

= Helmichis =

Helmichis (fl . 572) was a Lombard noble who killed his king , Alboin , in 572 and unsuccessfully attempted to usurp his throne . Alboin 's queen , Rosamund , supported or at least did not oppose Helmichis ' plan to remove the king , and after the assassination Helmichis married her . The assassination was assisted by Peredeo , the king 's chamber @-@ guard , who in some sources becomes the material executer of the murder . Helmichis is first mentioned by the contemporary chronicler Marius of Avenches , but the most detailed account of his endeavours derives from Paul the Deacon 's late 8th @-@ century *Historia Langobardorum* .

The background to the assassination begins when Alboin killed the king of the Gepids in 567 and captured the king 's daughter Rosamund . Alboin then led his people into Italy , and by 572 had settled himself in Verona , which made him vulnerable to the ambitions of other prominent Lombards , such as Helmichis , who was Alboin 's foster @-@ brother and arms @-@ bearer . After Alboin 's death , Helmichis attempted to gain the throne . He married Rosamund to legitimize his position as new king , but immediately faced stiff opposition from his fellow Lombards who suspected Helmichis of conniving with the Byzantines ; this hostility eventually focused around the duke of Ticinum Cleph , supporter of an aggressive policy towards the Empire . Rather than going to war , Helmichis , Rosamund and their followers escaped to Ravenna , the capital of Byzantine Italy , where they were received with full honours by the authorities . Once in Ravenna , Rosamund was persuaded by the Byzantine prefect Longinus to kill Helmichis in order to be free to marry him . Rosamund proceeded to poison Helmichis , but the latter , having understood what his wife had done to him , forced her to drink the cup too , so both of them died . After their deaths , Longinus dispatched Helmichis ' forces to Constantinople , while the remaining Lombards had already found a new king in Cleph .

= = Background = =

The oldest author to write about Helmichis is the contemporary chronicler Marius of Avenches . In his account he mentions that " Alboin was killed by his followers , that is Hilmaegis with the rest , his wife agreeing to it " . Marius continues by adding that , after killing the king , Helmichis married his widow and tried unsuccessfully to gain the throne . His attempt failed and he was forced to escape together with his wife , the royal treasure and the troops that had sided with him in the coup . This account has strong similarities with what is told in the *Origo* . The *Origo* would in its turn become a direct source for the *Historia Langobardorum* .

The background to the assassination begins when Alboin , king of the Lombards , a Germanic people living in Pannonia (in the region of modern Hungary) , went to war against the neighbouring Gepids in 567 . In a decisive battle , Alboin killed the Gepid king Cunimund and captured the king 's daughter Rosamund ? later marrying her to guarantee the loyalty of the surviving Gepids . The following year , the Lombards migrated to Italy , a territory then held by the Byzantine Empire . In 569 Alboin took Mediolanum (Milan) , the capital of northern Italy , and by 570 he had assumed control of most of northern Italy . The Byzantine forces entrenched themselves in the strategic town of Ticinum (Pavia) , which they took only after a long siege . Even before taking Ticinum , the Lombards crossed the Apennines and invaded Tuscia . After the fall of Ticinum , Alboin chose Verona as his first permanent headquarters . In this town Alboin was assassinated in 572 and it is in these circumstances that Helmichis ' name is first heard of . Most of the available details are in the *Historia Langobardorum* .

= = Assassination = =

By settling himself in Verona and temporarily interrupting his chain of conquests , Alboin had weakened his popular standing as a charismatic warrior king . The first to take advantage of this was Rosamund , who could count on the support of the Gepid warriors in the town in her search for an opportunity to avenge the death of her father . To obtain this goal she persuaded Helmichis , spatharius (arms bearer) and foster brother of the king , and also head of a personal armed retinue

in Verona , to take part in a plot to eliminate Alboin and replace him on the throne . Helmichis persuaded Rosamund to involve Peredeo , described by Paul simply as " a very strong man " , who was seduced through a trick by the Queen and forced to consent to become the actual assassin .

This story is partly in conflict with what is told by the Origo , which has Peredeo acting as an instigator and not as the murderer . In a similar vein to the Origo is the account of Peredeo contained in the *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani* , where it is added that Peredeo was Alboin 's " chamber @-@ guard " , hinting that in the original version of the story Peredeo 's role may just have been to let in the real assassin , who is Helmichis in Agnellus ' account , as it had been in that of Marius . However , the primary intent of the *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani* may have been to obtain a more straightforward and coherent narrative by reducing the number of actors in the story , beginning with Peredeo . The disappearance of Peredeo , however , means that the role of Helmichis changes : while Paul presents him as " the efficient conspirator and killer " , with Agnellus he is a victim of a ruthless and domineering queen .

According to historian Paolo Delogu it may be that Agnellus ' narrative better reflects Lombard oral tradition than Paul 's . In his interpretation , Paul 's narrative represents a late distortion of the Germanic myths and rituals contained in the oral tradition . In a telling consistent with Germanic tradition , it would be Helmichis who was seduced by the queen , and by sleeping with him Rosamund would pass Alboin 's royal charisma magically to the king 's prospective murderer . A symbol of this passage of powers is found in Paul 's account of the assassin 's entry : Alboin 's inability to draw his sword represents here his loss of power .

After the king 's death on June 28 , 572 , Helmichis married Rosamund and claimed the Lombard throne in Verona . The marriage was important for Helmichis : it legitimized his rule because , judging from Lombard history , royal prerogatives could be inherited by marrying the king 's widow ; and the marriage was a guarantee for Helmichis of the loyalty of the Gepids in the army , who sided with the queen since she was Cunimund 's daughter .

= = Failure = =

Behind the coup were almost certainly the Byzantines , who had every interest in removing a dangerous enemy and replacing him with somebody , if not from a pro @-@ Byzantine faction , at least less actively aggressive . Gian Piero Boggetti advances a few hypotheses about Helmichis ' motivation for his coup : his reason could have involved a family link to the Lethings , the Lombard royal dynasty that had been dispossessed by Alboin 's father Audoin ; or he may have been related through Amalafrid to the Amali , the leading dynasty of the Goths . Helmichis easily obtained the support of the Lombards in Verona , and he probably hoped to sway all the warriors and Lombard dukes to his side by having Alboin 's only child , Albsuinda , under his control . He may also have hoped for Byzantine help in buying the dukes ' loyalty economically .

Helmichis ' coup ultimately failed because it met strong opposition from the many Lombards who wanted to continue the war against the Byzantines and to confront the regicides . Faced with the prospect of going to war at overwhelming odds , Helmichis asked for help from the Byzantines . The praetorian prefect Longinus enabled him to avoid a land route possibly held by hostile forces , by shipping him instead down the Po to Byzantine @-@ held Ravenna , together with his wife , his Lombard and Gepid troops , the royal treasure and Albsuinda . Boggetti believes that Longinus may have planned to make the Lombards weaker by depriving them of any legitimate heir . In addition , because of the ongoing war , it was hard to assemble all the warriors to elect a new king formally . This plan was brought to nothing by the troops stationed in Ticinum , who elected their duke Cleph king , having it in mind to continue Alboin 's aggressive policy . In contrast , Wolfram argues that Cleph was elected in Ticinum while Helmichis was still making his bid for the crown in Verona .

= = Death = =

Once in Ravenna , Helmichis and Rosamund rapidly became estranged . According to Paul , Longinus persuaded Rosamund to get rid of her husband so that he could marry her . To

accomplish this , she made him drink a cup full of poison ; before dying , however , Helmichis understood what his wife had done and forced her to drink the cup too , so they both died . According to Wolfram , there may be some historical truth in the account of Longinus ' proposal to Rosamund , as it was possible to achieve Lombard kingship by marrying the queen , but the story of the two lovers ' end is not historical but legendary . The mutual murder as told by Agnellus is given a different interpretation by Joaquin Martinez Pizarro : he sees Helmichis ' last action as a symbol of how the natural hierarchy of sexes is at last restored , after the queen 's actions had unnaturally modified the proper equilibrium .

At this point , Longinus sent the royal treasure and Albsuinda to Constantinople , the Empire 's capital , together with Helmichis ' forces , which were to become Byzantine mercenaries . This was a common Byzantine strategy , already applied previously to the Ostrogoths , by which large national contingents were relocated to be used in other theatres . These are believed to be the same 60 000 Lombards that are attested by John of Ephesus as being active in Syria in 575 against the Persians . As for Albsuinda , the Byzantine diplomacy probably aimed to use her as a political tool to impose a pro - Byzantine king on the Lombards . According to Agnellus , once Longinus ' actions came to the attention of emperor Justin II they were greatly praised , and the emperor gave lavish gifts to his official .

Cleph kept his throne for only 18 months before being assassinated by a slave . An important success for the Byzantines was that no king was proclaimed to succeed him , opening a decade of interregnum and making the Lombards who remained in Italy more vulnerable to attacks from Franks and Byzantines . It was only when faced with the danger of annihilation by the Franks in 584 that the Lombard dukes elected a new king in the person of Authari , son of Cleph , who began the definitive consolidation and centralization of the Lombard kingdom .

= = Early Middle Ages sources = =

Among the surviving Early Middle Ages sources , there are six that mention Helmichis by name . Of these , the only contemporary one is the *Chronica* of Marius of Avenches , written in the 580s . Marius was bishop of Aventicum , a town located in the western Alps in the Frankish Kingdom of Burgundy . Because of the small distance from Aventicum to the Italian peninsula , the chronicler had easy access to information regarding northern Italy . For this reason , historian Roger Collins considers the *Chronica* , though short , to be reliable on Italian matters . The remaining sources all come from Italy and were written in later centuries . Two of them were written in the 7th century , the *Continuatio Havniensis Prosperi* and the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* , both anonymous . The *Continuatio* is a chronicle written around 625 that has reached us in a single manuscript . As its name suggests , it is a continuation of the 5th century chronicle of Prosper of Aquitaine . Derived in considerable measure from the *Chronica Majora* of Isidore of Seville , it blames the Romans for their inability to defend Italy from foreign invaders , and praises the Lombards for defending the country from the Franks . This is the earliest surviving work to name Rosamund , the queen of the Lombards who plays a central role in Helmichis ' attested biography . The other 7th century work , the *Origo* , is a brief prose history of the Lombards that is essentially an annotated king list , although it begins with a description of the founding myth of the Lombard nation . Giorgio Ausenda believes that the *Origo* was written around 643 as a prologue to the *Edictum Rothari* , and continued to be updated till 671 . According to Walter Pohl , the author 's motives are mostly political : the *Origo* serves to consolidate the Lombards ' national identity by emphasising a shared history . Apart from the origin myth , the only more detailed account is the one concerning the death of Alboin , and thus Helmichis .

For the events surrounding 572 , the most exhaustive source available is Paul the Deacon 's *Historia Langobardorum* , a history of the Lombard nation up to 744 . The book was finished in the last two decades of the 8th century , after the Lombard Kingdom had been conquered by the Franks in 774 . Because of the apparent presence in the work of many fragments preserved from Lombard oral tradition , Paul 's work has been often interpreted as a tribute to a vanishing culture . Among these otherwise lost traditions stands the tale of Alboin 's death . According to Herwig Wolfram ,

what Paul deals with is an example of how nationally vital events were personalized to make them easier to preserve in the collective memory . Even later than the *Historia Langobardorum* , but possibly using earlier lost sources , are the last two primary sources to speak about Helmichis : the anonymous *Historia Langobardorum Codicis Gothani* and the *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis* written by Andreas Agnellus . The first is a brief Christianizing version of the *Origo* that was made in the first decade of the 9th century from a Carolingian point of view . The second was written in the 830s by a priest from Ravenna and is a history of the bishops who held the see of Ravenna through the ages . Agnellus ' passage on Alboin and Rosamund is mostly derived from Paul and little else .