

A Carolingian suite: the Supponids in Italy until the death of Lothar (814-855)

by Igor Santos Salazar

This chapter aims to interpret the political role and moral values that characterised the action of the first two generations of the Supponids (and in particular that of the count Adalgisus) in order to study how the emperors structured their relationship with some of the main families of the kingdom. As “resources” of the *publicum*, the members of this kin group were protagonists of political developments and social paths which gradually developed into a complex relationship that combined loyalty to the king with a strong aristocratic consciousness.

Middle Ages; ninth century; Italy; Brescia; Parma; Carolingians; kinship; governance.

Igor Santos Salazar, University of Trento, Italy, igor.santossalazar@unitn.it, 0000-0003-0980-9554

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Abbreviations

- ChLA², LXXXVIII = *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters*, 2nd series, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj, part LXXXVIII, Italy LX, Modena, Nonantola 1, publ. G. Feo, M. Al Kalak, M. Mezzetti, M. Modesti, Dietikon-Zürich 2008.
- ChLA², XCIII = *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters*, 2nd series, ed. G. Cavallo, G. Nicolaj, part XCIII, Italy LXV, Parma 2, publ. C. Mantegna, Dietikon-Zürich 2014.
- Chronicon Moissiacense* = *Chronicon Moissiacense*, ed. G. Pertz, Hannover 1826, pp. 280-313 (MGH, SS, 1).
- DD B I = *I diplomati di Berengario I*, ed. L. Schiaparelli, Roma 1903 (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, 35).
- Dhuoda, *Liber manualis* = *Dhuoda, Liber manualis*, ed. P. Riché, *Manuel pour mon fils*, SC 225, Paris 1975.
- Gesta Berengarii* = *Gesta Berengarii*, ed. P. von Winterfeld, Berlin 1899, pp. 354-403 (MGH, Poetae, 4/1).
- MGH, ARF = *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannoverae 1895 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 6).
- MGH, Astronomus, *Vita* = *Astronomus, Vita Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, Hannover 1995, pp. 280-555 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 64).
- MGH, Capit. I = *Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 1, ed. A. Boretius, Hannover 1883 (MGH, Legum sectio, II/1).
- MGH, Capit. II = *Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 2, ed. A. Boretius, V. Krause, Hannover 1897 (MGH, Legum sectio, II/2).
- MGH, Concilia III = *Die Konzilien der Karolingischen Teilreiche 843-859*, ed. W. Hartmann, Hannover 1984 (MGH, Conc., 3).
- MGH, DD LdF = *Die Urkunden Ludwigs des Frommen*, ed. T. Kölzer, Wiesbaden 2016 (MGH, Diplomata Karolinerum, 2).
- MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II = *Die Urkunden Lothars I. und Lothars II.*, ed. T. Shieffer, Berlin-Zürich 1966 (MGH, Diplomata Karolinerum, 3).
- MGH, Notker, *Gesta Karoli* = *Notker der Stammler, Taten Kaiser Karls des Grossen*, ed. H.F. Haefele, Berlin 1959 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 12).
- MGH, Thegan, *Gesta* = *Thegan, Gesta Hludowici imperatoris*, ed. E. Tremp, Hannover 1995, pp. 168-277 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 64).
- Paschasius, *Vita Adalhardi* = *Paschasius Radbertus, Vita s. Adalhardi abbatis Corbeiensis*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris 1852, coll. 1507-1556 (PL, 120).
- Placiti I = *I placiti del "Regnum Italiae"*, vol. 1, ed. C. Manaresi, Roma 1955 (FSI, 92).

1. Introduction

The Carolingian aristocracy has been the focus of much of the scholarship on ninth century society. It is worth noting the great transformations that this research topic has undergone, from the distant prosopographical works of Tellenbach and his school to the more recent *elite-turn*¹. The latter has also opened up the field of investigation to strata of society that previously suffered marginalisation by virtue of the economic role and political agency of the lesser elite groups, which tended to be underestimated by those traditionally concentrated exclusively on the higher ranks of early medieval society. Furthermore, such historiographical developments have led to a certain

¹ Without claiming to be exhaustive I recall here at least: Tellenbach, *Zur Bedeutung*; Martindale, *The French Aristocracy*; Reuter, *The medieval Nobility*; Goetz, *Nobilis*; Airlie, *The aristocracy*. Among the many volumes published after the research project dedicated to *Les élites dans le haut Moyen Âge*, see *Les élites*; *Hierarchie*; *Théorie et pratiques*.

conceptual ambiguity²: in many essays it is possible to observe a coexistence of the term *aristocracy* and the term *elite*, which, however, has favoured renewed approaches to the social articulation of Early Medieval dominant groups.

In the following pages the features that distinguish the political actions of the first two generations of Supponids will be analysed through confronting their role as public officials in the service of Lothar (and partly of Louis II³) with their aristocratic ethos. The former can be followed through the study of the kingdom's public sources (*capitularia*, diplomas and *placita*); the latter will be carried out approaching Dhuoda's *Liber Manualis*⁴. Its contents may be useful for deepening the moral values and political behaviour of families like the Supponids, called into the service of the emperor in the middle years of the ninth century. Both shed light on the forms of relationship between the sovereigns and his officials in Carolingian Italy.

Unlike other aristocratic families of the empire, the Supponids do not have a recent monographic study. More than a century has passed since Ippolito Malaguzzi Valeri published, in 1894, the first work entirely dedicated to the family⁵. In spite of this, the role played by the group during the ninth and the first decades of the tenth centuries – at that time, two Supponid women, Angelberga and Bertilla, attained the ranks of, respectively, empress and queen – means that the names of many members of this kin group appear in countless studies⁶.

Going back to the deeds of the family can be a way to take a fresh look at the Italian aristocracy within the “Lothar moment”⁷.

2. *A new family in the regnum*

The relevant political and social position acquired by the Supponids within the confines of the former *regnum Langobardorum* makes the documents and narratives that mention them extremely well known to the historiogra-

² Underlined by Nelson, *Élites in the reign*, pp. 310-311.

³ For the problems and challenges that the short chronological span of the investigation entails see Bougard in this volume.

⁴ Dhuoda, *Manuel* (onwards cited as *Liber Manualis*).

⁵ Malaguzzi Valeri, *I Supponidi*. I was able to consult the booklet kept in the Carducci House Library (Bologna) Busta 344.17, dedicated by the author to the poet.

⁶ Malaguzzi Valeri himself warned, as early as 1894, how the Supponids had recalled «così assidue e diligenti le ricerche degli studiosi moderni». See now Bougard, *Les Supponides*, pp. 381-401; Bougard, *Le royaume, passim*; Lazzari, *Una mamma carolingia*, pp. 41-57 and Vignodelli, *Supponidi*, pp. 538-541; not forgetting the “portraits” of every single male member of the family in Hlawitschka, *Franken*, specially: pp. 110-111 (Adalgisus); 236-237 (Maurinus); 268-271 (Suppo and Suppo II), and the *Exkurs zur Genealogie der Supponiden*, pp. 299-309 and Cammarosano, *Nobili, passim*. For the Supponids active during the regnal years of Louis the Pious see also Depreux, *Prosopographie* in the following notes.

⁷ See Bougard's contribution to this volume.

phy. In this paragraph, therefore, I will not add anything new to this dossier of information; instead, I will try to relate the data contained in the written sources to the general context of the empire (and in particular to Northern Italy), with the intention of anchoring the position of certain members of the family in times of trouble.

In February 814, Suppo, together with Adalhard of Corbie, *missus* of Charlemagne, took part in Spoleto in the resolution of some disputes involving the abbey of Farfa, located further south, in the territory of the Sabine. In the *placitum*, Suppo is mentioned as *comes palatii*⁸. Shortly before, King Pippin's death in Milan, on eight July 810, had caused some changes in the geometry of the succession arranged by Charlemagne in the *Divisio regnorum* (806). The kingdom of Italy was entrusted to Adalhard of Corbie, a regent who had to oversee the fate of the kingdom at least until 813, when Pippin's son Bernard arrived in Italy⁹. For all that, it does not seem too risky to assume the arrival of the first members of the family (Suppo and Mauringus) in the Italian peninsula coming from Alamannia¹⁰, precisely when Adalhard had to manage the affairs of the *regnum* in the years between the death of Pippin and the royal proclamation of Bernard¹¹.

It was always alongside events relating to Bernard's politics that Suppo achieved a more prestigious position. After the death of Charlemagne (28th January 814), a troubled period began in the relations between the king and Louis the Pious, Bernard's uncle and new emperor, which resulted in disagreements that are recorded in the narrative sources. From the first contacts between both men, which were still cordial in the years 814-816, the relations gradually deteriorated towards an imperial policy that excluded Bernard from the succession games, which were intended by Louis the Pious to benefit only his direct descendants. Later on, the *Ordinatio Imperii* (817) clarified Bernard's suspicions; in it, the king of Italy was not even mentioned, pushed into a limbo loaded with dynastic consequences; in fact, Lothar, first-born son of Louis the Pious, was favored for the succession to the throne of Pavia¹².

⁸ Placiti I, n. 28, pp. 85-89 (814 II, Spoleto), With Bernard acting as king, it is likely that Suppo's title refers to him as indicated by Depreux, *Prosopographie*, p. 408.

⁹ On Pippin, *Spes Italiae*.

¹⁰ As one might expect by the presence of their names in the confraternity book of the monastery of Reichenau, see Bougard, *Les Supponids*, p. 382, with further bibliography. For the issue of Frankish immigration in Italy, with special focus on the city of Lucca, see Predatsch, *Migration*.

¹¹ For the election of Bernard to the throne: MGH, ARF, p. 138, *ad annum* 813. In the spring of 813 Bernard appears as king in Italian charters: «Factum est anno dominorum Caroli et Bernardi regibus anno regni eorum in Italia», ChLA², LXXXVIII, n. 29, pp. 110-111 (813 VI 4). For this general context see Santos Salazar, *Governare*, pp. 84-85. For Adalhard, see Depreux, *Prosopographie*, pp. 76-79.

¹² MGH, Capit. I, n. 136, 17, p. 273 (817): «Regnum vero Italiae eo modo praedicto filio nostro, si Deus voluerit ut successor noster existat, per omnia subiectum sit, sicut et patri nostro fuit et nobis Deo volente praesenti tempore subiectum manet».

This choice had, inevitably, a political consequence: the progressive isolation of Bernard and the repression of an aristocratic sector which was critical towards the choices of the emperor, guilty, in the opinions of authors such as Theodulf of Orléans, of wanting to dismantle the political guidelines and dynastic balances bequeathed by Charlemagne¹³.

Bernard rebelled against his uncle in the autumn of 817. In doing so, he received important support from those men marginalised by the new imperial policies, as well as from a large part of the aristocracy active in Italy, where characters rooted in Lombardy, such as the archbishop of Milan, Anselmus, and the bishop of Cremona, Wolfoldus, seem to have played a prominent role in the rebellion¹⁴. However, narrative sources offer conflicting accounts: for the Astronomer (who wrote years later about these events), almost the entire Italian aristocracy had risen up with the king. In contrast, the *Annales* attributed to Einhard claim that the reports of a rebellion in Italy were only partly true, leaving the field open to a movement that was perhaps not so dangerous for the maintenance of imperial authority but which, nevertheless, provoked a lightning reaction from Louis¹⁵. It is at this point that Suppo seems to have played a key role in ruining the surprise effect of Bernard's revolt: the echo of the Italian king's "betrayal" soon reached the imperial court, thanks to him and to the bishop of Verona Ratold, another man coming from Alamannia.

With the death of the king, possibly due to the injuries sustained after his blinding¹⁶, and with his *fideles* removed from positions of power, the emperor was able to launch the career of Lothar, entrusting him the *regnum*, even though the succession had to prove much more arduous than a mere turnover of men. In fact, Louis the Pious had to come to terms with his nephew's symbolic legacy. Lothar was not sent to Italy until he did, in 822, public penance for having caused Bernard's death, in the context of one of the most important assemblies of the empire, celebrated at Attigny. There, a reconciliation with some eminent personages of the Carolingian world who had been ostracised (such as Wala) was also staged¹⁷.

And Suppo? When the Astronomer mentions him, he does so only by name, without indicating any title¹⁸. In turn the royal annals describe him as count of Brescia at the time he was elected as the head of the Duchy of Spoleto (822)¹⁹. The exact time of the appointment the Brescia office is therefore un-

¹³ Depreux, *Das Königtum*, pp. 3-10. For the role of Teodulf in Bernard's revolt, Shanzer, «Stilo... memoriaeque mandavi», pp. 81-107.

¹⁴ Noble, *The Revolt*, pp. 315-324; Jarnut, *Kaiser Ludwig*, pp. 637-648, Depreux, *Das Königtum*, pp. 1-24 and Innes, *Charlemagne's will*, pp. 833-855.

¹⁵ MGH, *Astronomus, Vita*, 29, p. 382; MGH, *Thegan, Gesta*, 22, pp. 210-212, and MGH, *ARF*, p. 147, *ad annum* 817.

¹⁶ Other hypothesis in Airlie, *Making and Unmaking*, p. 137.

¹⁷ de Jong, *The Penitential State* and Kramer, *Rethinking Authority, passim*.

¹⁸ MGH, *Astronomus*, 29, p. 382: «Quod cum certis nuntiis referentibus maximeque Rathaldo episcopo et Suppone certissime cognovisset».

¹⁹ MGH, *ARF*, p. 157, *ad annum* 822: «Winigisus dux Spolitanus iam senio confectus habitu saeculari deposito monasticae conversationi se mancipavit ac non multo post tactus corporis

known and the documented mentions of Suppo coincides with the most turbulent years between Bernard's coup (817) and Lothar's arrival in Italy (822). Likewise, we do not know if he held the comital office together with, or after the commitment as *comes palatii*.

Looking at the protagonists of Bernards' rebellion and, above all, to the areas of their influence, one tends to suggest that Suppo was already count of Brescia before 817 rather than only afterwards, as though the title had been a reward for the service rendered to the emperor as a whistleblower of the rebels. In fact, one of them, Wolfoldus, was bishop of Cremona, a city which had lost its political autonomy since the Lombard era, when its *territorium* was divided between the royal court of *Sexpilas* (Sospiro) and Brescia. What more opportune position than that of Suppo who, as count acting all around the city of Brescia and its territory, had continuous channels of communication with the *gastaldus* at the head of the royal court of Sospiro, one of the main royal residences in the whole area²⁰. Either had sufficient resources to gain first-hand and immediate knowledge of possible plots involving prominent members of the local society in Cremona²¹. Suppo's choice to support Louis the Pious against Bernard can be understood as a choice to remain faithful to a player of greater prestige, able to provide the family with greater resources than Bernard²². However, no documents that might shed light on this possibility are available.

3. *The soldier's tale*

The relationship between the Supponids, the highest offices of the *regnum*, and the Po plain did not end with the death of Suppo in 824. On the one hand, his brother Mauringus succeeded him in the comital office²³. On the other, with the second generation of the family, the ties with the territory placed between Brescia, Sospiro and Parma gain in clarity, thanks to the actions of the two sons of Suppo, Maurinus and Adalgisus²⁴. I will concentrate on the latter (but see Fig. 1).

infirmatate decessit; in cuius locum Suppo Brixiae civitatis comes substitutus est.». Suppo died two years later, MGH, ARF, p. 164, *ad annum* 824.

²⁰ For *Sexpilas*, a court also equipped with a *palatium*, and its importance in the administration of the fiscal assets on that sector of the Po plain see, Santos Salazar, *Governare*, p. 165 and pp. 192-200.

²¹ The *gastaldus* of *Sexpilas* is documented in the years of Louis II but the court was probably administered by *gastaldi* early on.

²² The reason to follow Bernard when Louis was only king in Airlie, *Charlemagne and the aristocracy*, p. 101, now published in Airlie, *Power and Its Problems*.

²³ For Mauringus, who was also appointed at the head of the Duchy of Spoleto but died shortly after, in 824, see Depreux, *Prosopographie*, p. 200.

²⁴ Karl Ferdinand Werner was the first to notice the "Lombard" flavour of the name of Suppo's son, assuming a probable union of the progenitor with members of the Lombard royal family or with a daughter of Arechi II of Benevento: Werner, *Hludovicus Augustus*, p. 32. The bishop Adalgisus of Novara seems to have been a member of the kin: Vignodelli, *Supponidi*, p. 539.

Adalgisus appears to be mentioned for the first time in a *notitia* which gives an account of a dispute between the monastery of Nonantola (located in nowadays Emilia) and the *advocatus* of the count of Verona. The meeting, dated in March 827, took place to implement what had already been agreed between the parties, some time before, in the presence of Count Ragimundus and *Adelgis comis palaci missi domni imperatoris*²⁵. Thus, in what is his first appearance in the sources, Adalgisus bears the same title that was his father's.

Almost eight years later, he is mentioned again, together with his brother Maurinus (now count of the palace), and the chaplain Ructald, directing the *inquisitio* that established, at the request of Lothar ("exiled" in Italy since the previous autumn²⁶), that the Cremonese clergy should not supply carts and horses to the royal fisc²⁷. It is worth noting that the diploma was redacted *in Sexpilas palacio regio*: beyond the methodological problems and the risks involved in correlating the presence of a sovereign with the place in which the documents were written, the relationship between the official duties of the count, his closeness to Lothar and his spaces of power (such as the palace of Sospiro), identified, once more, the members of the second generation of the family as key political players in the kingdom²⁸.

Shortly afterwards, Queen Cunegonda's testament (the widow of Bernard) shows the count active in Parma²⁹, the city from which came the vassal present in the new *inquisitio* conducted by Adalgisus (again obeying Lothar's orders) in 841 to ascertain the rights of the episcopal Church of Cremona over certain anchorages and docks located on the banks of the rivers Adda and Po³⁰. On that day, the *comes* was accompanied by a large group of his vassals, which include, in addition to the vassal from Parma cited earlier, nineteen men from the territory of Brescia, the city where his father had been count some twenty years earlier. This whole set of information has traditionally

²⁵ A new edition of the document in Castagnetti, Ciaralli, *Falsari*, Appendice II, n. 2, pp. 274-277 (827 III 22, Ostiglia) This is a complex document, copied in the 11th century and heavily interpolated but, as far as the mention of the count is concerned, does not seem to pose any problems of interpretation.

²⁶ Schäpers, *Lothar I.*, pp. 299-339.

²⁷ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 25, pp. 98-99 (835 III 7, Sospiro). Maurinus is mentioned as *comes palatii* acting as *missus* of Lothar in 840, Placiti I, n. 44, pp. 144-147 (840 II, Lucca).

²⁸ For the methodological issues see McKitterick, *A King on the Move*, pp. 145-169.

²⁹ ChLA², XCIII, n. 2, pp. 19-23 (835 VI 16, Parma): in it, the count wrote his autograph signature. Cunegonda has been identified with the first generations of Supponids, but it seems safer to identify the woman with the maternal family of Bernard of Septimania, in which a Cunegonda is documented in the book written by Dhuoda as her mother-in-law: Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 10.5, p. 354. For this identification see Bougard, *Les Supponides*, pp. 386-387, who based his interpretation in the work of Christian Settapani. Nevertheless, a daughter of Adalgisus named Cunegonda was a nun in the monastery of San Salvatore of Brescia and, later, abbess of the monastery of San Sisto of Piacenza, founded by her sister Angelberga. Her name is mentioned several times, along with so many other members of his family, in the *Liber Memorialis* of San Salvatore; see *Der Memorial*, *passim*.

³⁰ *Privilegia episcopii Cremonensis*, n. 56 (841 III 22, Cremona), online edition available at: < <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/cr/cremona-sicardo/carte/vescovosicardo0841-03-22> > [23/12/2024].

served to assume that the Supponid was count in Parma with special political commitments in Brescia, able to extend, therefore, his influence to Cremona, where he is often mentioned conducting judicial affairs³¹.

Brescia was a nodal point for understanding the relationship between the family of Adalgisus and the kingdom. The monastery of San Salvatore (later Santa Giulia), the richest in northern Italy, was (and still is) located within the walls of the city. Founded and endowed with fiscal lands by the Lombard king Desiderius and his wife Ansa, it had been entrusted to the government of their daughter Anselperga. Following the Carolingian conquest (774), the monastery went through a period of crisis, represented by the scarcity of documents in its archive up to the first quarter of the ninth century. After Bernard's death, and perhaps as a consequence of it, San Salvatore played, once again, an important role in politics. Louis the Pious ceded this ecclesiastical institution *in beneficium* to his wife Judith, as recalled by a *praeceptum* of the emperor which, in addition, confirmed Charlemagne's dispositions³². But Lothar changed his father's choice, restoring the government of the abbey to its abbesses in 837, in the years in which the Supponids were the main players both in the city and in that whole area of the *regnum*. At the same time, the family itself maintained an intimate relationship with San Salvatore, as is shown by the *Liber memorialis* of the monastery³³.

If the comital office of Adalgisus was never attached to a specific city (he was mentioned exclusively as *comes* or *missus*), his judicial and political action seems, instead, to gravitate around the centres that articulate a huge fiscal landscape placed in the heart of the Italian *Königslandschaft*³⁴. Not by chance, Adalgisus is documented once again trying to resolve the judicial issues that were pitting the bishop of Cremona and some of the city's merchants against each other. After an inquisition conducted by Theodoric, counsellor of Louis II, the *placitum* was held in the presence of the count of the palace Hucpold, and the *comites* Adelgisus and Achedeus, when the reasons of the bishop of the Lombard city were acknowledged³⁵.

The participation in the exercise of the imperial justice, his closeness to San Salvatore (which controlled a very large body of public land as well), and his specialization in issues pertaining to the administration of the *fiscum publicum*

³¹ Although the comital office of Adalgisus is never linked to a specific place, his signature in Cunegonda's charter has led to being considered by the historiography as count of the city of Parma, see Provero, *Chiese e dinastie*, pp. 46-47. The legal historian Silvio Pivano interpreted Adalgisus' relevant political position between Brescia, Cremona and Parma to hint to the existence of a Lombard-Emilian march, which is never mentioned in the sources, Pivano, *Il "comitato" di Parma*, pp. 1-80.

³² MGH, DD LdF, n. 246, pp. 615-616 (819-825).

³³ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 35, pp. 112-115 (837 XII 15, Marengo). For the book, *Der Memorial*. The *inquisitio* organized to prepare the contents of Lothar's diploma, directed to acknowledge the possessions of San Salvatore, was conducted, among other bishops, by Adalgisus of Novara, himself a Supponid, strengthening the closeness between the group and the monastery.

³⁴ Santos Salazar, *Governare*, pp. 225-242.

³⁵ Placiti I, n. 56, pp. 193-198 (851 X-852 I 29, Pavia).

in the central sector of the river Po and eastwards, up to the gates of Ravenna³⁶, are the reasons for which he was mentioned in the documents, underlining the political agency of the count within the “Lothar moment” in Italy.

The *ministerium* of Adalgisus went beyond Parma or Brescia and crossed even the boundaries of the kingdom: he accompanied Louis II during the trips and feasts celebrated in Rome, first in 844 when Lothar’s son was crowned king, and when he was associated by his father to the imperial throne six years later. But his military and diplomatic duties did not end there³⁷. Together with a good part of the Italian aristocracy of Italy, the count took part in the expedition organized in 847 against the Muslims³⁸, and served in Chiusi as *missus* of Louis II in the thorny affair linked to Anastasius³⁹.

If all this is not enough to define the place Adalgisus was occupying in the social body of the *regnum*, it is sufficient to note the marriage of his son Suppo II to Berta, the daughter of the count of Piacenza Wifred and, above all, the marriage between his daughter Angelberga and the Emperor Louis II⁴⁰.

4. Ministri rei publice

The careers of these three generations of Supponids show their service in the government apparatuses of the empire as officials and brides⁴¹. The following pages intend to analyse in which way those duties can be put in relation with the conceptualisation of the *res publica* carried out by Carolingian intellectuals; that is, to what extent the conception of the “public” and its moral meanings established by a handful of authors succeeded in filtering into the daily lives of those who were involved in administrative tasks in Italy.

In this context, the character of Adalgisus allows us to consider the “republic” from a lay point of view, warning against a dominance of the ecclesias-

³⁶ Placiti I, n. 43, pp. 139-144 (838 V I, Rovigo). The dispute concerns lands of the archiepiscopal church of Ravenna. The *placitum*, which is preserved in Ravenna in his original sheet, mentions the count’s notary, a certain *Ghisulfo Adalghisi comiti notario*.

³⁷ I do not consider the count’s mention in the Roman *placitum* of 850 as marking the charter a forgery, Placiti I, n. 53, pp. 176-187 (850 IV, Rome). The document, a 13th century copy, is preserved in the archive of the bishopric of Arezzo (Tuscany), as it regards the long-lasting boundary dispute between the sees of Arezzo and Siena. An online transcription with further bibliography in < https://saame.it/fonte/placiti-toscani-toscana-15/#_ednref27 > [21/02/2023]. For the coronation ceremony, in which Adalgisus was probably present: Böhmer, *Regesta Imperii*, n. 67, pp. 26-27.

³⁸ *Synodus habita Francia tempore domni Hlotharii imperatoris pro edificatione Nove Rome*, in MGH, Conc. III, n. 12, p. 139 (846 X) and *De expeditione contra Sarracenos facienda* in MGH, Capit. I, n. 203, p. 67. See also Delogu, *Strutture politiche*, pp. 141-142.

³⁹ An involvement of the imperial side, and thus of Adalgisus, in the escape of Anastasius is suggested in Cò, *Vescovi, re, imperatori*, pp. 9-17, with further bibliography and references to the papal sources.

⁴⁰ Bougard, *Engelberga*, pp. 668-676.

⁴¹ But with the highest title recognising the role of each, as *consors regni*, in the governance of the kingdom: Delogu, *Consors regni*, pp. 47-98.

tical vision of the Carolingian *res publica*. This prominence (and its problems) is (and are) twofold. On the one hand, the written sources that have survived the wreckage of the centuries were preserved by ecclesiastical institutions, which shows the void left by the almost total disappearance of the archives which must have existed within the aristocratic families and, particularly, those that had to exist in the *palatia* and other centres of public authority, of which only fleeting mention is made in some laws directed at regulating the administration of the *publicum*⁴². Their preservation would have allowed for a deeper understanding of the concept of “public” by the imperial authority and its lay officials.

On the other hand, one cannot forget, as Mayke de Jong has pointed out, the existence, in the Carolingian world, of a double *res publica*, ecclesiastical and secular, that was jointly and doubly articulated⁴³. In fact, the “republic” of the Carolingian “intellectuals” (many of them churchmen) was not the “republic” of the “intellectuals” active in ancient Rome: in the understanding of the former, the *res publica* was the product of the moral and spiritual responsibilities of the Christian sovereign, chosen by God as the leader (obviously, a Carolingian) to govern the *regnum*. An example of this can be read in Hincmar of Rheims’ *De ordine palatii*, a work dedicated to Carloman II, which incorporates a work written by Adalhard of Corbie at an earlier time (c. 814). Hincmar, backed by his political experience since the last years of Lothar’s reign, identifies the existence of two powers that govern the world: the *auctoritas sacra pontificum* and the *regalis potestas*; the latter responds to the law and acts through the *reipublicae* ministers that appear frequently mentioned in *capitularia* and diplomas, whose language clearly influenced Hincmar’s own prose⁴⁴.

From this point of view, Suppo, Mauringus and Adalgisus, were this kind of officials; namely pieces of a complex machinery of power. The Carolingian officials were arranged around the figure of the emperor even years before the family’s arrival in Italy. Indeed, when Charlemagne promulgated (801 ca.) the *Capitulare italicum*, the emperor addressed «omnibus ducibus, comitibus, gastaldiis seu cunctis rei publicae per provincias Italiae a nostra mansuetudine praepositis»⁴⁵. This reference is all the more significant because it was not a unique occurrence in the Carolingian legal landscape, as can be seen in

⁴² For lay archives see the chapters included in Brown, Costambeys, Innes and Kosto, *Documentary Culture*. References to lost public documentation in *Karlo epistola in Italiam emissa*, MGH, Capit. I, n. 97, pp. 203-204. Also in *Hlotharii capitulare papiense*, MGH, Capit. II, n. 201, pp. 59-63. For a wider view, McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the written word*.

⁴³ de Jong, *The two republics*, pp. 486-500.

⁴⁴ Hincmar, *De ordine palatii*, MGH, Capit. II, pp. 517-530, which cited the letter of Pope Gelasius (492-496) on the two authorities which ruled the world, *Letter to the Emperor Atanasius*, p. 20.

⁴⁵ MGH, Capit. I, n. 98, pp. 204-206 (a. 801). We do not have the original wording of the capitulary, which leads to caution when considering these quotations, which may have been manipulated when it was copied much later. In any case, the appearance in Charlemagne’s diplomas of similar references to the *res publica* offers the basis for considering such definitions plausible.

chapters 6 and 10 of the *Capitulare Mantuanum secundum generale* (813), in which officials like Suppo and Adalgisus are defined as *ministri rei publice*⁴⁶.

Thus, throughout this period, a whole series of terms linked to a perception of the *publicum* appear in different sources (*capitularia*, royal diplomas, narratives), which are useful when interpreting the themes through which the Carolingians defined and represented its essence and its vision of the world, as well as its understanding of the *publicum*. Moreover, polemics around the “public/private” opposition are not exclusive to our days; they were also present during Antiquity and the Early Medieval world⁴⁷. In fact, this opposition between public and private is not anachronistic for the Carolingians: the *leges*, public documents, and the works of “intellectuals” often include explicit references to this antithesis. The *Capitulare Mantuanum secundum* points out the difference between *servitio publico vel privato*⁴⁸. The legalistic frame of the empire, as a whole, represents, therefore, a horizon of government closely linked to the rhetorics of governance aimed, as an instruments of power, to communicate with the officials active throughout the Carolingian realms⁴⁹.

Thus, the *res publica* was not simply an intellectual space: the *capitularia* define it as a political reality that weaves and binds the kingdom together, that guarantees the common good, the *utilitas regni*, and to which obedience is therefore due⁵⁰. The usefulness and stability of the realm thus appear as one of the law’s main concerns, which runs through all Italian legislative production from Lothar to Louis II. In the capitularies issued by the latter, the problems connected with the “public”, i.e. the places of government and the officials appointed to its administration, occupy ample space: the *comites* are still defined as *rei publicae provisores*; the *palatia*, for which continuous restoration work is requested, *ad ornatum nostrae rei publicae*⁵¹. The care with which the “republic” is purported to be administered guarantees the very health of the realm and, conversely, neglect causes the *regnum* to fall ill⁵².

However, all the forms linked to the *res publica* seem insufficiently precise to define the contours of the aristocratic groups, precisely because they tend to flatten the strong hierarchy existing in the ranks of the Carolingian ruling classes. In the broadest sense, *ministri rei publice* were also the local officials (*gastaldi, actores, scabini, sculdahis* ecc.). Even the *servi fiscalini*,

⁴⁶ MGH, Capit. I, n. 93, pp. 196-198 (813 I 16).

⁴⁷ As far as the Early Middle Ages are concerned, there are recent books devoted in full to its interpretation: Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere; L’espace public; Spazio pubblico*.

⁴⁸ MGH, Capit. I, n. 93, pp. 196-198 (813 I 16).

⁴⁹ MacLean, *Kingship and Politics*, p. 20.

⁵⁰ MGH, Capit. I, n. 164, 2, p. 328 (825 V): «obedientiam rei publice»; MGH, Capit. I, n. 165, 2, p. 330 (825 V): «rei publicae utilitatem».

⁵¹ MGH, Capit. II, n. 210, 14, p. 83 (845-850), and MGH, Capit. II, n. 213, 7, p. 86 (850). See also, Santos Salazar, *A propósito*, pp. 91-101.

⁵² MGH, Capit. II, n. 212, 8, p. 85 (850): «ut status rei publicae nostrae in hoc non videatur infirmari»: disease often caused by selfishness, to cite Paschasius, *Vita Adalhardi*, coll. 1632-1633.

as property of the *publicum* subjected to provisions issued by sovereigns can, with all caution, be included in the lowest step of such a large group⁵³.

In fact, some writers, like Thegan, blamed the kings for encouraging paths of social ascension making powerful men from the poorest strata of Carolingian society, as was the case of bishop Ebbo of Rheims⁵⁴. Therefore, if the *res publica* gave meaning to the service of *nobiles, mediocres et infimi* embodied in it⁵⁵, the political ideals and behaviour of the aristocracy had to resort to other forms of social distinction, which went beyond service to the *publicum*, a commitment which embraced all those men called to their duties within the universe of the Carolingian system, whatever those duties might have been⁵⁶. Instead, the service of the emperor could satisfy the aristocratic consciousness of certain “noble” families, perhaps less politically ambitious than others? Were they by those means more conscious of their position within the restricted club of the *potentes* serving the *regnum*?

5. Aristocratic ethos

To address the set of traits and modes of behaviour that make up the complex and highly articulated identity of the Carolingian aristocracy (which was never a closed group) during Adalgisus’ lifetime, it is perhaps useful to approach it via the work of a woman. I refer to the *Liber Manualis* written between November 841 and the first days of February 843 at Uzès (located in Southern France) by Dhuoda, the wife of Bernard of Septimania, count and chamberlain (*camerarius*) of the Emperor Louis the Pious⁵⁷. It is a moral work, with some similarities to the “Mirror of princes” books, addressed to her first-born son, William, then aged sixteen⁵⁸. As Régine Le Jan has pointed

⁵³ The *fiscalini* are mentioned in the *Capitulare de villis vel curtis imperialibus* among others sources, MGH, Capit. I, n. 32, 50 and 52, pp. 82-90. See also Barbero, *Liberti, raccomandati, vassalli*.

⁵⁴ His family was a family of the royal fisc: Airlie, *Bonds of power*, pp. 202 and 204. Airlie mentioned also Adrevald of Fleury, who claimed that Charlemagne was so suspicious of his noble following that he entrusted the *cura regni* to some of his *servi fiscalini* in his *Miracula s. Benedicti*, p. 192. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that Charlemagne followed, with this attitude, the famous Gospel dictate, expounded in Luke 1, 52: «et exaltavit humiles».

⁵⁵ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, 1.1, p. 2: «pueros nobilissimos, mediocres et infimos», are defined by Notker when he narrates how the noble students were scolded for their demerit by Charlemagne visiting their school, and how he promised abbeys and bishoprics to those not noble but meritorious.

⁵⁶ Hincmar, *De ordine palatii*, 17, p. 523 (MGH, Capit. II): «totius regni confaederatio in maioribus vel minoribus singulis quibuscunque cottidianis necessitatibus occurrentibus cum palatio conglutinabantur».

⁵⁷ Dhuoda and her book have been the focus of much research in recent years, see at least Riché, *Introduction*; Dronke, *Women Writers*, cap. 4, pp. 36-53; Nelson, *Dhuoda*, pp. 106-120; Le Jan, *Dhuoda ou l'opportunité*, pp. 109-128.

⁵⁸ The mirror is explicitly mentioned in the book’s prologue. Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis, Prologus*, p. 80: «inuenies etiam et speculum in quo salute animae tuae indubitanter possis conspicer».

out, «the Manual is a complex work, which goes well beyond the treatise on Christian education»⁵⁹.

Dhuoda's aim was to explain to William, «the way of living of *aulici* as a group; she wrote to stimulate their service to the *res publica*, and their devotion to the Carolingian dynasty»⁶⁰, thus being an exceptional guide to the values that may well have been those guiding the moral and public actions of the Supponids. The desire to advise on the way in which fidelity to God (firstly and above all), and the Carolingian king has to be interpreted has been emphasised by much of the historiography⁶¹, but a deeper reading of the text shows how that service to the dynasty is secondary if compared to the extreme loyalty that Dhuoda's required William to have towards his own family and, in particular, to its leader, his father Bernard⁶².

Such ethical and behavioural principles may explain some of the families' actions in the turbulent years of Charles II rule in West Frankia⁶³. But they serve, above all, to observe, at close quarters, how the centrality of the kin was beyond dispute: thanks to its landed wealth the aristocrat holds his rank; wealth that passed on from generation to generation through inheritance⁶⁴. True, no one can deny the importance of obedience and service to the crown. The emperor (or the king) is the only one with the power to bestow *honores*. Thus, in the pages written by Dhuoda, there is a very unstable balance between the priority given to loyalty to the kin and the needs to be a faithful servant of the Carolingian sovereigns, the only one able to regulate access to offices at a time in which much of the political history of the period revolves around the struggle for *honores*⁶⁵.

⁵⁹ Le Jan, *The multiple identities*, p. 211.

⁶⁰ Nelson, *Dhuoda*, p. 120.

⁶¹ See also the Preface of the *Liber*: «Audiui enim quod genitor tuus Bernardus in manus domni te commendauit Karoli regis; admoneo te ut huius negotii dignitatem usque ad perfectum uoluntati operam des» (Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis, Praefatio*, p. 86).

⁶² Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 3.2, p. 140: «Quantquam in specie humanitatis forma uel potentia regalis atque imperialis praecellat in saeculo, ut secundum more[m] hominum illorum prior ueneretur actio et nomina quasi causa uenerationis et potestas fulta culmine honoris, ex uerbis testimonio collectis illius qui dixit: "Siue regi quasi praecellenti, siue ducibus et cetera"; mea tamen, fili, talis est uoluntas, ut secundum admonitionem paruittatis meae intelligentiam, secundum Deum, in primis illi qui te prolem habuit, proprium, fidelem et certum dum uiuis non negligas reddi obsequium. Certa quidem et fixa manet conditio, quod nullus nisi ex genitore procedat, non potest ad aliam et summam personam culmine peruenire senioratus», where criticism against adventures such as Ebbo of Rheims seems to be echoed. Dhuoda returns to the subject in Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 3.1, p. 134: «Qualiter domno et genitori tuo Bernardo, tam praesens quam absens, timere amare, atque fidelis in omnibus esse debeas, insinuare, ut ualeo, non pigeo». Dhuoda goes so far as to write that the sovereign has been chosen by God, but also by William's father, see Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 3.4, p. 148.

⁶³ Nelson, *Charles the Bald, passim*.

⁶⁴ Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 8.14, p. 318: «Ora pro parentibus genitoris tui, qui illi res suas in legitima dimiserunt hereditate».

⁶⁵ Airlie, *Charlemagne and the aristocracy*, p. 93. The importance of the competition for the *honores* in Airlie, *The aristocracy*, p. 446.

From this point of view, a review of Adalgisus' career shows his close proximity (*Königsähe*) to Lothar and Louis II: he was always faithful and was rewarded with the commitment in public affairs as *count* and *missus*. As far as his family is concerned, there do not seem to have been any political problems, of which the count was also the leader during the last years of Lothar's life. It is more difficult to find documentary evidence of his landed wealth, the consistency of which escapes our images of the period that one can find, like faded photographs, in the sources that have survived to the present day for the nephew, Suppo III, mainly around the rural territories around Reggio Emilia, Parma and Piacenza⁶⁶. In fact, observing the reality of other comital families of lower rank than the Supponids, as in the case of Count Autrammus, one can imagine processes of patrimonial rootedness in the areas where these men carried out their public tasks as *ministri rei publice*⁶⁷.

The last of the themes that Dhuoda emphasises in terms of the suitable training of a great aristocrat is that of the advice (*consilium*), which, on the one hand, will allow William to be an indispensable pawn for the proper government of the kingdom and, on the other, would keep his actions removed from bad company⁶⁸. Within Adalgisus' kin, the role played by his father Suppo in denouncing Bernard's rebellion, must have been very present in the stories that could be told at family meetings or by the firelight. Probably, the group also remembered the dangers of bad advice (as the Carolingian narrative sources also reminded one in the case of the young king of Italy), to which Suppo paid no heed, like a new Ulysses, deaf to the voices of the mermaids⁶⁹.

Like Dhuoda, Adalgisus could also boast continued loyalty – and far longer than the family of Bernard of Septimania, decimated by royal wrath as a response to their rebellions supporting other Carolingians –, to the kings Lothar and Louis II all around the Italian peninsula, from Brescia to Ravenna and Rome⁷⁰. He could also be defined as other aristocratic *fideliter servientes*,

⁶⁶ Provero, *Chiese*, pp. 50-51. His importance as a man of Louis II and the high offices to which he was called were already noted by Malaguzzi Valeri, *I Supponidi*, pp. 8-10; his genealogical tradition has been corrected by more recent works. For similar family routes, interpreted by Ucpoldings, in which the competition with the Supponids for the control of some territories of the kingdom could have led to a disagreements with Louis II, it is worth to see Manarini, *I due volti*.

⁶⁷ The landed wealth was based on exploitation of fiscal *beneficia*, completed by own properties which the count bought in the territories placed between Modena and Bologna and close to his own comital see: Santos Salazar, *Una terra*, pp. 166-169 and Bougard in this volume.

⁶⁸ For the bad company, Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 3.7, p. 162: «Cum maliuolo et pusillanimo uel iracundo consilium non in eas» and 3.5, p. 152: «Fac cum consilio illorum qui tibi ad corpus et animam fidelem praeferant actionem».

⁶⁹ *Chronicon Moissiacense*, p. 312, *ad annum* 817: «Audiens autem Bernardus [filius Pippini regis] rex Italiae quod factum erat, cogitavit consilium pessimum, voluitque in imperatorem et in filios eius insurgere, et per tyrannidem imperium usurpare». Compared with Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 3.6, p. 158: «Sunt nonnulli qui quasi consiliarii se arbitrantur esse, et non sunt».

⁷⁰ Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 3.4, p. 150: «Nunquam aliquando ex infidelitatis uestania imperium ex te exeat malum».

which were *fulgentes in aula*⁷¹. In fact, not even once does Adalgisus seem to have thought of rebellion, perhaps because he considered his sovereign *digno et sublimi*, carrying on the family tradition set by his father in the service of Louis the Pious⁷². Not even when Lothar decided, in 848, to reduce the family's political influence over the monastery of San Salvatore (and, thus, over the entire north western sector of the Po plain) by handing it over in usufruct to his wife Ermengard (and at her death, to their daughter Gisla) did the count seem to have displayed any kind of opposition⁷³.

He and his family were among the most loyal representatives of a behaviour which came to be known as that of secular sanctity: nobles were expected to be «saintly in public, partly to save their own souls and partly to save the others», as pointed out by Thomas Noble⁷⁴, though one is tempted to add that this may have also been to save themselves from a cruel political destiny. Nevertheless, Adalgisus served Lothar and Louis II all his life (from the courts of justice⁷⁵ to the battlefield) loyally. It is worth noting that Louis II was also his son-in-law.

From then on, to be loyal to the crown and to their kin could be understood by the Supponids as one and the same task.

6. *Beyond Lothar: a conclusion*

With its men acting as the highest *officia* in the kingdom and one of its women as an empress, the family proved to be one of the main resources for the support of the Carolingians in Italy. The sovereigns could use the Supponids as a *quasi* fiscal asset, always at their disposal to carry out the government of the kingdom. A task that continued with the generation of Adalgisus' son and grandchildren, who held *comitati* and episcopal functions in various areas of northern Italy, from Lombardy to Emilia and Piedmont, as well with his nephew Suppo III, who married a sister of Eberhard, the Marquis of Friuli, and came to be *consiliarius* of Louis II⁷⁶.

With Bertilla, Suppo II's daughter, the union between the family and the throne was repeated⁷⁷. The brothers of the new queen (from 888) distinguished themselves by their loyalty to King Berengar during the wars that followed in Italy the deposition and death of Charles III. In the *Gesta Ber-*

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 3.9, p. 170.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 3.6, p. 162.

⁷³ MGH, DD Lo I / Lo II, n. 101, pp. 240-242 (818 III 16, Aachen).

⁷⁴ Noble, *Secular sanctity*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ May he had followed Dhuoda's counsel in court? Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, 10.2, p. 344: «Iustus in causas iudex ualens adesto, munus a manu non accipias umquam, nec oprimas quemquam».

⁷⁶ Bougard, *Les Supponides*, p. 390 and Bougard *Le royaume*. On Eberhard see Provero, *La Rocca, The dead*, pp. 225-280.

⁷⁷ Sereno, *Bertilla e Berta*.

engarii, a panegyric composed between 915 and 924 to celebrate the deeds of Berengar as the new emperor, the three brothers of the queen (Adalgisus II, Wifred II and Boso) were defined *tria fulmina belli*. The anonymous poet added that they were bonded by Bertilla to their *amato* (beloved) king⁷⁸. A fourth brother, Ardingus, was bishop of Brescia (the closeness between the family and the Lombard city is underlined once again) and archchancellor of the king⁷⁹.

The Supponids fell into disgrace at the time when Berengar preferred other policies, which included the elimination of the queen⁸⁰. As “resources” of the *publicum*, the members of the family could be raised up or put down, used or abandoned, placed at the head of public districts or removed from their offices, as the case of Bertilla shows in all its rawness. Only from that moment on, one of them, Boso, can be documented as a rebel⁸¹. Who knows if he ever read Dhuoda’s work. What is clear is that loyalty to his family was (for him as much as for Dhuoda), more important than loyalty to his king. Conversely, when another sovereign relied on their loyalty to build his own regime, as was the case of Hugh of Provence, the Supponids returned to prominence, occupying again the *honores* (as, for example, the comital office in Bergamo and Modena with Suppo IV).

For the family, proximity to a king was always a *conditio sine qua non* for aspiring to a leading role in the political arena of the *regnum*. When this closeness failed, or when kings resorted to other families, the members of the kin group disappeared⁸². Their fate as *ministri rei publice* came into crisis from the second decade of the tenth century onwards, when the *res publica* itself began to change in its political meanings and contents⁸³. By that time, other type of economic and social impetus would have characterised most of the new leading families of the kingdom⁸⁴.

⁷⁸ «Pariter, tria fulmina belli, / Suppone coeunt; regi sotiabat amato/ quos tunc fida satis coniuinx», in *Gesta Berengarii*, II, vv. 77-79, pp. 374-375. For a political context see Albertoni, *La fine dell'impero*, pp. 281-299. The identification of the queen as the sister of the three brothers in the glosses of the panegyric’s manuscript: «soror eorum coniux regis erat», is cited in Malaguzzi Valeri, *I Supponidi*, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Pratesi, *Ardingo*, p. 35, but his relationship with the family is not indicated.

⁸⁰ For the reasons for this choice in Lazzari, *Le donne del regno*, pp. 213-216.

⁸¹ DD B I, n. 91, pp. 244-245 (913 IX 19, Pavia): «infideli nostro Bosonete»; see Hlawitschka, *Franken*, pp. 162-163.

⁸² An interpretation very far from the nostalgic and melancholy hypothesis on the end of the Supponids hinted at years ago by Vito Fumagalli, for whom the last members of the family would have lived «sulla china di una decadenza politica ed economica maturata e consumata da tempo in fatalistica consapevolezza», Fumagalli, *Terra e società*, p. 105.

⁸³ Santos Salazar, *Governare*, pp. 277-286.

⁸⁴ West, *Reframing*; Vignodelli, *Il filo a piombo*; Santos Salazar, *Competition as politics*.

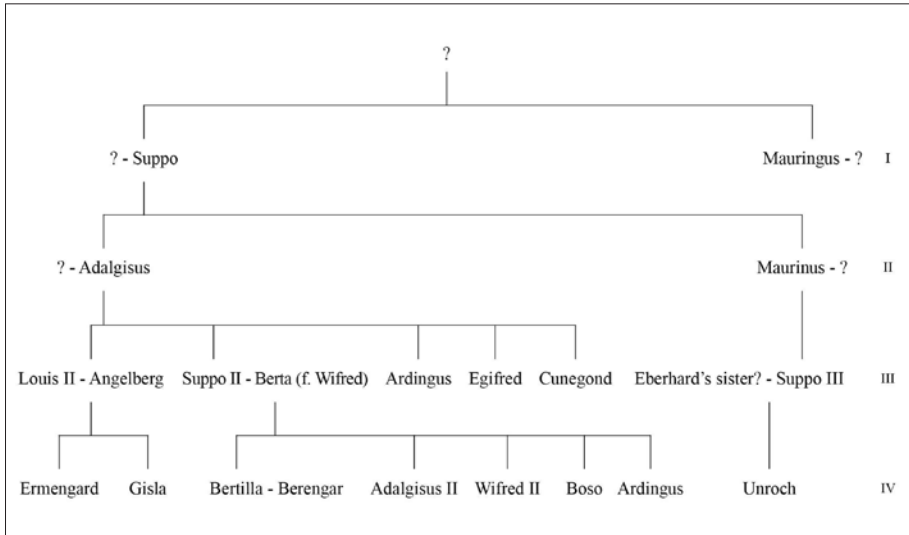


Fig. 1. Hypotheses for reconstructing the family ties of the first generations of the Supponids

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Igor Santos Salazar
Università degli Studi di Trento (Italy)
igor.santossalazar@unitn.it
0000-0003-0980-9554.