

The Narrative Worlds of Paul the Deacon

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Between Empires and Identities in Lombard Italy

Christopher Heath

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For Alice and Drogo

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

Christopher Heath

Levenshulme, November 2015

List of Abbreviations

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 *Vir valde Peritus*: Paul the Deacon and his Contexts

The Downfall

For the year 774 the *Annales Regni Francorum* record:

Et revertente domno Carolo rege a Roma et iterum ad Papiam pervenit ipsum civitatem coepit et Desiderium regem cum uxore et filia vel cum omni thesauro eius palatii. Ibiq̃ue venientes omnes Longobardi de cunctis civitatibus Italiae subdiderunt se in dominio domni gloriosi Caroli regis et Francorum.

And returning from Rome, the Lord King Charles came to Pavia again, seized the same city and King Desiderius with his wife and daughter together with all the treasure of his palace. And all the Lombards from all the cities of Italy came there and placed themselves under the power of the glorious lord King Charles and the Franks.¹

The *Liber Pontificalis*, not known for a positive view of the Lombards, reported that the *ira Dei* (the anger of God) had ‘raged and stormed against all the Lombards’ and that Charlemagne, the *excellentissimus Francorum rex* (most excellent King of the Franks) ‘had subjected the entire kingdom of the Lombards to his power’ (... *et suae potestati cunctum regem Langobardorum subiugavit*).² The siege of Pavia, within which the final Lombard king Desiderius (r. 757-774) had sheltered, and its surrender marked both the conclusion of Charlemagne’s (r. 768-814) campaign in Italy and the end of an independent Lombard kingdom. This kingdom had maintained its survival for over two hundred years despite invasions of Avars, Franks, and Byzantines. Sixteen years later Charlemagne was to mark his hegemony in the West with his imperial coronation, which attached the *regnum Langobardorum* to a revived western Roman Empire that had comprehensively eclipsed Byzantine power in northern and central Italy.

1 Pertz and Kurze (eds.), *MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, p. 38 and King, *Charlemagne*, pp. 76-77 (amended by me).

2 Migne (ed.), *Anastasii Abbatis*, col. 1179-1180 and Davis, *Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes*, p. 142.

Yet Charlemagne's success at this point was not the first attempt to forge a new political configuration that encompassed the whole Italian peninsula. Lombard kings such as Liutprand (r. 712-744), Aistulf (r. 749-756), and Desiderius had all attempted to create a kingdom that controlled all of Italy. An increasingly self-confident orthodox ideology, a notable element of the 'New Kingship' of Perctarit (r. 661-662 and 672-688), and Perctarit's son Cunincpert (688-700), allied with enhanced abilities and territorial ambitions of hegemony, failed to assuage implacable papal antipathy.³ It was this papal opposition that was to invoke Frankish intervention and the Lombard downfall.⁴

Both the life and works of Paul the Deacon shadow these momentous changes in Italy. As an important commentator, his works have been interrogated for their 'function, conception and intention' with respect to the events of 773-774 and its effects upon the situation on the ground.⁵ His physical presence at three of the courts associated with the dramatic events of 774 – those of the Lombard kings in Pavia, the Lombard dukes in Benevento, and Charlemagne in Francia – preclude a straightforward association between on the one hand his ethnic loyalties and on the other his obligations to his patrons. Despite, or even because of this proximity to the main protagonists, Paul made few direct references to the Lombard kingdom's downfall. His remarks on this subject are somewhat equivocal. On the one hand none of his works deal directly in detail or at length with the end of the Lombard kingdom. This may be simply because it was not an area that was directly relevant for his compositional purposes.⁶ On the other hand, it is clearly mentioned in passing in the *HL* where he observes:

Veniet autem tempus, quando ipsum oraculum habebitur despectui et tunc gens ipsa peribit. Quod nos ita factum esse probavimus, qui ante Langobardorum perditionem eandem beatis Iohannis basilicam, quae ubique in loco qui Modicia dicitur est constituta, per viles personas ordinari conspeximus, ita ut indignis et adulteris non pro vitae merito, sed praemiorum datione isdem locus venerabilis largiretur.

3 Delogu, Guillou & Ortalli, *Longobardi e Bizantini*, pp. 96-107; Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy*, pp. 28-47; and Gasparri, *Italia Longobarda*, pp. 74-99.

4 This may be termed the 'standard narrative', but it is predominantly, as Pohl observes, based on hostile Frankish and Papal sources. See Pohl, *Gens ipsa peribit*, pp. 67-78, at p. 67.

5 Hartmann, *Vitam litteris*, p. 71.

6 Clearly, there would be no particular need to mention the end of the Lombard kingdom in three of the four prose narratives we have from Paul. It is not even logically necessary for the end of the kingdom to be discussed in the *HL*.

But a time shall come when this place of prayer will be held in contempt and then the people itself shall perish. We have proved that this has so occurred, since we have seen that before the fall of the Langobards, this same Basilica of blessed John which was established in the place called *Modicia* (Monza) was governed by vile persons so that this holy place was bestowed upon the unworthy and adulterous, not for the merits of their lives, but in the giving of spoils.⁷

This is a significant and important passage whose immediate context in the *HL* was the failure and discomfiture of one (Byzantine) emperor and consequently the survival of Lombard polities in Italy. Whilst we do not discover who the *vilas personas* were or the foundation for Paul's (rather personal) rancour, his reference to the *Langobardorum perditionem* is clear. As Pohl suggests there was 'no future for the Lombards from Paul's point of view'.⁸ Elsewhere, however, in the earlier *Gesta Episcopum Mettensium*, Paul does deal directly with the events of 774. He writes:

Denique inter plura et Miranda quae gessit, Langobardorum gentem bis iam a patre devictam, altero eorum rege cui Desiderius nomen erat capto, alteroque qui dicebatur Adelgisus et cum genitore regnantem suo, Constantinopolim pulso universam sine gravi praelio suae subdidit dicioni. The people of the Lombards [had] formerly [been] twice subdued by [his] father (i.e. Pepin I). [Charles] among his many admirable achievements placed them completely under his rule without a severe battle. One of their kings named Desiderius was taken captive, the other one called Adelgisus who reigned with his father was driven away to Constantinople.⁹

'It was', concluded Paul, 'hard to know what to admire more in such a man; courage in war, celebrated wisdom or proficiency in all the liberal arts' (*De quo viro nescias, utrum virtutem in eo bellicam, an sapientiae claritatem omniumque liberalium artium magis admireris peritiam*).¹⁰ Such remarks would clearly chime with Charlemagne's description of Paul as his *clientulo*

7 MGH *SrL*, p. 147 and Foulke, p. 219 (with amendments).

8 Pohl, *Gens ipsa peribit*, p. 70. Bullough suggests that Paul's reference in *HL* I.1 – 'that the Lombards had ruled happily in Italy' (*quae postea in Italia feliciter regnavit*) – also implicitly refers to the end of the *gens* appears rather less certain. Bullough, *Ethnic History and the Carolingians*, p. 88.

9 MGH *SS*, p. 265 and Goffart, *Paul the Deacon's Gesta Episcoporum Mettensium*, p. 85 (translation amended slightly by me). See also Kempf, *Paul the Deacon*, p. 75.

10 MGH *SS*, p. 265 and Goffart, *Metz*, p. 85

(client).¹¹ Gasparri suggests that this is simply the ‘voice of the victors’, but one may conclude that this is a prime example of the ambivalence and adaptability (*anpassungsfähig*) of Paul’s works.¹² Such adaptability is further exemplified, on the other hand, by his closeness with the rulers of Benevento, which remained fundamentally beyond the control of Charlemagne. Both Arichis II (r. 758-787) and his wife Adelperga (the daughter of Desiderius) were connected to Paul through their patronage and both are praised in commissions that Paul had completed.¹³ Finally, one has to wonder whether the involvement of Paul’s brother Arichis in the revolt of Hrodgaud of Friuli in 775-776 was condoned in any active sense by Paul. Indeed, one could suggest that the very act of creation of a *Historia Langobardorum*, soon after the end of its independence, is both provocative and indicative of a desire to sustain an identity now forcibly and uncomfortably submerged within a Frankish hegemony.¹⁴

Discussions of Paul’s responses to the end of the Lombard kingdom are not, however, as diagnostic of his responses to issues generally as might be expected by modern commentators. As we have seen from this issue alone it is not possible, and moreover it is not wise, to seek to find one reaction of Paul’s which will ‘explain’ all his works or what he says at any particular juncture. This indicates why it has not been possible to attain a consensus in the literature because it is simply not possible to find an all-encompassing link between identity and authorial output. The range of opinion reflects Paul’s ambivalence and adaptability. McKitterick took the view that the *HL* was an *admonitio* for Charlemagne’s son Pepin (r. 781-810) in his role as King of Italy.¹⁵ Whereas Goffart has suggested that it was a work designed to guide the Beneventan Grimoald III (r. 788-806), the son of Arichis II, in his efforts to maintain a precarious Beneventan independence.¹⁶ Other theories have suggested that Paul was motivated by a desire to promote the Lombard identity;¹⁷ that his agenda was based on the interests of Montecassino;¹⁸ or

11 Migne, *PL*, xcv, cols. 1159-1160 and King, *Charlemagne*, p. 208.

12 Gasparri, *The Fall of the Lombard Kingdom*, pp. 41-65, and Hartmann, *Vitam Litteris*, p. 71.

13 Crivellucci, *HR*, pp. 3-4; *MGH SrL*, pp. 13-14; and 191; Godman, *Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance*, p. 3; and Neff, *Die Gedichte*, pp. 14-19.

14 Hartmann, *Vitam litteris*, pp. 75-84, especially pp. 79-81. See Gasparri, 774: *Ipotesi*.

15 McKitterick, *Paul the Deacon*, pp. 319-339 and McKitterick, *History and Memory*.

16 *Narrators*, pp. 333 and 380-381 and Krüger, *Zur ‘beneventanischen’ Konzeption*, p. 34. However, McKitterick: ‘I find myself totally unconvinced by Goffart’s inferences that Paul wrote the History of the Lombards for the Lombards and especially for the Lombards of Benevento’, McKitterick, *Paul the Deacon*, p. 326.

17 Pohl, *Paulus Diaconus*, pp. 378-379, and Pohl, *Paolo Diacono*, pp. 419-420.

18 Costambeys, *Monastic Environment of Paul the Deacon in Chiesa*, p. 138.

that his work was indicative of sympathy for Greek theology and policies.¹⁹ Whilst each idea has been carefully constructed and is internally cogent, they cannot all be entirely correct at the same time. The reality may be that all these suggestions have some value when one considers the life and works of Paul in total, but neither Paul as an individual nor his reactions to his reality would have remained static and fixed over a writing career that lasted more than thirty years.

Thus, mapping Paul's location at any particular time and matching this to his actions and his writings to elucidate an over-arching response to his past and identity will generate ambivalence and contradiction. In short, it will not work. Additionally this approach does not put his narratives and their structures at the forefront of analysis, and thus underestimates the complexities of his viewpoints to his past and present realities. Paul's narratives have been described as a patchwork, a jumble of genres combining dynastic, religious, and national history with hagiography, biography, and legendary elements.²⁰ Despite this jumble there is structure and organisation in what Paul has chosen to say and how he has chosen to do so. As shall be demonstrated later, Paul uses a wide range of sources in constructing his narratives. Some sources are more or less transparent, others not. It is evident that not only does he use his own experience, but also the reports and memories of others.²¹ In this way Paul's work can fall between the 'hard' modern paradigms of 'fact' and 'fiction' and thus become 'fiction of fact'.²² It is all too easy to forget that Paul was writing history, that he manages and uses sources and in this process edits and selects material. It is thus subject to the usual vagaries of extant sources, their reliabilities, their discourses, and the dislocation caused by the time gap between the events depicted and the act of writing. With these issues in mind, this chapter will now consider what we know of Paul's life.

19 Herren, *Theological Aspects*, pp. 223-235. For a contrary view, see Pohl, *Paolo Diacono*, p. 421. 'È ovvio che Paolo era del tutto contrario ad ogni alleanza dei Longobardi con Bisanzio contro i Franchi'.

20 'L'Historia Langobardorum è un originale miscuglio di generi letterari diversi, storia nazionale, storia dinastica, sociale, locale, ed agiografia, biografia ed excursus leggendari; mai storia ecclesiastica e mai storia annalistica.' Zanella, *La Legittimazione del Potere*, p. 69.

21 MGH SrL, pp. 51 and 124; Foulke, pp. 8-10 and 166-167; and Capo, pp. 200-201 and pp. 501-502.

22 Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages* and Erickson, *The Medieval Vision*; Pohl, *Paulus Diaconus*, p. 381; and White, *Content of the Form*, pp. 44-45 and p. 57.

The Life of Paul the Deacon

As an eighth-century figure, both the movements and activities of Paul the Deacon are comparatively well-known. He has been connected not only with the Lombard courts of the kings in Pavia and the Duke/Princes of Benevento in the south, but also as one of Charlemagne's 'collected scholars' in Francia.²³ Significant gaps in our knowledge remain, however, and continue to present interpretational difficulties. Here, hindsight is not a help. Underpinning modern comment on his life are a number of theories as to where he might have been at significant moments in his life. As a corollary these theories are based on un-provable assumptions as to why he may have been where it is suggested he was. McKitterick sums up this process:

All Paul's works have been fitted into a chronology of Paul's life according to assumptions about his piety, the peace and seclusion needed for writing, his relationship with Adelperga, his sojourn at Montecassino and where he was at the time of writing particular works.²⁴

The results have often been speculative and for that reason alone unsatisfactory. With this in mind, we shall analyse the contexts of Paul's life, in the first place, by considering the information that either contemporaries or Paul himself provided. Thereafter, we shall return to discuss the broader panorama of biographical issues that cannot be resolved entirely.

It can generally be agreed that Paul was born into a noble family (although this is based on rather thin evidence) in the province of Friuli in the north-east of Italy towards the end of the first quarter of the eighth century.²⁵ Subsequently, he spent an unknown number of years at the Lombard court in Pavia before moving south to Benevento, possibly accompanying Adelperga, the daughter of king Desiderius, as she married Arichis II.²⁶ At

23 Mary Garrison's memorable phrase in Garrison, *Letters to a King*, p. 305.

24 McKitterick, *Paul the Deacon*, p. 3.

25 See for instance F.H. Blackburne-Daniell's *Paulus Diaconus* in Smith and Wace, *A Dictionary of Christian Biography*, p. 272 where 'Paulus' is described as 'from a Lombard family, probably noble of Friuli'. Similarly Kempf: 'Paul was probably born ... to an aristocratic family in the duchy of Friuli', Kempf, *Paul the Deacon, Liber de episcopis Mettensibus*, p. 2. One indication of this noble lineage may be noted in Paul's poem-plea to Charlemagne when he refers to his family's tenuous hold on nobility. See Neff, *Gedichte*, p. 54.

26 Earlier historiography repeated the late tradition of Leo Marsicanus (c. 1100) that Paul was Chancellor (*cancellarius*) or notary to Desiderius. See Blackburne-Daniell, *Paulus Diaconus*, p. 272.

an unspecified moment, after perhaps three to four years, Paul returned to the south of Italy and his monastery and (again, presumably) died there between 796 and 799.²⁷ These are the broad contours of Paul's life, but it is possible and useful to consider at greater length some of the issues of the less certain aspects of his life.

Paul himself remains a source for elements of his background and life. Even this, however, provides rather limited biographical content – save, significantly, for his personal genealogy. This genealogy is included within the *HL* and purports to delineate his family's origins from the first arrival of the Lombards in Italy up to his own birth.²⁸ This genealogy is significant. It forms part of a remarkable chapter in the *HL* (IV.37) which itself is composed of three sections; first, an account of an Avar invasion into Friuli and the treachery of Romilda; secondly, the fortunate escape of the future king Grimoald (r. 662-671); and, finally Paul's digression on his family and origins, which partially mirrors his account of Grimoald's adventures as a youth. Even so it is clear that Paul realises that his interpellation is a digression to his main theme as he remarks:

Exigit vero nunc locus, postposita generali historia, pauca etiam privatim de mea, qui haec scribo, genealogia retexere.

The topic now requires me to postpone my general history and relate also a few matters of a private character concerning the genealogy of myself who write these things.²⁹

Subsequently he tells us that his family arrived in Italy when the Lombards left Pannonia (i.e. 568-569): *'Eo denique tempore quo Langobardorum gens de Pannoniis ad Italiam venit'* [At the time when the nation of the Langobards came to Italy from Pannonia].³⁰ Although, as has often been pointed out, Paul may have missed a generation in his genealogy, he associates his great-grandfather (*pro-avus*) Lopichis with the time of the same Avar invasion of the early seventh century that also saw Grimoald, the future Lombard king, and his brothers carted off into captivity. Akin to Grimoald, Lopichis ultimately evades the clutches of the Avars and returns to the ruined family

27 See Kempf, *Paul the Deacon, Liber de episcopis Mettensibus*, p.3, who notes Paul's letter transmitted to Hadrian I at the request of Charlemagne in 785-786.

28 *MGH SrL*, pp. 131-132; *Foulke*, pp. 184-187; *Capo*, pp. 512-513; and Hodgkin, *Italy and Her Invaders: The Lombard Kingdom*, p. 58.

29 *MGH SrL*, p. 131 and *Foulke*, p. 184. 'Retexere' has the sense of un-ravel or un-weave, which is not brought out in Foulke's translation.

30 *MGH SrL*, p. 131 and *Foulke*, p. 184 with my own slight variation in the translation.

home in Friuli, where, although never explicitly stated, it would seem the family of Paul remained and where he was born.

Beyond this remarkable personal history of his family, we are also given a number of notices that provide an idea of Paul's own sense of identity; his physical presence in particular places (often as simple parenthesis); and, his own witness to features or events that he discusses. In the *HL* Paul mentions himself on fifteen separate occasions; these may be divided into incidental remarks, references to his activity as a writer, and his presence in various localities.³¹ It will be useful to consider these references at greater length here.

First, his incidental references might be said to add little to our global knowledge of his biography, but do contribute to a fuller appreciation of him as an individual in the eighth-century.³² That said, secondly, his comments on his literary works, his working abilities (and methods), and outputs are more significant. When introducing a poem in honour of Benedict of Nursia (c.480-547/8), he says, for instance:

*Ego quoque pro parritate ingenii mei ad honorem tanti patris singula eius
miracula per singula distica elegiaco metro hoc modo contexui.*

I also according to my meagre talent have woven together in the following manner in honour of so great a father, each of his miracles by means of corresponding distichs in elegiac metre.³³

His literary humility is again expressed in reference to his own earlier completed works. In a discussion of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), he remarks:

*Ideo autem de beato Gregorio plura dicere obmittimus quia iam ante aliquod
annos eius vitam Deo auxiliante texuimus. In qua quae dicenda fuerant
iuxta tenuitatis nostrae vires universa discripsimus.*

We omit to say anything more concerning the blessed Gregory because some years ago we composed his Life in which according to our slender ability we sketched in writing what was to be told.³⁴

31 *MGH SrL*, pp. 50, 51, 64, 68, 76, 80, 87, 95, 105, 131, 134, 136, 167, and 170 and *Foulke*, pp. 7, 8, 10, 48, 49, 64, 70, 81, 99, 128, 184, 194, 201, 257, and 263.

32 *MGH SrL*, p. 50, *Foulke*, p. 7 and *Capo*, p. 374.

33 *MGH SrL*, p. 64, *Foulke*, p. 48 (with amendment) and *Capo*, pp. 411-418.

34 *MGH SrL*, p. 105, *Foulke*, p. 128, and *Capo*, p. 479.

Further, in a passage on Merovingian Gaul he discusses Arnulf (c.582-c.640) the ancestor of the Pippinids and Carolingians, and introduces the detail that:

Sed et ego in libro quem de episcopis eiusdem civitatis conscripsi flagitante Angelramno, viro mitissimo et sanctitate praecipuo, praefatae ecclesiae archiepiscopo, de hoc sacratissimo viro Arnulfo quaedam eius miracula conpossui, quae modo superfluum duxi replicare.

But I too in a book which I wrote concerning the bishops of this city (i.e. Metz), at the request of Angelramn, archbishop of the aforesaid church, a very gentle man and distinguished by holiness, have set down concerning this most holy man Arnulf certain of his miracles which I have considered it merely superfluous to repeat here.³⁵

Whilst we might expect Paul to employ modesty when referring to *'tenuitatis nostrae vires'* (our slender powers) both passages, as we shall see subsequently, highlight two enduring facets of Paul's prose works. First, his admiration for Gregory the Great manifested not only in the *HL*, but also demonstrated in his short work devoted to the Pope, the *Vita Sancti Gregorii Magni*, which will be discussed below; and secondly, the role of patronage in these works which were commissioned and then completed by Paul. Paul's movements and presence in various localities adds further texture to his comments. Thirdly, there are a group of references that record Paul's travels. There are three important notices. Whilst his remarks on both Thionville and Poitiers are interposed into the main narratives as asides, there is still significance in the content. For Thionville he records:

Ego autem in Gallia Belgica in loco qui Totonis villa dicitur constitutes ...

But when I was stationed in Belgic Gaul in a place which is called *Villa Totonis* ...³⁶

But his observations in this early section of Book I merely amount to a comparison of the measurement of his own shadow in the north of Gaul as opposed to Italy.³⁷ His second notice refers to his visit to Poitiers to see

35 MGH *SrL*, p. 170 and Foulke, p. 263. For Arnulf see Story (ed.), *Charlemagne*, p. 32 and Cracco-Ruggini, *The Crisis of the Noble Saint*, pp. 116-153.

36 MGH *SrL*, p. 50 and Foulke, p. 8.

37 MGH *SrL*, p. 50 and Foulke, p. 8.

the grave of Venantius Fortunatus (c.540-c.600), an earlier Italian who had moved to Francia:

Cum illuc orationis gratia, adventassem hoc epitaphium, rogatus ab Apro, eiusdem loci abbato.

For the purpose of prayer upon the request of Aper, the abbot of that place.³⁸

Paul uses this chapter (II.13) to not only relate at length the career of Venantius, but to also include his own *epitaphium* composed and inscribed, we are told, upon the request of Aper (d.c. 799). In terms of Paul's biography we can draw a number of conclusions from these two notices alone: once again the role of patronage in the composition of Paul's works; his connections to the elite networks of the Frankish court that facilitated Paul's own movement throughout Gaul, from Thionville to Metz to Poitiers; and, of course, the extended stay Paul 'enjoyed' in the north.

The third reference has assumed greater importance in the discussion of scholars. Paul recalls an occasion when he was present at the court of the Lombard kings and saw the skull-cup of the Gepid king, Cunimund (d. 567):

Hoc ne cui videatur impossible veritatem in Christo loquor ego hoc poculum vidi in quodam die festo Ratchis principem ut illud convivis suis ostentaret manu tenentem.

Lest this should seem impossible to anyone I speak the truth in Christ. I saw Prince Ratchis, holding this cup in his hand on a certain festal day to show it to his guests.³⁹

So far as biographical significance is concerned the assumption has been made that not only does this passage place Paul in close proximity to the Lombard king Ratchis (r. 744-749 and 756-757), but also puts him at the court in Pavia at some point between 744 and 749 i.e. during the first tenure of Ratchis as king rather than the short, contested, and ultimately unsuccessful

38 *MGH SRL*, p. 80, *Foulke*, p. 70 and *Capo*, pp. 436-437. For Venantius Fortunatus, see George, *Venantius Fortunatus*; Brennan, *The Career of Venantius Fortunatus*, pp. 49-78; and Godman, *Poets and Emperors*, pp. 1-37. Aper was abbot of St. Hilary, Poitiers between 780 and 792 – see *MGH SRL*, p. 80 n.2 and *Capo*, p. 437.

39 *MGH SRL*, pp. 87-88; *Foulke*, p. 81; and *Capo*, p. 453. Most commentators presume that the production occurred at the Lombard court in Pavia.

period of Ratchis as Lombard ruler between late 756 and early 757.⁴⁰ It may be, however, that Paul points to this second period by his reference to Ratchis as a 'prince' rather than as a 'king' with intriguing possibilities regarding Paul's presence at Montecassino and his own loyalties to Ratchis. More generally, the passage reinforces not only Paul's Friulan origins, but also his family's connections to that of Pemmo, *Dux* of Friuli (r. 701/12-c. 738), whose sons Ratchis and Aistulf (r. 749-756) subsequently occupied the Lombard throne.⁴¹ It is tempting to believe that 'the quality of his family' rendered Paul's presence in Pavia a natural outcome of the assumption of power by Ratchis, but apart from this reference and Paul's attendance at the classes of Flavian at court, there remain significant un-resolvable issues.⁴² Despite his indication that he spent time in Pavia, Paul does not say when he arrived, when he left, or indeed what it was exactly he did whilst in residence in the capital. Indeed, for the period between 749 and his Frankish journey in the early 780s, a significant proportion of his adult life, there is no certainty. The decade of the 750s is particularly obscure. Goffart's suggestion that Paul remained at Pavia during the rule of both Ratchis and Aistulf when 'it is tempting to guess that this was where he was ordained deacon and started upon the path of ecclesiastical preferment' remains unverifiable in the extant evidence. Further, Bullough's comment that:

where he was in the 750s ... he nowhere indicates. But he clearly managed to extend his book-learning, write his first surviving poem, *Ordinar tuas laudes, o maxime Lari*, and (most importantly), successfully negotiate a change of ruling dynasty⁴³.

This amounts to the sum of our knowledge of this time with regard to Paul and his activities. On the evidence that Paul's notices supply, it is apparent that a comprehensive biography cannot be reconstructed; instead we are left with snapshots of his activities, albeit evocative in various places in

40 Miller, *Papal-Lombard Relations*, pp. 363-366. Ratchis did not use the title 'King', but 'Servant of Christ and Prince of the Lombards', and Hallenbeck, *Pavia and Rome*, pp. 85-90.

41 Gasparri, *I Duchi Longobardi*, p. 69 for Ratchis as *dux* and pp. 70-71 for Aistulf as *dux*.

42 Bougard, *Paul Diaconus*, p. 6. Leonardi also suggests that there was a '*familiarità con la famiglia reale*' and '*è rapporto con re Ratchis e poi con Desiderio*', Leonardi, *La figura di Paolo Diacono*, p. 13. Early commentators suggested that Paul was the *cancellarius* of Desiderius; see for instance Vossius, *De Historicis Latinis*, p. 290, but such a view was based on a late tradition, see Blackburne-Daniell, *Paulus Diaconus*, p. 272.

43 Bullough, *Ethnic Inheritance*, pp. 86-87. For the poem, see Neff, *Die Gedichte*, pp. 1-6.