

Episcopal authority and networks in Carolingian times: recent approaches and perspectives*

by Gianmarco De Angelis and Francesco Veronese

This paper introduces the volume, aiming first of all at presenting the historiographical framework in which the collected essays are placed and the common questions around which they revolve, with particular regard to typologies, characteristics, extension of the social and cultural networks that the Italian bishops built around themselves, and to their effects on the integration of the *regnum* in the Carolingian political structures.

Early Middle Ages; 9th century; Carolingian Italy; Manuscript studies; Literacy; Episcopal powers.

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1. *Carolingian ecclesia and multiple episcopal identities*

In the last two decades, studies on bishops and episcopal identity in the Carolingian age have participated in the profound renewal of interpretation to which the Carolingian world as a whole has been subjected¹. New approaches to the age-old question of the functioning – and, before that, the existence or otherwise – of state systems in early medieval Europe have led to a refocusing of attention on the vocabulary of the sources and the representations of public power they construct and transmit². The overlapping of meanings in the term *ecclesia*, highlighted by Mayke de Jong, has provided new bases for rethinking the relationship between public power and religious authorities³. The Carolingian *ecclesia*, as an ensemble of ecclesiastical structures and, in a broader sense, of all the people over whom the Frankish kings exercised their sovereignty, became the common framework within which to elaborate and give meaning to representations of society aimed at calling all its components to collaborate for the prosperity and stability of the social body and its rulers. A first, fundamental, subdivision was established between laymen and the clergy, based above all on the different ways in which the two groups reproduced themselves over time: through marriage and procreation for the former, through social and ritual means (priestly consecration) for the latter⁴. Within the group of ecclesiastics, a further distinction was made, taking up pre-existing patterns, between secular clerics, specialised in pastoral care, and monks, experts in intercessory prayer. For each of these groups (*ordines*), specific models of life and behaviour were identified and applied, and as many texts were produced, for example Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis* for clerics, and the *Regula Benedicti* for monks⁵. The laity were the recipients of moral teachings by means of treatises (*specula*) composed by leading intellectual figures of the Carolingian world, such as Alcuin, Paulinus of Aquileia, Jonas of Orléans, and Dhuoda⁶. The progressive elaboration of this image of

¹ Overview in Costambeys – Innes – MacLean, *The Carolingian World*.

² Historiographical account and some overall considerations were last proposed by Santos Salazar, *Governare la Lombardia*, pp. 15-27.

³ In particular de Jong, *Ecclesia*; de Jong, *The state of the church*; de Jong, *The two republics*.

⁴ Stone, *'In what way'*.

⁵ See for example the *Concilium Moguntinense*, pp. 259-260.

⁶ Stone, *Morality and Masculinity*.

society as divided into *ordines* aimed at framing each group – ideally, each individual – within it, establishing its position, and the contribution it was called upon to bring to the common good.

The Carolingian scheme of the *ordines*, long known and analysed in the historiography, has traditionally and for a long time been the basis of a clear distinction between the group of the laity and that of the ecclesiastics, meant as socially separate bodies, bearers of different interests and often in mutual conflict. This distinction and opposition were then used as instruments to interpret the peculiar (and ambiguous) political-institutional balance of the Carolingian world, and even the reasons for its dissolution⁷. The sovereigns, especially from Louis the Pious (814-840) onwards, used the ecclesiastical structures and their leaders, bishops and abbots, to counter the centrifugal thrusts and individual interests of the secular aristocracies, especially of those among their members who held public offices (counts, dukes, *marchiones*)⁸. In this way, however, they would have bestowed increasing quotas of public functions and lands on their ecclesiastical allies, ultimately emptying royal and imperial authority of its meaning and practical effectiveness⁹.

More recent approaches have allowed these readings to be nuanced. The greater emphasis on the ideological-discursive character of the distinctions internal within Carolingian society, has led to see them as a framework of representations and images aimed at legitimising the power of the Frankish sovereigns and at integrating the aristocracies into the shared management of public functions¹⁰. On this basis, the social, familial and cultural practices of the elites of the Carolingian world have also been observed from different perspectives, which have attenuated the image of incompatibility between the interests of the rulers and those of the aristocracies¹¹. A decisive contribution came from the analysis of these dynamics in terms of collaboration, competition and the intertwining between them, i.e. cooptation. Collaboration was what, for example, bishops and counts were called upon to do on several occasions in the capitularies, in order to support each other in the joint exercise of justice, a fact which Gerda Heydemann has recently observed from the point of view of its exegetical justifications¹². The competition between kin and political groups, strictly supervised and regulated by the Carolingians, aimed instead at obtaining public offices, lands and movable goods and fiscal bene-

⁷ *L'ambiguità delle istituzioni nell'Europa costruita dai Franchi* is just the title of an essay of Giovanni Tabacco (1975, repr. in 1993) on the problems posed by the the institutional parallelism of the church and kingdom systems.

⁸ With particular regard to the age of Louis the Pious, a fundamental overview can be found in Werner, Hludowicus Augustus; see also Bühner-Thierry, *L'épiscopat en France orientale*.

⁹ Useful summary on this point in Nelson, *Kingship and Royal Government*, pp. 389-392; see also the considerations of Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space*, pp. 3-19.

¹⁰ Nelson, *How Carolingians created consensus*.

¹¹ Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*; Bougard – Bühner-Thierry – Le Jan, *Les élites du haut Moyen Âge*.

¹² Heydemann, *Nemo militans Deo*.

fits, and a privileged relationship with the sovereigns themselves¹³. Collaboration and competition were therefore both integral parts of the horizons and schemes of action with which the Carolingian elites elaborated their projects of social affirmation or reinforcement, conceived therefore in a framework that responds to the sociological definition of cooperation¹⁴.

The renewed analysis of the role of bishops in Carolingian society, and of political mechanisms, went hand in hand with these historiographical reconfigurations. As part of the Carolingian *ecclesia* in both senses of this term, the bishops represented indeed an observatory of particular interest to examine the processes of self-definition of identity by individuals and groups. For some time now, bishops have been recognised by scholars as members in all respects of the social and family groups from which they came, and thus of the aristocratic elite, and a large part of their choices and actions has been traced back to their belonging to these groups, rather than to ecclesiastical structures¹⁵. On the basis of this close correlation, and even kinship, between bishops and secular aristocracies, a clear distinction between the two groups, and between their respective interests, seems difficult to find¹⁶. However, from Charlemagne's reign onwards, the social origin of the Carolingian episcopal body is less homogeneously restricted to the aristocracies. Unprecedented career opportunities opened up in the ecclesiastical sphere for those figures, even those from lower social classes, who demonstrated their ability to provide the sovereign with refined doctrinal, theological, exegetical and, in general, cultural skills. This knowledge was particularly required and appreciated in the context of the efforts of *correctio* initiated by Charlemagne, to standardise the religious practices of his increasingly vast domains but, above all, to fulfil the ambitious task (*ministerium*) that the Carolingian sovereigns developed for themselves, that of leading their subjects to spiritual salvation. In the first decades of the ninth century, a new generation of bishops, arising as a result of these new requirements, developed self-representations for themselves in which membership of the social elite played a very limited role, precisely because many of them could not boast of such a pedigree¹⁷; for this reason they also attracted criticism from those episcopal circles in which nobility of birth was still considered an inalienable value¹⁸. With Louis the Pious, the *correctio* also took on the characteristics of a moral reform, and a revision of individual and collective behaviour within the empire, one of the foundations of what Mayke de Jong has defined as the penitential state elaborated by Charlemagne's successor¹⁹. In this phase, the bishops claimed with

¹³ Le Jan, *Compétition et sacré*; Loré, *Introduzione*; Joye, *Introduction*.

¹⁴ Le Jan, *Coopétition*.

¹⁵ Prinz, *Klerus und Krieg*, p. 70; more in general Parisse, *Les évêques et la noblesse*.

¹⁶ Noble, *Secular sanctity*.

¹⁷ Patzold, *Redéfinir l'office épiscopal*.

¹⁸ See for example Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici*, 44, pp. 232-238.

¹⁹ De Jong, *The Penitential State*.

increasing decision a role, first as assistants of the sovereigns, then as real guides, in the process of revision of the individual and collective behaviour of the various social components of the Carolingian world.

Moreover, the bishops, in continuity with the Merovingian age, were called upon by the Carolingians to perform public functions and represent the sovereigns at a local level²⁰. The difference with respect to the previous age lay, if anything, in the people who attained episcopal dignity. In the central decades of the eight century, through their connection with – and support of – the reforming work of the missionary Bishop Boniface, the masters of the palace (later kings) replaced at least some bishops with figures politically faithful to them²¹. In the aftermath of these changes, the integration of the bishops into the framework of public power was further strengthened, since the Carolingian sovereigns saw them as reliable and, above all (and precisely because they were so), as carefully selected supporters. This is demonstrated by the frequent assignment of duties as *missi* to episcopal figures, to be exercised in the territories of their dioceses²². The multiplicity of roles, functions and identities thus developed by the Carolingian bishops has emerged in all its complexity, as has been highlighted in particular by the important work of Steffen Patzold²³.

2. *Back to manuscripts and politics of textuality: readings from this book*

In this framework of fruitful historiographical repositioning, the questions on which scholars have focused when dealing with episcopal activities and identities have also changed. Traditional themes such as the economic and patrimonial basis of the bishops' power, prosopographical reconstructions, and stances in moments of political crisis, have not been completely set aside, but have been flanked by investigations into the education and cultural skills of the bishops, their writing and documentary practices, the training of their subordinate clergy, the books they owned, and the uses they made of them²⁴. Working methods have also undergone important changes. Manuscript studies, one of the outcomes of the recent material turn, have made a solid contribution in this respect²⁵. Long neglected aspects of manuscripts, their graphic features, forms and contents, such as marginal *glossae* or possession notes, corrections and other editorial interventions, have been and are at the centre of a season

²⁰ Jégou, *L'évêque, juge de paix*, pp. 139-286; Patzold, *Die Bischöfe*; Bühner-Thierry, *Épiscopat et royauté*.

²¹ Glatthaar, *Boniface and the Reform Councils*; Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils*, pp. 198-210.

²² Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice*, pp. 54-57.

²³ Patzold, *Redéfinir l'office épiscopal*, and, above all, Patzold, *Episcopus*.

²⁴ A fundamental work on this field of study is van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord*.

²⁵ Rosamond McKitterick's studies from the first half of the 1990s paved the way and remain fundamental: see, in particular, McKitterick, *Books, scribes and learning* and *The Carolingians and the written word*.

of studies that has produced new insights into the history of manuscripts and texts, such as the recent re-attribution of the *supplementum* to the *Hadrianum sacramentarium* no longer to Benedict of Aniane, but to Theodulph, bishop of Orléans²⁶. Similarly, Carolingian bishops have been reinserted, and studied within the networks of relations of which they were a part, and which were nourished by contacts (personal and epistolary) and exchanges of news, books and texts²⁷. From and through these networks, they drew and transmitted the textual and cultural tools they used to fulfil their duties, and through them they developed behavioural patterns and self-representations for themselves and their colleagues. One example is represented by the rewriting of the *Vita Hucberti*, commissioned by Bishop Walcaud of Liège from Jonas of Orléans, and constructed by him as a mirror of episcopal life²⁸. The cultural activities of the Carolingian bishops have thus been enriched with new data and reconstructions, and at the same time have been read within broader contexts, capable of giving them meaning and a place not only in the political and social, but also in the intellectual, processes of that time²⁹.

The two-day workshop from which this volume derives seeks to fit into these strands of research, bringing the contribution of a perspective focused on the Italian kingdom in the first half of the ninth century – but with episodic projections before and after this chronological threshold. The networks of relations and textual exchanges in which the bishops active in Italy inserted themselves, and which they helped to shape, were at the centre of the analyses presented on that occasion, as they are in the contributions collected here³⁰. One of the questions from which the programme of the workshop was developed is in fact of a historiographic nature: how is Italian historiography, and that of the *regnum* in general, positioned, and what contribution can it bring to these new themes and interpretations³¹? The impression seems to be that it is not yet fully integrated in this field of studies, and therefore, that there is still a condition of relative isolation of the Italian kingdom in the reconstruction of the episcopal networks that ran through the Carolingian world. Even in a recent and important synthesis on the Carolingian episcopate proposed by Raffaele Savigni, Italy plays a marginal role, except for an in-depth study on the case of Lucca³². There is no lack of precise analyses on single figures or

²⁶ Ruffiot, *Théodulf d'Orléans*; more in general, Steinová, *Notam superponere studui*.

²⁷ Pani, *Transiti di manoscritti*; Nelson, *Charlemagne and the bishops*; Gravel, *Les lettres des autres*.

²⁸ On this text see Heydemann, *Text und Translation*, pp. 307-322.

²⁹ Most recently Ward, *History, Scripture, and Authority*.

³⁰ With respect to the programme of the conference, however – and for reasons beyond the authors' control – the proceedings introduced here could unfortunately not include the contributions by Giorgia Vocino (*The relics of St Syrus: episcopal promotion, doctrinal debates and catechesis in the capital of the kingdom*) and Matteo Bagarolo (*Subalpine episcopates and legal culture in late Carolingian Italy: normative reception and ideological reworking*).

³¹ A recent and up-to-date starting point is that proposed by Bougard, *Was there a Carolingian Italy?*

³² Savigni, *L'episcopato nell'Europa carolingia*.

single contexts, some of which are due to some of the authors contributing to the volume³³. What is lacking, however, is an overall view and an attempt to observe what the Lombard kingdom had been like as part of the Carolingian structure from this point of view as well, as has been done in other fields, from the administration of justice to the production of documents and law, just to give a few examples³⁴. The reasons for this situation are undoubtedly many, and can only partly be summarised here. The initial position of the Frankish and Italian bishops, in the aftermath of the conquest of 774, was certainly different. As Stefano Gasparri has pointed out, the weight of the bishops and their involvement in the political life of the Lombard kingdom, also because of a social origin of the episcopal body that was not always restricted to the level of the aristocracies, appeared to be less central than in the Frankish context, even if it was growing during the eight century³⁵. In some contexts and episcopal sees, the Carolingian conquest also led to the introduction of transalpine personnel to replace the Lombard bishops. This phenomenon of mobility has attracted, and still attracts, much attention from scholars, who have insisted on the dialectic between the local identities of the Lombard tradition and those of the newcomers³⁶. These aspects are also the focus of studies dedicated to the use that the bishops made of the past and the traditions of their seats, such as the memories linked to their predecessors (particularly if they were saints), the cult of relics and the related hagiographic legends, the architectural and monumental heritage³⁷. The panorama of studies is therefore rich and constantly growing, and is part of a general, renewed interest in the role of the *regnum* in the balance and mechanisms of the Carolingian world³⁸. It is precisely this broadening of perspective, and the horizons of comparative and integrated analysis that it offers, that can contribute to its further implementation. Although (or precisely because) it is also structured as case studies focused on specific areas or figures, this volume aims to bring together different realities, to place them in dialogue with each other. The collected essays, structured around some common questions, aim to offer a picture as articulated as possible of the social and cultural networks that the Italian bishops built around themselves, and of the effects of these networks on the integration of the *regnum* into the Carolingian political structures.

³³ De Angelis, *Poteri cittadini*, pp. 21-56 (in particular on Hagano of Bergamo); Heil, *Bishop Leodoin*; Tessera; *L'autel d'or*; Tessera, "Angilbertus ovans".

³⁴ Costambeys, *The laity, the clergy, the scribes*; Davis, *Charlemagne's Practice*, pp. 206-238; De Angelis, *Scabini e altri ufficiali pubblici*.

³⁵ Gasparri, *Recrutement social et rôle politique*.

³⁶ Hlawitschka, *Franken, Alamannen, Bayern* is a classic work, alongside the many studies on this subject by Andrea Castagnetti on Northern Italy; an interesting recent research is that of Predatsch, *Migration im karolingischen Italien*.

³⁷ A cornerstone of this line of research is Picard's volume, *Le souvenir des évêques*.

³⁸ See the papers collected in the volume *After Charlemagne*, ed. Gantner – Pohl.

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