

many survived and merged with the Lombards to form a new composite landed elite. Lombard nobles took possession of lands around Turin: the hill of Superga across the Po from the city supposedly takes its name from a Lombard lady, Saroperga, who was once its owner. The story of the Lombard kingdom is thus one of gradual social and cultural assimilation between conquerors and conquered. Over the two centuries during which they ruled northern Italy the Lombards became gradually Romanized. One unmistakable sign of this slow cultural fusion is the disappearance of the Lombard language, as the late Latin vernacular of the indigenous population became the common language of Romans and non-Romans alike. Another indication of this cultural shift is the steady progress of Catholic orthodoxy at the expense of Arianism: by the end of the seventh century there were no more Arian bishops at Turin.

The Lombards did not attempt to preserve the Roman forms of government, as Theoderic and the Ostrogoths had done, although they maintained the use of Latin as the language of administration. They developed their own law-code, drawn up in the middle of the seventh century at the order of King Rothari, to serve as a parallel system of jurisprudence alongside the Roman law of the indigenous population. The Lombards abandoned the Roman tax system and supported their warriors directly from the produce of the soil: a sign that economic regression was causing a scarcity of money, which made it impossible to levy taxes and pay the army in cash. The Lombards also did away with the old Roman provincial organization, and replaced it with a system of about thirty duchies, centered on strategic cities, and governed by their local military commanders, or dukes. In northwestern Italy Turin, Ivrea, Asti and Novara became the seats of Lombard duchies. The dukes enjoyed a wide degree of autonomy: in the duchy of Turin this was especially necessary because of the need to mobilize forces quickly to repel possible incursions across the Alps. All the Lombard dukes owed allegiance – nominally at least – to their king, whom they chose as their supreme leader in war, and who held court at Pavia. But the control he exercised over his subordinate dukes was limited, for they disposed of considerable military forces, under their direct command. Nonetheless the Lombard kingdom, loose and decentralized as it was, formed a coherent political structure, and constituted the point of origin out of which the later Kingdom of Italy, the *Regnum Italiae*, would emerge under Frankish rule in the ninth century.

The dukes of Turin played a prominent part in the history of the Lombard kingdom, reflecting the strategic importance of their duchy. In the early years after the conquest the throne remained vacant, until