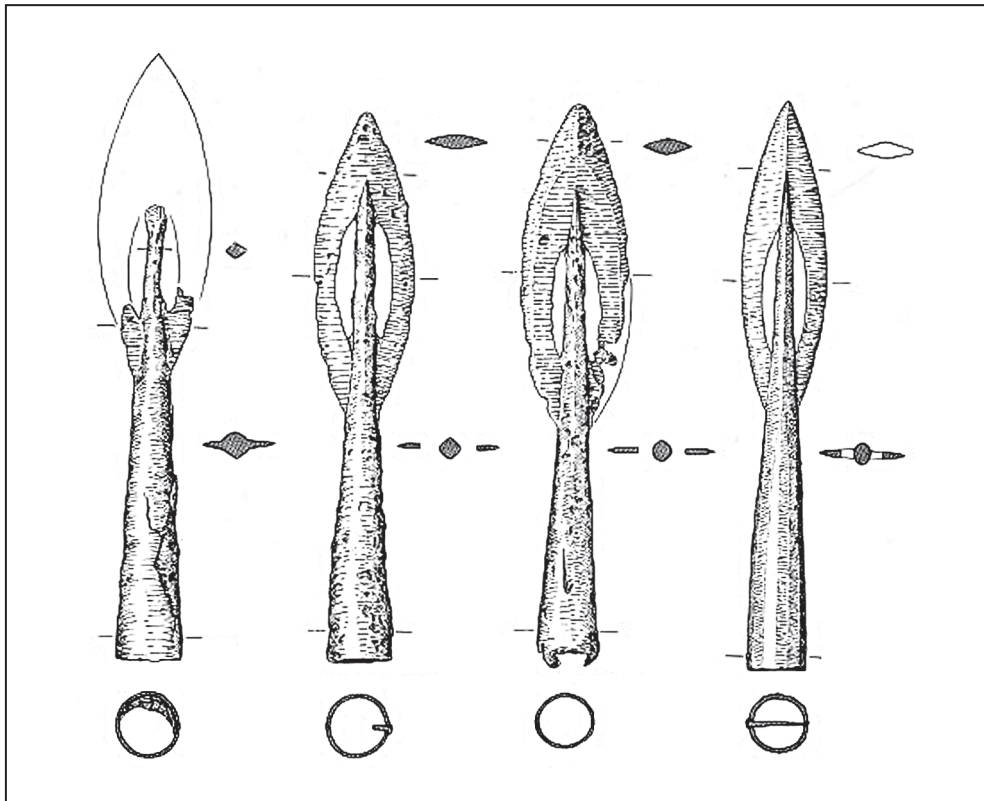


Fig. 7 Lances with perforated heads (after von Hessen 1971 Pl. 19)

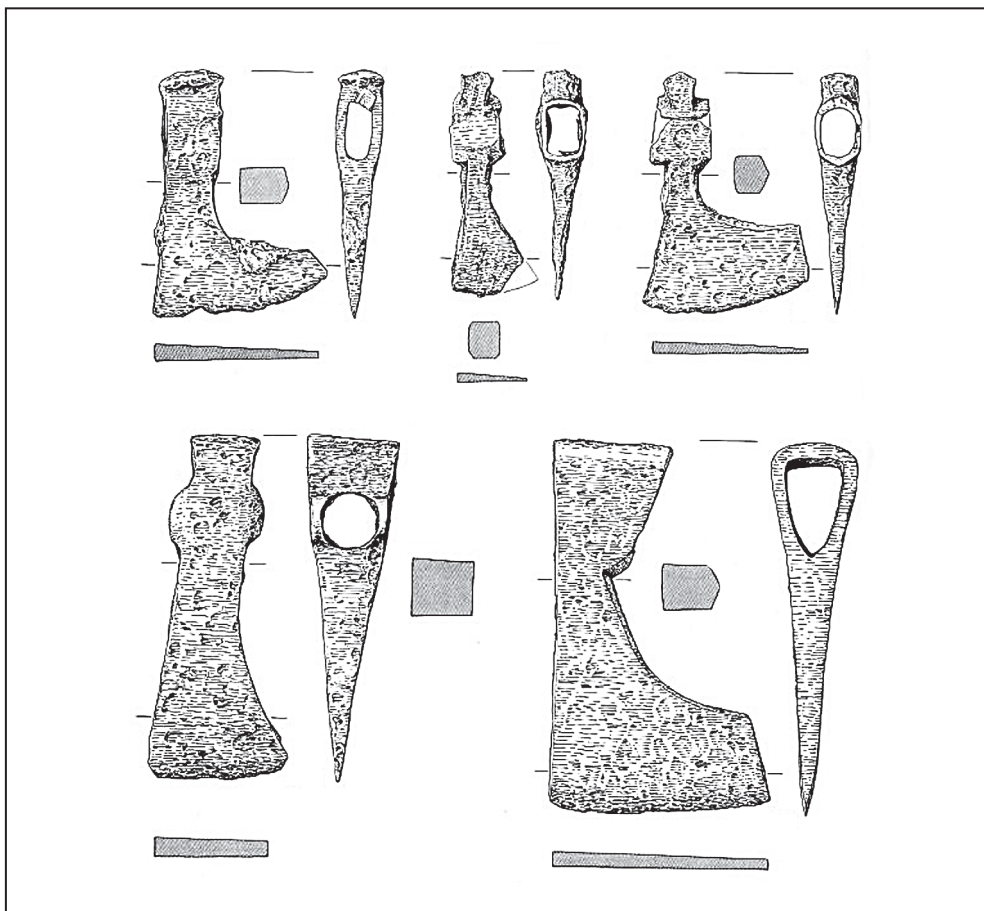


Fig. 8 Axes from the cemetery of Testona (after von Hessen 1971 Pl. 22)

The cenotaphs are decorated with a design showing a lance surmounted by a bird, perhaps symbolising the soul of the deceased.⁷³ The combination of lance and bird is also known from some archaeological objects, displayed, for example, on an ornamental shield plaque from Lucca-San Romano. Archaeology has revealed a remarkable number of lances, or rather their perforated heads. The latter may have had a double-function (**Fig. 7**).⁷⁴ They might have been used as offensive weapons on the battlefield, but at the same time could be interpreted as a specific form of the *signa* or *vexilla*, that is, military standards. These standards were important as rallying points in battle and on the march. The depiction of a lance with two appendages at its head on the shield plate from Trezzo sull'Adda (see above) might be viewed as one such standard.

Axes

Literary sources on Lombard Italy only occasionally mention axes. Originally everyday tools, for tasks such as clearing wood or cutting firewood, axes were further developed into battle axes. They usually had a long wooden staff with a single-bladed metal head at the end, and they varied in shape and size. There is no evidence for double-bladed axes in Lombard Italy. A single hit from a battle axe could easily smash shields, armour and/or bone, as the weapon's deadly nature depended upon its whole weight being transferred to its relatively short cutting edge. It could be used as an offensive weapon in two ways: first in close combat, and second as a projectile, which is how the *francisca* was used. Paul the Deacon reports that King Authari (reg. 584–590 AD) was armed with a throwing-axe (*securicula*). To demonstrate his power to his followers, he threw it into a tree, saying "Authari is wont to strike such a blow".⁷⁵ Apart from that episode, Paul the Deacon attributes the use of axes in battle to Slavic warriors.⁷⁶ Single-bladed axes are reported only rarely in burials from Lombard Italy (**Fig. 8**). A unique specimen was found in Grave 1660/4 in the cemetery of Cividale del Friuli, S. Stefano. Its small size of only 7 cm might indicate that it was used as a toy.⁷⁷ An alternative

interpretation could be that this small axe reflected the wish of grieving parents their child would have become a brave warrior.

Daggers and knives

It is not easy to determine in which cases the Latin term *cultellus* refers to a dagger or to a knife. In Paul's *History* there are two references. The first one is found in a story that the author apparently knew only from hearsay, located in Constantinople. The Lombard Peredeo, who had been involved in the assassination of Alboin, is said to have wounded two imperial officials with two *cultelli*, which he had been hiding.⁷⁸ In the second reference the translation of *cultellus* as knife would make more sense. King Cunincpert is said to have tried to kill a fly that had flown through the window of his room by throwing his *cultellus* at it, but this only succeeded in cutting off one of the fly's legs.⁷⁹ This strange narrative is told by Paul to describe the shady character of the king, who was planning to eliminate two henchmen, who had once betrayed him. Iron knives are frequently found in the burials of Lombard Italy (**Fig. 9**). This relays the impression that they were standard equipment for Lombard warriors. However, splendidly decorated pieces, like the one found in the richly furnished male Grave F in the necropolis of Castel Trosino, are much rarer.⁸⁰ Its golden scabbard indicates that it can be classified as a *Prunkwaffe* (**Fig. 10**).

Bows and arrows

Because bows, as with lance shafts or axe handles, were made of wood and were thus easily perishable, no complete specimens have been found from the Lombard period, although arrowheads are quite common in archaeological contexts. Some pieces of a composite bow have been found in Grave 86 in the cemetery of Nocera Umbra, (**Fig. 11**).⁸¹ Excavations in the Crypta Balbi (a workshop), Rome, have also revealed parts of such weapons, indicating that they might have been produced there (**Fig. 12**).⁸² Compared to ordinary long bows (made from a single piece of wood), composite bows have the

⁷³ Gasparri 2000, 99.

⁷⁴ Von Hessen 1971 catalogued 14 pieces.

⁷⁵ *HL* III,30.

⁷⁶ *HL* VI,24.

⁷⁷ Ahumada Silva 2008, 352.

⁷⁸ *HL* II,30

⁷⁹ *HL* VI,6.

⁸⁰ Paroli/Ricci 2007, 19.

⁸¹ Rupp 2005, 109.

⁸² Ricci 2001, 400.



Fig. 9 Iron knife from Grave 1988/311, Cividale del Friuli
(after Die Langobarden 2008, 354)



Fig. 10 Dagger from Grave F, Castel Trosino
(Paroli/Ricci 2007 Pl. 228)

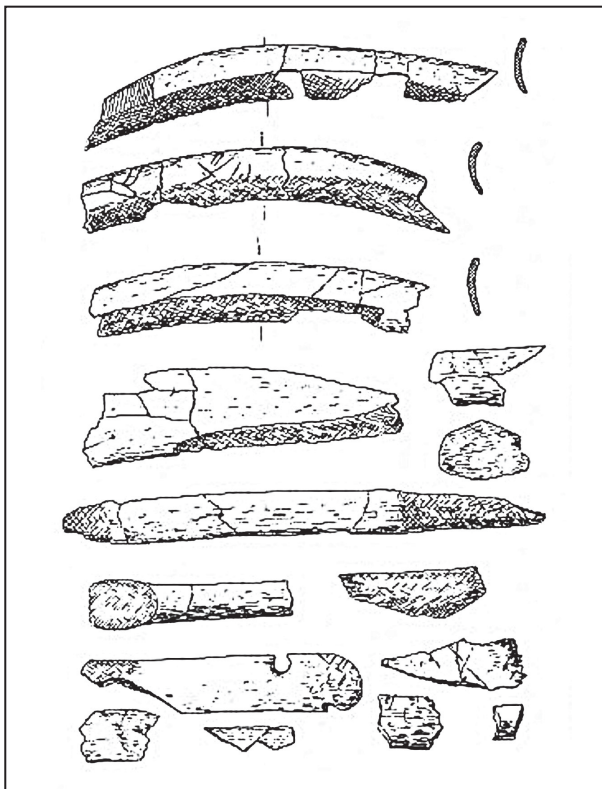


Fig. 11 Fragments of a composite bow, Grave 86, Nocera Umbra
(after Rupp 2005 Pl. 104)



Fig. 12 Fragments of a composite bow from the Crypta Balbi
(after Ricci 2001, 399)



Fig. 13 Belt fittings from Grave 27, Campochiaro (after Bertelli/Brogio 2000, 60)

advantage of combining smaller size with greater power. The most common Latin terms for the bow and arrow in early medieval sources are *arcus* and *sagitta*, and for quivers, *faretrae*. In most cases they are referred to in the context of hunting activities.⁸³ In the Lombard *leges* the term for quiver is *cocurra*. In one episode, Paul tells the story of his great-grandfather Lopichis, who had been abducted and taken to the land of the Avars. When he managed to escape, he only had a quiver, a bow and arrows at hand, suggesting perhaps that these objects were easy to make.⁸⁴ Another death caused by an arrow is recounted in Fredegar's *Chronicle*. Agilulf and his wife Theudelinde, unable to endure

the popularity of the Frank Gundovald among the Lombards, arranged for the latter to be murdered by an arrow shot (*sagitta saucis moritur*).⁸⁵

Defensive arms and protection

In addition to offensive weapons, we know of defence equipment in Lombard Italy. Body armour, such as *loricae*, helmets, or greaves (*ocrea*) are only rarely mentioned in written sources and are also rarities in the archaeological record with the exception of belt strap-ends and fittings (Fig. 13).

⁸³ *HL* V,33 (King Grimoald takes a bow to shoot a dove); VI.58 (a hunting accident, in which the nephew of King Liutprand, Aufusus, is killed by an arrow).

⁸⁴ *HL* IV,37.

⁸⁵ Fredegar, *Chronicle* IV,34. Paul the Deacon (*HL* IV,40) also knew this story. He emphasised that it was not possible to identify a shooter. Therefore, it illustrates the specific character of this long-range weapon, with which it was possible to kill someone impersonally.



Fig. 14 Stirrup from Grave 41, Castel Trosino
(after Paroli 1995, 303)

The equipment of mounted warriors, such as saddles (*sella*), spurs (*calcares*) and stirrups (Fig. 14), is likewise rare.

Shields

The protective item of equipment *par excellence* was the shield, which was obviously available to most Lombard warriors. The literary sources employ different terms for shields. In Paul's *History* we find *clyppeus* (= *clipeus*),⁸⁶ whereas in the *leges* the word *scutum* is used. Two other terms in early medieval sources are *parma* and *umbo*. The typical shield, used by infantry and cavalry alike, had characteristic features: a round to oval shape, a slightly spherical arch and an onion-shaped shield boss. Usually the shields were made of wood and leather, whereas only the shield bosses, some appliqués and shield grips were made of metal and, therefore, recorded in the archaeological material. Particularly good evidence derives from burials with those shield bosses made of iron.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine how shields were decorated. The extent to which representations in (admittedly later) manuscripts are realistic is also difficult to determine. The average size of Lombard shields has been calculated as 80 to 100 cm (Fig. 15). Some shield bosses are richly decorated, for example, the shield boss found in Grave 1 in the necropolis of Nocera Umbra (Fig. 16).⁸⁸ In this case, a fighting scene is shown above a richly ornamented frieze. One section illustrates two infantry men with shields, fighting each other, probably with lances. Another section depicts a rider holding an object in his right hand, which

may be interpreted as a sword. Such visual representations of battle scenes from Lombard Italy are extremely rare.

Helmets

Fragments of helmets are only rarely found in the burials of Lombard Italy, indicating that they might not have been easily available to the average warrior. Therefore, one may reasonably assume that only heavily armed cavalrymen regularly possessed this expensive piece of equipment. Those who were not able to afford a helmet might have protected their heads with a cap made of leather or felt, but the use of these items is archaeologically difficult to demonstrate. Probably the best known example of a helmet is the aforementioned Visor of Agilulf. One fragment of a helmet was found in Grave 6 of the cemetery at Nocera Umbra. The so-called *Spangenhelme* seem to have been used in Lombard Italy as in other parts of late antique and early medieval Europe. In one passage of Gregory of Tours' *Histories*, the armament of a Lombard warrior is described. Accordingly, the warrior was protected by a helmet (*galea*) as well as body armour (*lorica*). Furthermore, he carried a lance (*contus*).⁸⁹ In Paul the Deacon's *History* two terms are used to refer to helmets (*cassis* and *galea*), without any clear distinction between the two.⁹⁰

Body armour

There are only very few indications of the use of cuirasses in Lombard Italy. Paul the Deacon uses the term *lorica*, without indicating the exact type of body armour.⁹¹ The vague information provided by written sources can be combined with some archaeological finds, but armour is quite rare in burials; in most cases there are only fragments. These fragments suggest that plate as well as chain mail was used for protection.

⁸⁶ *HL* IV,16.

⁸⁷ De Marchi 2000; 2002.

⁸⁸ Rupp 2005, 3 Pl. 2.

⁸⁹ Gregor of Tours, *Decem Libri Historiarum* X,3: *Super huius laci litus Langobardos resedere audierant. Ad quem cum adpropinquassent, priusquam flumen, quod diximus, transirent, a litore illo unus Langobardorum stans, lorica protectus et galea, contum manu gestans, vocem dedit contra Francorum exercitum...*

⁹⁰ *HL* V,23; V,40 (*cassis*); I,20; V,40 (*galea*, the first one taken from a Herulian warrior)

⁹¹ *HL* IV,51 (3x); V,40; VI,38.



Fig. 15 Reconstruction of a Lombard parade shield, based on the findings in Lucca, Santa Giulia (after Brogiolo/Marazzi/Giostra 2017, 236)

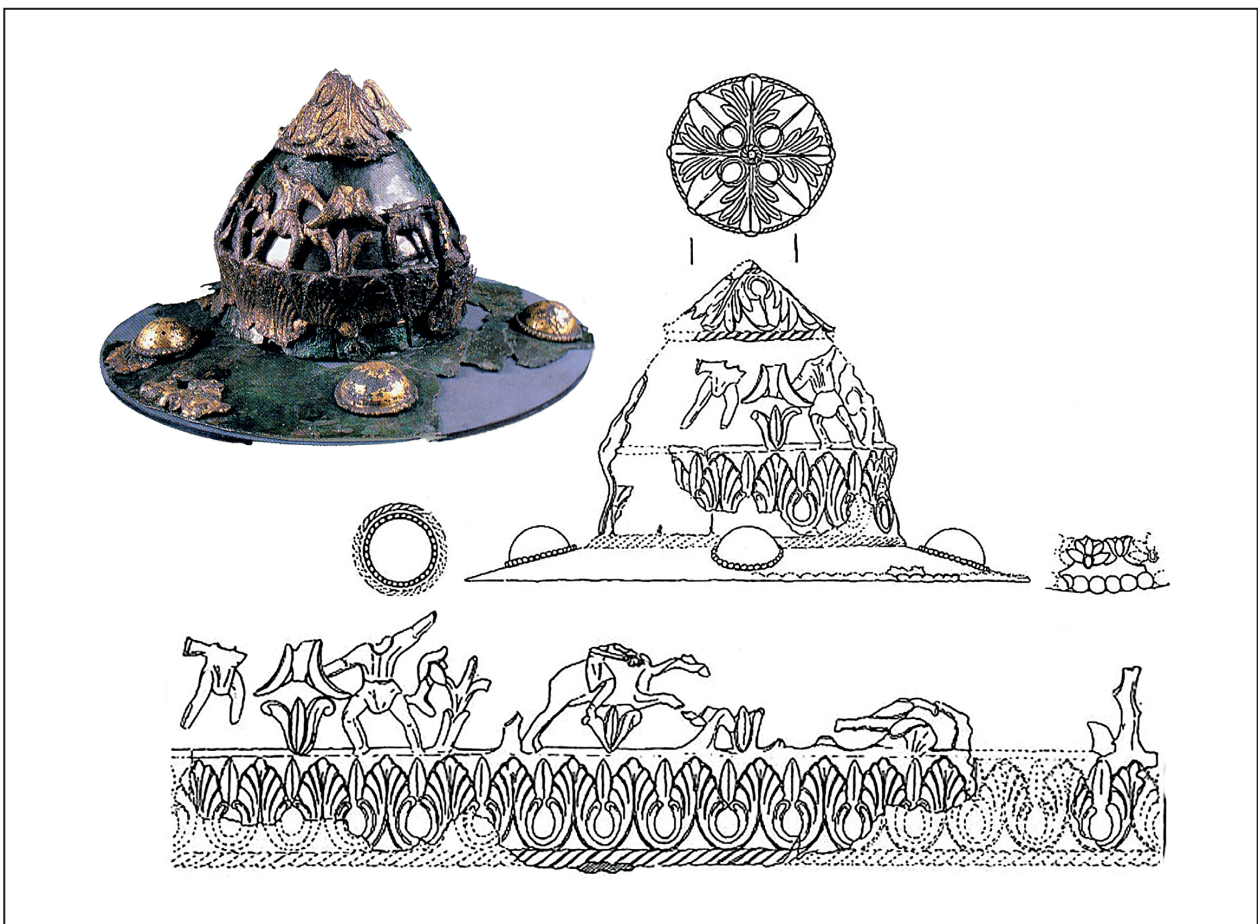


Fig. 16 Shield boss from Grave 1, Nocera Umbra (photo after Die Langobarden 2008, 377; drawing after Rupp 2005 Pl. 2)

Conclusions

In summary, when discussing Lombard weaponry and equipment, one needs to consider a wide range of source materials (texts, archaeological finds, visual representations) as well as a number of different analytical approaches. Weapons were not only *instrumenta bellorum*, but also formed an important part of the Lombard warrior culture and were almost certainly regularly on show in this militarised society. In addition to their actual function as instruments of war, weapons could be used for ritualistic acts, and thereby also bore symbolic meanings. The effort to gather together information on Lombard weaponry and equipment could form an important part of a general military history of the Lombards, which has yet to be written.

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Guido M. Berndt, The Armament of Lombard Warriors in Italy. Some Historical and Archaeological Approaches

The history of the Lombards could well be designated a history of warfare, for in the course of the 206-year existence of their realm in Italy the Lombards constantly carried out warfare of varying intensity, whether in their own defence or to expand their territory. Even the time prior to their invasion of Italy, especially their advances from Pannonia, were already marked by numerous military conflicts. Of particular interest here are the questions with reference to the background and the course of these conflicts, and also to the weaponry that was utilised. In the following contribution the weapons of Lombard warriors – or more specifically – the weapons used by warriors in Lombardian Italy will be examined. This specification is necessary because Lombard warriors experienced many interactions with other powers, for example, with Byzantine forces stationed in Italy (until 751 AD), and with foreign enemies like the Franks and Avars, who however could always turn into cooperative partners for the Lombards. Thus, it can be assumed that ultimately through contacts with enemies as well as with allies, the different types of Lombard weaponry depended upon the respective situation. Aside from use in real battles, weapons of the Lombards also had other functions: They were of symbolic significance in that they could demonstrate power and social differences. Certain types of weapons can be interpreted as signs of rank – which of course applies to the early Middle Ages on the whole. In principal, three groups of source material are at disposal for study: 1) references in written sources, 2) contemporary depictions of Lombard warriors, and 3) archaeological evidence, that is, weapons and pieces of armament found in graves, settlements and also occasional finds – including those without a find context. An overall picture of Lombard weaponry can only be gained when all possible source groups are evaluated.

Guido M. Berndt, Die Bewaffnung langobardischer Krieger in Italien. Einige historische und archäologische Ansätze

Die Geschichte der Langobarden könnte man wohl als Kriegsgeschichte schreiben, denn im Verlaufe der 206-jährigen Existenz ihres Reiches in Italien haben die Langobarden regelmäßig Kriege entweder zu ihrer Verteidigung oder aber zur Erweiterung ihres Territoriums geführt, freilich in unterschiedlicher Intensität. Bereits die vor-italische Phase, insbesondere ihre Zeit in Pannonien, ist von einer Vielzahl militärischer Konflikte geprägt. Interessant ist nun nicht nur die Frage nach den Hintergründen und Verläufen dieser militärischen Auseinandersetzungen, sondern auch nach den Waffen selbst. In diesem Beitrag werden die Waffen langobardischer Krieger betrachtet, oder genauer gesagt, die Waffen von Kriegern im langobardenzeitlichen Italien. Eine solche Präzisierung ist insofern notwendig, als die Einsatzsphären langobardischer Krieger durch vielfältige Wechselwirkungen mit anderen Mächten verwoben waren, so etwa dem in Italien stationierten byzantinischen Militär (bis 751 n. Chr.) und auswärtigen Feinden wie Franken oder Awaren – diese konnten aber auch immer wieder zu Kooperationspartnern der Langobarden werden. Man darf daher davon ausgehen, dass diese ihre Bewaffnung auf längere Sicht durch den Kontakt mit Feinden und Verbündeten auf die jeweilige Situation abgestimmt haben. Neben den rein militärischen, kriegerischen Funktionen kamen den Waffen noch weitere Funktionen zu. Sie hatten eine symbolische Bedeutung, indem sie Macht und soziale Unterschiede sichtbar machen konnten. Bestimmte Waffentypen sind als regelrechte Rangabzeichen zu deuten – dies gilt freilich für das gesamte Frühmittelalter. Prinzipiell stehen drei Überlieferungsgruppen zur Verfügung, nämlich: 1) Erwähnungen in den Schriftquellen, 2) zeitgenössische Bilder langobardischer Krieger und 3) archäologische Zeugnisse, also Waffen und Ausrüstungsgegenstände, die als Funde in Gräbern, Siedlungen oder auch als – mitunter kontextlose – Einzelfunde zu Tage getreten sind. Ein Gesamtbild der Bewaffnung langobardenzeitlicher Krieger lässt sich nur gewinnen, wenn alle zur Verfügung stehenden Quellengruppen ausgewertet werden.