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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Book Review: Menswear of the Lombards. Reflections in the Light of Archaeology, Iconography and Written Sources

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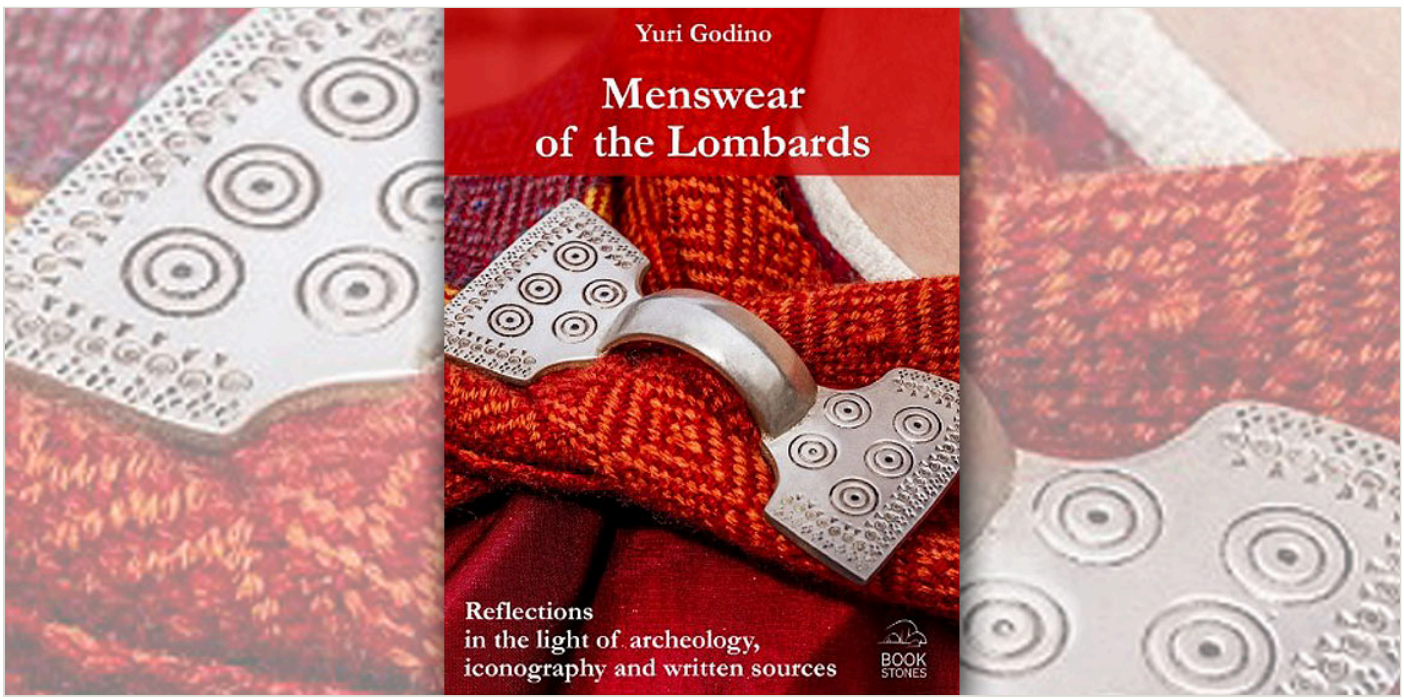

Recent archaeological adventures in the beautiful Friulian region of Northern Italy had introduced me to the history of the Langobards, a Germanic people who settled in the Adriatic during the 6th century AD after a long period of southerly migration from the German/Scandinavian Baltic area. Their architecture has stood the test of time, with churches such as the Oratorio di S Maria in Valle (Cividale), and its stunning murals of saints, sinners, kings and clergy. The museum of Cividale del Friuli is replete with their material culture, as

they interred grave goods with their dead well into their conversion into Christianity. Yet, there are massive gaps in our knowledge of their everyday life.

> Some remarkable preserved scraps of fabrics survived from burials at Testona, Collegno, Carignano, and Trezzo D'Adda, among others. Collegno is perhaps the most important, as the textile fragments appear to substantiate the statement made by the 8th century AD chronicler, Paulus Diaconus, that flax and wool were the staples of clothing fabric for the Langobards.

Yuri Godino's all-too-brief book is a potent primer, creating the first analysis of how Langobard men dressed, and the implications of clothing on status and power. It is part experimental archaeology, and part detective story. The book originated as a means of communicating some of the results of the Presenze Longobardi Project (http://www.aresitaly.com/presenzelongobarde/) in Massello, Italy. Setting the scene by detailing the difficulties in accurately defining what was a Langobardic costume, Godino uses ancient texts to indicate some form of differentiation between Roman-influenced clothing and those of the Germanic tribes of the 6th and 7th centuries. The region was a melting pot of cultures and religions from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD, with a continuous influence from the Eastern Empire.

It is fully understandable that most people associate material culture with the intricate, exquisite metalwork which make up Langobard grave goods. Godini takes a different slant altogether, looking for the evidence from fabric fragments found in burials, on which the metal adornments would have been placed. The chapter on textiles examines the weaving techniques and what evidence exists, especially using pseudomorphs of fabric on artefacts. A weaving sword from a tomb at Gallo, Cividale del Friuli, is remarkably similar to Anglo-Saxon specimens, but it is imprinted with the weave pattern of the fabric that the body was wearing when buried.

Some remarkable preserved scraps of fabrics survived from burials at Testona, Collegno, Carignano, and Trezzo D'Adda, among others. Collegno is perhaps the most important, as the textile fragments appear to substantiate the statement made by the 8th century AD chronicler, Paulus Diaconus, that flax and wool were the staples of clothing fabric for the Langobards. There appear to be several distinctive weaving patterns, with the simple linen tabby weave being used to produce shrouds and veils, whereas twills and herringbone patterns (illustrated in sumptuous colour) were employed for tunics. Silks were also present within the Langobard elite, with evidence of gold thread and brocade. The surprising presence of cotton fibres, contained within the stucco art within the Oratorio di S Maria in Valle, in Cividale, indicates a robust eastward trade through the 7th and 8th centuries. Combined with the dyes used, the Langobard tunics and footwear start to take form.

Using Paulus Diaconus again, key pieces of the male wardrobe have been identified. He described that "*Most of the tunics were loose and a line of clothing such as Anglisaxones have ….. it was broad and adorned with coloured strips. But they (the tunics) were almost to the top of the boots*". The knee-length underpants, known as *femoralia,* do not appear to have been exclusively Langobardic, being visible in Palaeochristian iconography from other regions of Italy such as Ravenna; they may be of Roman origin, modified over time. Trousers were worn, as in all Germanic tribes, made loose fitting to accommodate comfort when riding with bandaging around the lower legs, not unlike the long spats used by modern equestrians. Some speculation on the *hosis* foot-/legwear mentioned by Paulus would have been a welcome detail, but is not offered within this text.

The tunics mentioned by Paulus were belted and billowing, and if the contemporary depictions of men are to be taken literally, may well have had incorporated gussets. It is possible that the length of the tunic also implied an elevated social status, although the argument for this is undeveloped – clearly a particularly interesting area of continued research. However, using Langobardic art, Godino suggests three discernibly different types of tunic: one having a wide border around a circular collar, leading to a vertical strip on the chest; another with similar neck and chest detail, but continuing down the arms into a T-shape; and one example taken from a depiction of Longinus at S. Maria Antiqua, Rome, with a narrow piped collar, chest strip and cuff detail.

One could suspect that Langobardic accessories would be a substantial area of study in itself, as it would seem that the devil was indeed in the details, from the remarkably modern 'hipster' woolly hats to ornate 5-piece belts. Langobard belt buckles may not just have communicated a man's social position, but served also as apotropaic objects, incorporating symbolism from their Nordic pagan origins and fusing it with Roman iconography, displaying an evolving identity. These belts were, not surprisingly, used to carry weapons such as the *spatha* blade, found as part of a burial assemblage at Collegno, Italy.

While the Collegno *spatha* had an alder wood and herringbone fabric scabbard, with a goatskin fur lining, the leather belt it connected to was broken, with its metal components scattered. Using the art sources across the Langobardic regions depicting male costume, a functional reconstruction was created. However, the scatter of the metal buckles and links may tell their own fascinating story, fleshing out the burial rites of a culture on the borderline of a pagan past and a Christian future.

There is some evidence to suggest that high status objects such as belts may have been broken apart before burial, with some pieces being incorporated into other, later, grave goods. In the Collegno necropolis, four graves contained inlayed belts with metal plates with different chronologies or styles, possibly indicating they came from different belts, perhaps as heirloom pieces passed down through time. This practice has also been noted at burials in

Mezzane-Calvisano and in Campo Marchione, a powerful gesture of fraternal connectedness, passing the baton (or *spatha*?) to the next generation of warrior, so that their male relatives would still be beside them.

This little book is well illustrated with colour photographs, though is perhaps best thought of as a teaser for a major work which simply *must* be produced, to elaborate on elements of research only mentioned briefly here. The textile chapter in particular will possibly leave you in a similar frame of mind as it did me, aching for a book which incorporates swatches of the fabrics, to feel them and scrutinise the weaving methods. In short, this book will leave you wanting more. It is seldom one gets to read an archaeological version of the Langobard L'Uomo Vogue! There is much to delight both experimental archaeologists and interested readers.

Book information:

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