Conclusions

by Stefano Gasparri

The age of Lothar was of fundamental importance for the evolution of the ruling classes in Italy, both in the Italic kingdom and in the areas not included within it. The essays collected in this book investigate this evolution through the examination of a series of case studies, which highlight the diversity of the various local situations, particularly between the areas of the kingdom itself and the former Byzantine areas. One of the main points examined is that of the timing and importance of the penetration of immigrants from north of the Alps into Italian society, with the consequent exclusion of the Lombards from the most important positions of power. An important theoretical point examined in the book is also the discussion around the concepts of aristocracy and élites, and what meaning they have if applied to the members of the ruling classes in Italy in Lothar's time.

Middle Ages; ninth century; Lothar; aristocracy; élites; Italic kingdom; northern immigrants; former Byzantine Italy; principality of Benevento.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Stefano Gasparri, *Conclusions*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0771-3.18, in Giuseppe Albertoni, Manuel Fauliri, Leonardo Sernagiotto (edited by), *Aristocratic networks. Elites and social dynamics in Italy in the age of Lothar I*, pp. 311-319, 2025, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0771-3, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0771-3

Abbreviations
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).

The preface has already clearly identified the framework within which the authors of the essays collected in this book have operated.[1] In these conclusions, the remaining problems and open questions can be further emphasized. It has been written – albeit in a very different thematic context from the one treated here, but with a general value – that «those who want to codify the meanings of words fight a losing battle», as words, like the ideas and things they seek to express, have a history[2]. This is undoubtedly true for the battle over the definition and concept of aristocracy. As historians, we suffer from the lack of a codified and universally recognized lexicon, as is the case in the hard sciences, and instead use words that carry their own historical baggage. After Marc Bloch's studies, we no longer use, for the early Middle Ages, the term nobility, having replaced it with aristocracy[3]. As far as the Carolingian age is concerned, the use of the term *Reicharistokratie* (or *Reichsadel*), which is also used by some authors in this book, has come to the fore. However, this term is not neutral; it does not simply indicate the upper echelon of the aristocracy serving imperial power. It originates from the prosopographical studies of Gerd Tellenbach and his school and basically refers to a rigid dynastic model of a patrilineal, agnatic type.

However, using such a term contradicts – precisely because of its history – the model of aristocracy that emerges from reading this book. Instead of a rigid model of patrilineal lineages and closed dynastic groups, at the highest levels perhaps separated by birth from other classes, the book presents an image of an open élite, integrated within a network of relationships with numerous nodes throughout society. In this framework, women played a much greater role in the construction of aristocratic groups than was previously recognized. Some particularly prominent figures emerge, as showed by Cristina La Rocca, especially queens, who embodied different models and had their own networks of *fideles*. Moreover, monasteries and their landed wealth were included in the assets granted to queens in Carolingian and post-Carolingian Italy, thus shaping these women's responsibilities as administrators of public resources[4]. However, when moving away from this high level, the documentation we have sometimes makes it more difficult to grasp the role played by women in constructing élites.

[1] The apparatus of notes will be very limited and references to sources and bibliography already cited by the authors of the essays will not normally be made.
[2] Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis*, p. 1053.
[3] The reference is to the distinction made by Bloch in *La société féodale* (ed. it. Bloch, *La società feudale*, pp. 323-376).
[4] Reference can be made to Lazzari, *Dotari e beni fiscali*, and Lazzari, *On the Special Uses of Public Property*.

Returning to the problem of definitions, the issue becomes more complicated if, as François Bougard has well pointed out and as is the case in this book, the term aristocracy has to be compared with the term élite, which has gained importance in medieval studies in recent years[5]. This is evidenced by the series of volumes on early medieval élites from the early 2000s, the result of a French-Italian research project. The term élite, borrowed from the social sciences, always has a relational value, as it refers to the upper stratum of any human group, even far from the top echelons of society. For this reason, "élite" does not eliminate the need to use a term like "aristocracy". Despite everything, the two terms can coexist and establish a mutual relationship. This is demonstrated by the case-studies analyzed by the authors of the essays on Lucca (members of diocesan élites aiming at the aristocracy) or Veneto-Friuli (exponents of the old and new Lombard aristocracy confronting newcomers) show.

It is evident that our definitions are artificial, not least because the various levels of the upper strata of society communicated with each other through different channels. We are not dealing with an immobile society. Monasteries come to the fore here: as Francesco Veronese wrote in his paper, all monasteries were effectively "in the middle", since they were founded to attract donations of land from landowners in exchange for the prayer services performed by the monks, fostering the creation of vast political and social networks around them. Monasteries also represented a kind of gateway through which central powers could insert themselves into local societies, engaging directly with lower-ranking élite members.[6]

As we permanently abandon the reassuring patterns of the past, we are bound to multiply the characteristics needed to define and distinguish the various levels of the élites: wealth, birth, hierarchical relevance, *Königsnähe* – whose importance is evident for example in the case of the Supponids studied by Igor Santos Salazar –, access to public office, vassalage ties with kings and emperors, relationship with fiscal assets, connection with monasteries, potential urban nature, lifestyle; multi-regional, regional, sub-regional, local scope of action. Moreover, in the contributions on Tuscany (by Manuel Fauliri and Paolo Tomei) the classification proposed for Tuscany by Simone Collavini, based on very concrete elements, was adopted, outlining four levels of wealth and activity, exercised on a local, diocesan and regional basis, or alongside the king or emperor.

Of all the elements that characterize the aristocracy and that we have listed, lifestyle and military activity have been left very much in the background, due both to the shape of the book and, thus consequently, to the type of documentation used. Nonetheless, the military aspect is highlighted by the case of the Aldobrandeschi and the Farolfingi, studied by Paolo Tomei, two families whose members during the ninth century appear both as *vassi* and as counts.

[5] The first volume of this series appeared in 2006: *Les élites au Haut Moyen Âge*.
[6] Wood, *The Christian Economy*.

Indeed, two of them, Eriprand I and Farolfus I, commanded contingents of the "second *scara*" during Louis II's 847 southern Italian expedition against the Saracens. At this point, it is interesting to mention that a codex from the monastery of Sankt Paul im Lavanttal in Carinthia, written in Italy between 813 and 825, contains – in a later addition – a list of one hundred and sixty-four men, representing the census of the adult male population of a county in preparation for military mobilization. According to Stefan Esders, the codex belonged to a count of Emilia Romagna (probably the count of Piacenza or, alternatively, of Modena) and was compiled in preparation of Louis II's aforementioned 847 expedition[7]. In Lothar's capitulary containing the mobilization order, the count of Piacenza, Wilfrid, and the count of Modena, Autramn, are listed among the eight commanders of the "second *scara*" and are furthermore designated as standard-bearers (*signiferi*)[8]. This is the same group in which Eriprand I and Farolfus I were present. This extraordinary testimony allows us, on the one hand, to see the use of the written word in the administration of the county, and on the other hand, it further highlights the relationship between aristocracy and war, which is central in defining aristocratic identity: the counts were military commanders[9].

With regard to lifestyle, Italian sources address it primarily when prohibitions are imposed. For instance, capitularies, from the one in Mantua in 813, to that of Pavia in 850, forbade bishops (and with them, all clergy and monks) from hunting with dogs, sparrow hawks and falcons, or from attending hunts, from taking excessive care of horses, from attending any game, and from wearing luxurious clothing. These prohibitions reveal not only the behaviour of bishops but also those of aristocratic laymen[10]. At the highest level, the display of aristocratic luxury is represented by the image of Queen Ermengarda, splendidly dressed at the christening of her daughter Rotruda. Lifestyle and military activity thus complete the image of the aristocrats of Lothar's age and explain why the *timidus* Hugh of Tours – who barely dared to leave his house – or Guy of Spoleto, who was too moderate in food, did not seem suitable for their role within aristocratic society.

Military rituals, also typical of the aristocracy, must not be overlooked. Although we know little about them in Italy, they must have been practiced. I have recently provided some examples elsewhere[11]. In the rest of the Carolingian world, there is even mention of the beginnings of knighthood, but in Italy there is no Nithard, that is, a writer who, due to his personal background, was particularly sensitive to such phenomena[12]. However, we must also take this

[7] Esders, *Deux* libri legum, pp. 79-84.
[8] The capitulary reporting the mobilization for the 847 expedition is in MGH, Capit. II, n. 203, pp. 165-168.
[9] On this, see also Gasparri, *I Franchi e la guerra*.
[10] MGH, Capit. I, n. 92, 6, p. 195, and MGH, Capit. I, n. 228, 3-4, p. 117.
[11] Gasparri, *Rituali di potere*, pp. 113-120 and p. 135.
[12] Nelson, *Ninth Century Knighthood*.

aspect into account, as it must have been crucial in shaping the male identity of the aristocracy[13]. In a different, but no less important dimension, we must finally also consider the use of the Caroline minuscule in documents by counts and bishops, as investigated by Gianmarco De Angelis and Laura Pani, as a conscious manifestation of belonging to the upper class.

The key element examined, common to all contributions on the Italic kingdom, however, was the penetration of transalpine immigrants into Italy, who progressively occupied the highest positions in society. One well-highlighted aspect is that, for many immigrants from beyond the Alps, Italy remained only a temporary phase of their lives. In this regard, the type of analysis recently conducted by Paul Predatsch is very interesting. Using the tools of modern migration sociology, he examined the phenomenon of transalpine immigrants in Italy, identifying different types, among which the "return migrants" are particularly significant, that is, those who do not settle down, but return beyond the Alps. This is an important factor to consider when evaluating the role of immigrants, especially in the light of later developments.

From a chronological perspective, the proposal made at the beginning of the book by François Bougard is confirmed by various territorial investigations, from the north to the centre: the transalpine migrants occupied almost all the main public offices in the age of Lothar, which led to the marginalization of the indigenous Lombard element, removed from the most important offices (counts, bishops). This phenomenon, which is evidenced by a Northern-style onomastics (of Franks, Alamanni, Bavarians), was, however, much slower than previously thought. Predatsch has also demonstrated the unfoundedness of many ethnic identifications made in the past, emphasizing that much more attention must be paid to all the elements present in the sources that reveal a person's connection to territories north of the Alps – something Hlawitschka did not sufficiently consider. Certainly, onomastics can be used as a means of identifying the origin of individuals, but when not supported by other elements, caution is necessary before drawing conclusions[14]. These observations reaffirm the persistence of the indigenous element within the group of public officials until the third decade of the ninth century. The Lombard element appears to be important particularly in the northeastern area studied by Leonardo Sernagiotto: although the Friulan élite had suffered a harsh repression, that in the area of Verona still retained significant patrimonial resources. In contrast, even in the first half of the 9th century, transalpine immigrants appeared to have little connection with this territory.

Connected to the dialectic between immigrants and the Lombard aristocracy is the issue of vassalage. As mentioned, in Lothar's time the Lombards were excluded from the upper levels of the public hierarchy. For instance, Bougard highlights that in every succession of bishops whose Lombard origin

[13] The reference is to the recent volume *Early Medieval Militarisation*.
[14] Predatsch, *Migration im Karolingischen Italien*, pp. 51-52 and pp. 76-100.

can at least be presumed, the successor was with certainty of transalpine origin. However, the Lombards still found space within vassalage. Thus, there was no complete replacement of the Lombards, as was once believed, even if – according to all contributors – the vassals occupied a lower level than the aristocracy. It is, however, difficult to resolve the issue of a possible continuity between the Lombard *vassi* and the *gasindi*, which, in my opinion, is quite unlikely.

It is also worth emphasizing that vassalage, tied to the system of military benefices (which did not exist in Lombard Italy), initially functioned in the opposite way, as a means for the Franks to assert themselves and control the conquered territory. Examples of this are the benefice granted by the *baiolus* Rotchild to the Bavarian Nebulungus in Pistoia, or the military benefices carved out of the lands of Bobbio – all structures dismantled once the first decades had passed[15]. Therefore, the vassalage-benefices system appears to have been a flexible institution, adaptable to different contexts and carrying different political implications at different times.

A key concept in the book is the penetration of the Franks into the different local societies. From this perspective, the élites of the former Byzantine areas, in Rome, Ravenna, Venice (also in Naples, although it is less studied) are different from those of the *regnum Italiae*, regardless of whether they were part of it or not[16]. In Rome, there was never a permanent Frankish presence; in Ravenna, as Edward Schoolman has pointed out, integration of post-exarchal ruling families with Frankish (and Lombard) outsiders took place, but peacefully, through marriages. Of course, in Venice, which remained outside the Italic kingdom, there were no insertions from the kingdom into the ruling class, although in the 10th century, through marriages of members of the ducal family, connections were established with the kingdom's aristocracy. Consequently, the "Lothar moment" (as Bougard called it), primarily linked to the evolution of the kingdom's élites, does not carry the same weight in the peripheral or external areas of the kingdom, even if Lothar (and Louis II) influenced these territorial realities to some extent. For example, it was precisely during the Lothar period that the aforementioned Frankish penetration into Ravenna's aristocracy began, while in Rome, the imperial power's relationship with the aristocracy became increasingly significant, as demonstrated by Veronica West-Harling.

However, the difference of the aristocracies of the former Byzantine areas is even more profound, because they were markedly city élites, compared to those of the kingdom. Their political action revolved entirely around the palace and local power, embodied by the pope, the archbishop of Ravenna or the Venetian duke, from whom they – certainly at least in the case of Rome and Ravenna – received the management of most of the land they had at their

[15] Gasparri, *The Dawn of Carolingian Italy*.
[16] See the overview provided by West-Harling, *Rome, Ravenna, and Venice*.

disposal[17]. Remarkable is the case of Rome, where, as shown by Maddalena Betti, on the occasion of the writing of the life of Leo IV, the aristocracy holding palace offices managed to influence even the official representation of his papacy in the *Liber pontificalis*.

A similar evolution to that of the former Byzantine cities occurred in *Longobardia minor* around the prince. The first point to be made is that in the south, too, the age of Lothar and Louis II directly influenced the evolution of the aristocracy. Giulia Zornetta has highlighted well the fact that the *Divisio* of 849 marked the end of the previous political system, splitting the political network linked to the prince of Benevento into two smaller ones, in Benevento and Salerno, to which Capua was later added. This division significantly weakened the aristocracy, and in the second half of the century, kinship ties with the prince's family became crucial.

In the south, the aristocracy was urban (Beneventan, later also Salernitan), palatine (holding office) and, at the highest level, owned estates throughout the principality. For this reason, when the principality was divided into two distinct entities, the impact on the aristocracy and its holdings was severe[18]. The southern Lombard aristocrats were entirely dependent on local office appointments (counts, gastalds) granted by the prince, but they resided in the capitals, participating in political decisions alongside him. Their military identity, however, remains less clear[19]. It would be interesting to understand why the evolution of the Lombard south, already moving in this direction even before 774, was so different from the rest of the kingdom. Strong ties with the Byzantine lands of the south and with Byzantium itself may offer an initial explanation.

Returning to the former Byzantine Italy, the Lothar period was also significant due to the famous pact of 840 with the Venetian duchy. I discussed this pact at the recent conference on Carolingian frontiers, included in this same series of volumes, so I refer back to it[20]. These last two examples highlight that the period of Lothar's rule was important not only for the increased presence of immigrants from the North, but also for the military and political action that led to the two pacts I just mentioned, both of which influenced the evolution of local aristocracies.

To conclude, some remarks on Venice, to which I dedicated my recent studies. A proper discourse on the Venetian aristocracy for the 9th century is impossible due to a lack of evidence. In the following century, the aristocracy appears in the sources, but its origins are difficult to trace – whether rooted

[17] These topics were discussed within the conference *I beni del fisco regio nell'Italia medievale: continuità e cambiamenti, secoli IX-XII*, held in Ravenna (January 25-27, 2024), the proceedings of which are currently being published.
[18] Zornetta, *Italia meridionale longobarda*.
[19] On the problem of the military weakness of the southern Lombard aristocracy, Martin, *Èlements préféodaux*.
[20] Gasparri, *Border Pacts and frontier areas*.

in trade (which grew significantly after Lothar's pact) or in the old Byzantine political-military offices, or both. One fact that immediately emerges is that the relationship with the mainland existed as early the 9th century, as Anna Rapetti has shown, including landownership, and it is one of profound interaction. For ties with the landed aristocracy, on the other hand, we will have to wait until – as I have already mentioned – the 10th century.

In Venice, the only aristocratic element known to us since the 9th century is the duke, and therefore we can put him under the magnifying glass[21]. It is known that his characteristic profile is somewhat different from mainland aristocrats: see duke Justinian's will from 829, where profits from the sea trade are mentioned, albeit alongside landed property and rule over men. The same dual elements emerge if we examine the earliest known ritual of election of a Venetian duke, dating from 887 (but certainly older): it included the handing over to the duke of sword, staff and seat, symbolizing military function, executive power, and the exercise of justice; apart from the third symbol (of ancient tradition, but also found, however, in Lombard burials), the first two were derived from contacts with the Italic mainland[22]. It is also possible, however, to say something more. It may be that the model on which the symbolic and ritual figure of the Venetian duke is built – lacking, due to his nature as an official subordinate to a sovereign power, the possibility of aspiring to a royal model – was precisely that of the Carolingian count, as it appears, for example, both in the famous fresco in the church of Saint Benedict in Malles, datable to the early 9th century and depicting a Carolingian official holding a sword, as well as in the same codex from Carinthia cited above, where a count is most likely depicted, holding a *baculus*[23]. It is a hypothesis, based on the relations that the Venetian dukes surely must had with counts from neighboring areas – including also a personage of the level of Eberhard of Friuli –, highlighting the appeal of the Carolingian aristocratic comital model outside the kingdom's borders.

The last example reinforces the main insight from the book. It does not present a single model of aristocracy but rather examines aristocratic networks and the dynamics of various élites across the Italian peninsula. It portrays a dynamic reality, free from rigid compartments. The definitions provided do not seek to ossify Italian social reality but rather offer keys to understanding Italy in Lothar's age. The distinctive characteristic of this period, which emerges clearly, is the extreme complexity of its ruling classes, influenced by the dialectic between immigrants and natives and by the strong differentiation between the areas of the Italic kingdom and those that remained outside (Venice, southern Lombardy) or on its margins (Rome, Ravenna).

[21] For all observations on Venice, see Gasparri, Gelichi, *Le isole del rifugio*.
[22] Giovanni Diacono, *Historia Veneticorum*, III, 32, p. 147.
[23] See above essay by Esders, cited in note 7.

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