

Officials and fiscal lands. The imperial presence in Italy (c. 1050-1150)

by Luigi Provero

This paper aims to analyse the forms, instruments and effectiveness of imperial power in Italy between the 11th and 12th centuries. The starting point is the early decades of the 11th century, marked by a significant rift between the Empire and the Italian high aristocracy, which was busy consolidating its power on a strictly local basis. This distancing is expressed both in the impossibility for emperors to replace Italian marquises (whose power was entirely dynastic) and in the lack of interest of Italian aristocrats in intervening in the election of kings, as had been the case in the early 11th century. However, the imperial history between the 11th and 12th centuries cannot be interpreted in simplistic terms as a continuous and inevitable decline: Italian churches and nobles regularly addressed the Empire to obtain benefits and diplomas, the effectiveness of which appears to have been concrete; at the same time, the aristocracy seems to have articulated its own behaviour, between those who limited themselves to formal loyalty to the emperor and those who made this loyalty an effective political practice.

L'articolo si propone di analizzare forme, strumenti ed efficacia del potere imperiale in Italia tra XI e XII secolo. Il punto di partenza è costituito dai primi decenni del secolo XI, segnati da un rilevante allontanamento tra l'Impero e l'alta aristocrazia italiana, impegnata a consolidare il proprio potere su basi propriamente locali. Questo allontanamento si esprime sia nell'impossibilità per gli imperatori di sostituire i marchesi italiani (il cui potere era pienamente dinastico), sia nel disinteresse degli aristocratici italiani a intervenire nell'elezione dei re, com'era invece successo nei primi anni del secolo XI. La vicenda imperiale tra XI e XII secolo non può però essere letta nei termini semplicistici di una continua e inevitabile decadenza: chiese e nobili italiani fanno regolarmente ricorso all'Impero per ottenere benefici e diplomi, la cui efficacia appare concreta; al contempo l'aristocrazia sembra articolare i propri comportamenti, tra chi si limita a una formale fedeltà all'imperatore e chi fa di questa fedeltà un'effettiva pratica politica.

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“It is very tempting to understand the evolution of the Kingdom of Italy in Matilda’s age as a precipitous process of reduction of the royal possibilities for political action, a reduction so radical as to eventually render the function of the Kingdom superfluous”. This was the incipit of Giovanni Tabacco’s 1978 paper on the structures of the Italic Kingdom between the 11th and 12th centuries,¹ and I cite it here to note that this temptation – which Tabacco himself gradually complicated in that paper, to the point of ultimately rejecting it – remains very much alive, and we must still confront it.

A particularly productive way to test the effectiveness of the relationships between the emperors and the Kingdom of Italy is to move beyond a purely institutional level and examine the networks of people and writings that criss-crossed the political society of the 11th century.² Along these lines, I will focus on two aspects: the relations between the sovereign and the great royal officials and the outcome of the fiscal estates. To do this, my discussion will focus on the period from 1039 to 1152, i.e. from the accession to the throne of Henry III to that of Frederick I. These are very traditional points of reference, but they are consistent with the aims of the book, since the decades before 1039 and those after 1152 were two periods of intense transformation of imperial power in Italy. Indeed, the reign of Frederick Barbarossa – which I will not discuss here – is best known for its conflicts with Italian powers, to the point of often overshadowing the developments of his authority in the kingdoms of Germany and Burgundy.³ The age of Henry II and Conrad II, on the other hand, had been marked by a series of changes that produced new balances, which it is necessary to outline as a premise.

1. *A preliminary note: Henry II and Conrad II*

In brief, by the mid-11th century the Kingdom of Italy was far removed from the functioning it had exhibited in the Ottonian age, and this change resulted from several different processes. First of all, the matter of royal election: in the early years of the century, it appeared both possible and attractive for the Italian aristocracy to intervene in deciding who should be the new king. The death of Otto III opened the way for the confrontation between Henry II and Arduin of Ivrea, who was crowned with the support of some great Italian

¹ Tabacco, “Le strutture del regno italico,” now in Tabacco, *Sperimentazioni del potere*, 119. All translations from the Italian are my own.

² This is the path adopted in Doublier’s important book, *Ein Reich ohne König?*

³ The most recent and articulate analysis is by Görich, *Federico Barbarossa*.

families.⁴ The tension did not end with Arduin's final defeat – which, moreover, did not come until 1014, a full twelve years after his coronation – both because Henry had to work to rebuild ties with Italian churches, dynasties and communities,⁵ and because the issue resurfaced upon his death in 1024, as shown by the contacts between certain Italian aristocrats and William of Aquitaine, to whom they offered the crown, probably on behalf of his son. And again, in 1037, some bishops, led by the Milanese Ariberto of Intimiano, within the framework of their conflicts with Conrad II, initiated similar contacts with Odo of Blois.⁶ These episodes are poorly documented and, in any case, did not produce concrete results. They nonetheless show that, in these decades, attempting to influence the royal election was an accessible and appealing option. Directly related to this context are the destruction of the palace of Pavia and – perhaps even more significant – the imperial decision not to rebuild it, events that again occurred within the window of opportunity created by the transition from Henry II to Conrad II in 1024. The citizens of Pavia took advantage of the crisis to free themselves from a presence that probably imposed more burdens than benefits. Conrad, by choosing not to rebuild the palace, acknowledged the eclipse of a properly administrative dimension of the Kingdom, leaving room instead for an approach characterised by relational networks, active recognition of local developments, and the assertion of a central position within the political and military system.⁷

The weakening of royal centrality is seen above all in the appointment – or rather, in the non-appointment – of new counts and marquises. At the highest levels, the last appointments of a marquis who was not the son of his predecessor were those of Boniface of Canossa for the March of Tuscia and the Hucpoldingian Hugh for the March of Camerino.⁸ The case of the *Amtsgrafen*, appointed from the reign of Henry IV onwards, is a completely different matter, to which I will return later.⁹

Greater mobility is evident in the comital functions,¹⁰ but, overall the room for manoeuvre available to the Empire in this respect is well illustrated by the diploma issued in 1029 for the bishop of Parma, to whom Conrad II

⁴ Sergi, *Arduino fra storia e mito*, and Levi Momigliano et al., *Arduino mille anni dopo*, especially Sergi, "Arduino marchese conservatore."

⁵ We can see from the extensive series of diplomas Henry granted to churches, laymen and communities during his brief presence in Italy between 1013 and 1014: Bresslau, *Die Urkunden Heinrichs II. und Arduins*, docs. 274-314, 323-95. The conflictual climate surrounding Henry is amply evoked in *Die Chronik des Bischofs Thietmar von Merseburg*, VII.2, 400-1.

⁶ Behrends, *The Letters and Poems of Fulbert of Chartres*, doc. 103, 186; doc. 111-3, 196-202 (for William); Nass, *Die Reichschronik des Annalista Saxo*, 373 (for Odo).

⁷ On the destruction of the palace and its implications, see Cammarosano, *Storia dell'Italia medievale*, 237-42; Majocchi, *Pavia città regia*, 69-74.

⁸ For Bonifacio, the reconstruction by Bertolini, *Bonifacio, marchese e duca di Toscana* remains useful; for Hugh: Manarini, *I due volti del potere*, 109.

⁹ See note 40 below.

¹⁰ Collavini, "Mutazione signorile e trasformazioni economiche," 3, emphasises the mobility of comital functions in Tuscany in the 11th century.

granted *totum comitatum Parmensem [...] post decessum videlicet Barnardi comitis Vuidonis filii*, unless the count should have a legitimate son. If such a son, in turn, did not leave legitimate heirs, the district would pass to the bishop.¹¹ The public nature of the office is not entirely obscured, but dynastic control appears to prevail.¹² Naturally, the recognition of aristocratic powers had long been a requirement of the realm: Otto I's conquest of Italy had itself largely consisted in acknowledging existing dominations and reintegrating the Italian dynasties into a system of loyalty.¹³ Yet this necessary recognition became more explicit and more systematic in the 11th century.

A fact that is only apparently marginal is the growing illiteracy of the great official families. At different times – but with an interesting convergence in the decades between the 10th and 11th centuries – we see both the ability to write and even the most elementary capacity to sign one's name diminish or disappear among dynasties such as the Gisibertini, the Obertenghi and the Aldobrandeschi.¹⁴ These families moved away from cities and thus from opportunities for education, but above all their power changed, shifting towards a less administrative and more local orientation, for which writing appeared superfluous in comparison with practices rooted in orality and political ceremonial.

A profound rupture also took place in the system of fiscal lands, which is now at the centre of an intense phase of scholarship. The principal merits of this research seem to lie in three aspects: a dynamic perspective that seeks to reconstruct the actions and implications associated with fiscal possession; renewed attention to archaeological data; and, finally, the study of the relationship between fiscal lands and documentary practice – or rather, the distinctive unwritten form of the acts by which royal rights were redistributed.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that it is precisely in the first decades of the 11th century that we can trace the end of royal control over specialised production sites – the 'off-scale' sites studied particularly by Giovanna Bianchi – with the consequent weakening of a system of production and circulation within the royal economic network.¹⁶

In the same decades, two types of deeds – very different in form but sharing an underlying affinity – became significantly more common in the documentation of the great royal officials: on the one hand, the fictitious sales of

¹¹ Bresslau, *Die Urkunden Konrads II.*, doc. 143, 194.

¹² Provero, "Apparato funzionariale e reti vassallatiche," 204-11.

¹³ Cammarosano, *Nobili e re*, 263-4 and 310-9.

¹⁴ For the issue in general and the Aldobrandeschi specifically, see Collavini, "Aristocrazia d'ufficio e scrittura," especially 36-7; see also Menant, "I Gisibertini," 57. New elements regarding the Obertenghi and their literacy are emerging from Loris Motta's ongoing research; for the dynasty and its context, see Nobili, *Gli Obertenghi e altri saggi*.

¹⁵ Collavini and Tomei, "Beni fiscali e 'scritturazione';" Collavini, "'Mutazione signorile' e trasformazioni economiche," 7.

¹⁶ Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*; for some implications in terms of economic functioning, see also Fiore, *The Knots and the Nets*.

large estates to loyal followers (usually clerics), and on the other, the foundation of private monasteries. The sales could serve to manage a complex or disputed inheritance, to provide security for a church, or to protect against possible requisitions.¹⁷ The foundations expressed, above all, the intention to polarise local society around holy centres on which the “necessary generosity” – to use Georges Duby’s phrase – of those expected to demonstrate solidarity with the founders could converge.¹⁸ It is obviously not possible to offer here an exhaustive picture of the monastic foundations established by great officials between the 10th and 11th centuries. It is worth noting, however, that the activity of the Arduinic marquises of Turin appears particularly intense: over a span of about twenty years in the first half of the 11th century, we have documentary evidence for the foundation of at least three monasteries and a rectory by this family.¹⁹

Although profoundly different in many respects, foundations and sales shared their focus on lands – often of fiscal origin – that had become the fundamental basis of dynastic power. This base needed to be secured, both against hereditary partitions and, above all, against possible imperial requisitions, which rested on the assumption that royal lands retained their fiscal character indefinitely and that grants were therefore always revocable. Foundations and sales made it possible to anchor the assets in written instruments,²⁰ to obscure their original fiscal nature, and thus protect them from the Kingdom, which itself exhibited obvious weaknesses in managing the documentary memory of the Italian fiscal lands, as shown – a century later – by the serious uncertainties faced by the canons of Aachen when compiling for Frederick I the list of courts and their revenues.²¹

Finally, the processes of redistributing goods also changed with the *Edictum de beneficiis* of 1037, which was undoubtedly a form of “active ascertainment”,²² i.e. both an acknowledgement of the balances emerging within aristocratic society and a claim by the Kingdom to an overarching political-military system that had to – or should – depend on the king. Scholarly attention has generally focused on the *Edictum*’s implications for bishops and *milites*, but from my perspective it is important to note its impact on the power of the great official dynasties, whose ability to influence the middle aristocracy, and thus to act as mediators of imperial authority, was significantly reduced by the rapid effectiveness of the *Edictum*.

¹⁷ On fictitious sales, see Sergi, *I confini del potere*, 27, 83-4; Collavini, *Honorabilis domus et spetiosissimus comitatus*, 80-4, 117.

¹⁸ Duby, *Le origini dell'economia europea*, 70-1.

¹⁹ Sergi, *I confini del potere*, 87, 99, 136-7; Provero, “Monasteri, chiese e poteri,” 399-409 and 419-20.

²⁰ Collavini, e Tomei, “Beni fiscali e ‘scritturazione’.”

²¹ See note 42, below.

²² Sergi, *I confini del potere*, 385; Keller, “Das *Edictum de Beneficiis*,” Albertoni, *Vassalli, feudi, feudalesimo*, 145-51.

2. Successions of kings, successions of marquises

These developments in the first decades of the 11th century form the premises and the key to understanding the period at the centre of our enquiry. A good starting point is the question of royal succession, an issue that might seem of little relevance to Italy. Yet that is precisely the point: after the mid-11th century, the Italian aristocracy was completely excluded from elective procedures and appears passive in this respect. This was not a foregone conclusion. It had not been so in the preceding decades, when dynastic discontinuities and conflicts had offered opportunities and prospects, as we have seen from the case of Arduin onwards and then again into the 1030s.

Not even the conflicts between Lothair III and Conrad III – a century later – had the effect of opening new opportunities for intervention by the Italian aristocracy. But it was above all the reign of Henry IV, and his conflict with Gregory VII, that offered the most promising potential opportunity in 1077, when Gregory excommunicated and deposed Henry. In this context, the German princes elected Rudolf of Swabia as king, yet the Italian aristocrats did not act – either in support of Rudolf or in search of another, different king²³ – and the interventions of the major dynasties tended towards mediation rather than further destabilisation of royal authority. Between 1030 and 1070 the great Italian aristocracy had altered its outlook: it no longer operated to control the Kingdom, but rather to secure its own autonomy. If in the first decades of the century electing a king had been an accessible and attractive option, by the 1070s it was perhaps still accessible, but no longer attractive.

If the great dynasties were no longer interested in choosing the king, was the king still able to appoint new marquises? The short answer is no: after 1037 the emperors did not appoint any new marquises who were not themselves the sons of marquises. The longer answer is somewhat more complex, because the redistributive power of the Empire – always significant in terms of resources and prestige – underwent an interesting evolution over the course of the century with respect to functions and jurisdiction.

A good opportunity to understand this is provided by the history of the Arduinici, marquises of Turin from the mid-10th century to the end of the 11th.²⁴ In 1091, the death of Countess Adelaide marked the end of the March and could be interpreted as an irretrievable dynastic crisis. In fact, however, there was no dynastic crisis at that moment, since Adelaide's grandsons were alive and politically active – above all Humbert of Savoy, the son of her son Amedeo and thus a direct male descendant.

The real dynastic crisis had occurred almost sixty years earlier, in 1034, when Marquis Olderico Manfredi died leaving three daughters and no sons. At that point, however, the Kingdom could neither forgo the March nor detach

²³ D'Acunto, *La lotta per le investiture*, 141.

²⁴ For the whole history of the Arduinici, see Sergi, *I confini del potere*, 56–141.

its fate from that of the Arduinic dynasty, whose rootedness in the territory was too strong to be resisted – that is, too strong to allow the imposition of a different marquis in their place. The solution is succinctly and effectively described by Hermann of Reichenau: “Herimannus quoque dux Alamanniae, marcham soceri sui Meginfridi in Italia ab imperatore accepit”.²⁵ The passage makes its institutional ambiguity perfectly clear: the March was that of the father-in-law, transmitted hereditarily to Adelaide’s husband, Hermann, who nevertheless received it from the emperor – a necessary mediator to legitimise a transmission that was indeed hereditary but did not possess a fully patrimonial character.²⁶ The point of balance was therefore to preserve the unity of the March by recognising Adelaide as its *de facto* holder and by avoiding a fully patrimonial division among Olderico’s three daughters and the different branches of the Arduinic family.

The Arduinic affair is particularly clear in its successive phases, but it forms part of a much broader process in which new female powers emerge, linked above all to the increasing structuring of families along patrilineal lines – a development that entailed the exclusion of parallel branches and generated difficulties in the absence of sons, with powers consequently devolving upon daughters.²⁷ It was also connected to the fear, on the part of the various parties involved – and in particular the Empire – of destabilising the regional political framework, as would have occurred in this case with the appointment of a new marquis from a different family.

Adelaide’s rise to power in 1034 was thus the result of a convergence between royal authority and dynastic interests: the Empire needed to preserve the unity of territorial blocs that ensured a relatively effective mediation between the sovereign and local societies, yet the power of these dynasties had acquired such autonomous solidity that the unity of the district could be maintained only by recognising and consolidating this entrenched position.

In 1091 the situation was very different: Henry IV was obviously unable to counter the strength of Adelaide’s descendants, but he had no interest in preserving the March, an intermediate structure that no longer functioned as a channel of mediation towards local society. As a result, the Counts of Savoy and the Marquises of Vasto were able to develop their princely-oriented seigneurial powers with considerable autonomy, asserting control over larger or smaller portions of the March. At the same time, the emperor sought to seize Adelaide’s patrimony, in a claim that combined the fiscal character of the lands with the personal bond that linked Henry to the countess, mother of his first wife.²⁸

²⁵ Herimanni Augiensis *Chronicon*, 122.

²⁶ Creber, “Adelaide of Turin,” 37-40, discusses Emperor Conrad II’s intervention in enabling the succession and linking Adelaide to imperial power through her marriage to Hermann. Gandino, *Contemplare l’ordine*, 191 emphasises how a model already operating at the royal level – namely, the transmission of royal charisma through women – is taken up here.

²⁷ Lazzari, “I poteri delle donne al tempo di Matilde,” especially 54.

²⁸ Tabacco, “L’eredità politica della contessa Adelaide.” For the question of royal intervention in Adelaide’s estate, see n. 38, below.

Interesting analogies can be found in the developments in the March of Tusciana throughout the 11th century. Here too the dynastic crisis triggered by the death of Boniface was managed in the 1050s by accepting the *de facto* authority of Beatrix and Matilda, in a manner not unlike what occurred in the March of Turin. Yet even here the imperial orientation changed profoundly in the following decades. Before Matilda's death in 1115, a key moment came in the early 1080s, when Henry IV stripped Matilda of the title of marquise and issued two diplomas to the cities of Lucca and Pisa, outlining a political model based on direct communication between the Empire and the cities – bypassing all mediation and, above all, dispensing with the March as a mediating structure.²⁹

The change in the second half of the 11th century therefore lay not so much in the dynastic strengthening of the royal officials – long already underway – but in the decline of their ability and willingness to act as mediators between the emperor and Italian society. And, in what was hardly a coincidental convergence, this development overlapped with the effects of the Reform: both because of the impact of the prolonged civil wars and because of the lasting rupture in relations between the Empire and the bishops, which undermined the latter's capacity to act as mediators between the Kingdom and the cities, as they had very concretely done until the first decades of the century.

3. *Calling on the emperor*

At the end of the 11th century, the Empire thus lacked structural mediators within Italian society. In this context, imperial power must be understood in relational terms, and we must therefore assess the ability of different political actors to manipulate this network in ways that could challenge imperial authority.

We can step back a few decades, and in this respect Germana Gandino has interpreted the 1037 testament of Landolph, bishop of Turin,³⁰ which is situated in a dual context: on the one hand, the profound crisis of the Arduinic dynasty, with the delicate question of female succession to Marquis Olderico; and on the other, the strong and direct presence of the emperor in Lombardy, in the midst of the conflict between bishops and vassals. Through a refined textual operation – crafted through both words and silences – Landolph presented himself as an effective and reliable local embodiment of imperial power, in opposition both to the marquises, portrayed as incapable of guaranteeing peace, and to the archbishop of Milan, who at that time was aligned with the Arduinics and opposed to the emperor.

²⁹ Doublier, *Ein Reich ohne König?*, 65–74. For the diplomas for Lucca and Pisa, see below, no. 33.

³⁰ Gandino, *Contemplare l'ordine*, 188–210 (my entire presentation follows Gandino's analysis); edition in Cancian, "Il testamento di Landolfo."

The operation was carried out in three steps: first, the presentation of the diocese as a desolate and defenceless land, subject to the violence of pagans and Christians alike, of strangers and compatriots; second, the works undertaken by Landolph, in which the construction of each church is invariably preceded by fortifications, since an orderly religious life required the protection of social life, which only the bishop could guarantee; and finally, the commissioning of the monks of Cavour to pray for the emperor and empress, for the bishops, and for the faithful – with a “resounding silence” (as Gandino puts it) regarding the Arduinic marquises and the archbishop of Milan.

Similar developments – some decades later – can be found in another famous text, namely the letter sent by the monks of Monte Amiata (in southern Tuscany) to Henry IV, probably in 1081, to denounce the violence inflicted upon them by the Aldobrandeschi counts.³¹ Here too the act is situated in a dual context, again at the crossroads of regional dynamics and imperial action: first, the long-standing tension between the counts and the monks, with the abbey’s commitment – “a fiscal patrimony endowed with conscience”, as it has been aptly described³² – to resisting the advancing process of patrimonialisation by the Aldobrandeschi; and second, the period of intense imperial intervention in Tuscany by Henry IV, who between 1080 and 1081 had deposed Matilda and issued two important diplomas to Lucca and Pisa, likely made more effective by the emperor’s direct presence in the region.³³

Precisely the themes of imperial mobility and the variable impact of imperial power lie at the heart of the Amiata monks’s argument, in which they highlight a fundamental change. When Henry III had intervened in person, Count Hildebrand had submitted to the imperial will, only to attack the abbey again once the emperor had departed. When, by contrast, Henry IV approached Tuscany, Hildebrand’s sons fortified themselves and increased the pressure on the abbey’s resources and men. The picture had shifted: although no one could ignore the approach of the sovereign and his armies, the ways of responding to it differed, so that by the end of the century submission was only one of the available options.

On this basis, the monks make a further textual move, seeking to draw a sharp contrast between the seigneurial power of the counts and their own, and they do so through a shrewd and insistent use of possessives. The monks and the abbey are consistently associated with the Empire (with no fewer than twenty-one repetitions of the possessive *tui* throughout the letter), while the connection between the counts and the sovereign is either silenced or denied (the violence is carried out “a comitibus iuxta eam positus”, or “a comite, qui Ildebrandus dicebatur”). A systematic juxtaposition of possessives is thus

³¹ Published in Kurze, *Monasteri e nobiltà nel Senese*, 262-3; see Collavini, *Honorabilis domus et spetiosissimus comitatus*, 133-6.

³² Collavini, 87.

³³ Von Gladiss and Gawlik, *Die Urkunden Heinrichs IV.*, doc. 334, 437; doc. 336, 442; context in Ronzani, “L’affermazione dei Comuni cittadini fra Impero e Papato.”

constructed, in which *servi tui* (the monks) are opposed to *sui milites*, and so on. The counts are presented as outsiders to the imperial power structure, acting against a royal church and therefore against the king himself.

The monks' attempt failed, just as Bishop Landolph's had failed; but these textual strategies clearly show how, throughout the 11th century, royal power – viewed from the point of view of local forces – was one of the elements in play, or rather, to quote Tabacco, “a hegemonic element whose decisive action was requested or accepted in situations of stalemate of conflicting local forces”.³⁴ Imperial power was invoked not only by appealing for its intervention, but also by situating a church within the power structure headed by the emperor, thereby denying or delegitimising the role of counts and marquises within the same system. Certainly, the capacity of churches to manipulate texts is nothing new; what is new is the malleability of the political-institutional framework, in the context of a progressive and non-linear loosening of the imperial grip on Italian society. District frameworks were no longer a relevant point of reference. Thus, whereas Landolph in 1037 sought to replace the Arduinici as mediator between his diocese and the Empire, the horizon of the Amiata monks in 1081 was entirely different: their aim was to protect the monastery, its lands, and its men.

Even after applying all the necessary qualifications that prevent us from reading the decades at the turn of the century as a period of total imperial absence from Italy, the discontinuities remain undeniable. In the first half of the 12th century, imperial presence in Italy was sporadic, and between 1097 and 1110 there is a complete absence of diplomas issued for Italian entities or dynasties.³⁵ This fact that must, however, be used with caution, since the documentary series of several episcopal sees display significant gaps precisely at the end of the 11th century – gaps corresponding to the tenure of imperial bishops whose memory was probably erased later (and who would have been potential recipients of diplomas).³⁶ There was no power vacuum, to be sure, but rather a crowding – “an unbridled competition of powers”,³⁷ in which the Empire struggled to find its place.

Periodic imperial absences meant that moments of presence became occasions for assertion. This was the case with the lands of Adelaide and Matilda, whose vast inheritances became object of struggle in which the Empire did not act as arbiter but as a party.³⁸ These lands were expected to serve as a key instrument for ensuring a concrete imperial presence, yet the fragility of imperial claims also emerges in the law issued by Lothar III in 1136, which,

³⁴ Tabacco, *Sperimentazioni del potere*, 121.

³⁵ Doublier, *Ein Reich ohne König?*, 89; Fiore, *Il mutamento signorile*, 46.

³⁶ D'Acunto, *La lotta per le investiture*, 161-4.

³⁷ Tabacco, *Dai re ai signori*, 97.

³⁸ For Matilda's possessions, see Gross, *Lothar III. und die Mathildischen Güter*; less documented is the imperial intervention in the dispute over Adelaide's possessions, on which see Fiore, *Il mutamento signorile*, 45.

in regulating feudal relations, acknowledged the existence of autonomous military nuclei not fully connected to the Kingdom.³⁹ It is in this context that the so-called *Amtsgrafen* – the counts and marquises appointed by Henry IV and subsequently by Henry V and Lothair III – acquired growing relevance: German aristocrats with no local roots in the territories in which they operated, entrusted not with the unrealistic task of governing them, but with the far more specific and concrete function of managing the imperial estates.⁴⁰

In the same vein, the list of fiscal properties drawn up by the canons of Aachen, probably between 1152 and 1153, was first and foremost a claim – but also an admission of the profound difficulties in knowing the actual Italian situation.⁴¹ Shortly after being elected king of Germany, and before descending into Italy to be crowned emperor, Frederick Barbarossa asked the canons of Aachen to draw up a list of the fiscal courts, indicating for each how much was owed to the king. The canons produced a series of short lists for the different regions of the Empire: Saxony, Rhineland, Bavaria, and Lombardy. But whereas the first three lists are clear, naming easily identifiable places with well-defined levies, matters become difficult when Italy is reached: the canons record toponyms that are often unrecognisable and, in any case, always incorrect (e.g. Carvil, Cavallar, Sypont...). As Renato Bordone has noted, these toponyms “are transcribed in a highly distorted form, certainly attributable to the incomprehension of the German copyists”.⁴² And even the levy claimed by the Empire in the various courts are poorly defined, formulated at times in expressions that are enigmatic at best (“Septima dat II regalia servitia, Turrin allodium suum”). Clearly, the canons were relying on fragmentary and uncertain documentary traditions, writing about places with which they were unfamiliar, and they could not rely on any regular imperial practice of levy-collection. Indeed, the final statement is illuminating: “iste sunt curie de Lombardia: tantum dant, quod nullus potest renarrare nec investigare, nisi prius veniamus in Lombardiam”. The Empire needed to read the territory and organise information into operational lists on a basis that was above all patrimonial; yet a clear sign of imperial weakness lies in the obvious limits of its knowledge of the territory and of its own patrimony.

4. *Loyalty as a political practice*

An important way to understand the Empire’s insertion into the crowded landscape of powers during these decades is through its documentary sys-

³⁹ Tabacco, *Dai re ai signori*, 96; Albertoni, *Vassalli, feudi, feudalesimo*, 158-60.

⁴⁰ Bordone, “L’amministrazione del regno d’Italia;” Fiore, “L’impero come signore,” 36-7; Cortese, “L’impero e la Toscana,” 58.

⁴¹ Edited in Bühl and Kölzer, *Das Tafelgüterverzeichnis*; the most recent analysis is Bordone, “L’enigmatico elenco dei beni fiscali.”

⁴² Bordone, “L’enigmatico elenco dei beni fiscali,” 68.

tem: not only the most forceful and most programmatic texts – some of which I have already mentioned – but also the sequences and transformations of textual models.⁴³ I would like to highlight three aspects: two are very well known (and I will therefore mention them only briefly), while the third, to my mind, deserves particular attention.

The first point concerns the *placita*, or rather their disappearance – a process that was undoubtedly slow, yet shows a clear progression over the second half of the 11th century. This development directly reflects the limits of the Empire's coercive effectiveness, which had become insufficient to sustain its credibility as a judge capable of bringing an end to litigations.⁴⁴ A second aspect concerns the sequence of imperial diplomas for Italy throughout the 11th century, and specifically the increase in diplomas granted to urban communities. The few diplomas issued in the first half of the century show that direct political communication between the sovereign and the communities was already an available option within imperial political practices,⁴⁵ but it is only from the final years of Henry III onwards that we see the frequency of such diplomas increase. This growth continues in the following decades, with certain periods of acceleration,⁴⁶ and, above all, with a profound change in their content: from patrimonial protections and tax exemptions they shift towards an increasingly explicit promotion of more properly political components, as is already evident under Henry V.⁴⁷

These two developments in the imperial documentary system are well known. The third theme – less emphasised in historiography – concerns people, and specifically those who stood beside the emperor during assemblies. The assembly constituted the foundational political ceremonial of the relationship between king and aristocracy,⁴⁸ and it served the interests of all the parties involved: for the recipients of the diploma, the public display of the ceremonial concession offered the first political guarantee of the diploma's effectiveness; for the great aristocrats, the assembly provided an opportunity to exhibit their direct and privileged relationship with the king; and, finally, for the king, the assembly offered the firmest foundation for his decisions and a means of displaying aristocratic support and the extent of his clientele.

⁴³ On this matter, see the relevant analysis in Doublier, *Ein Reich ohne König?*

⁴⁴ Wickham, "The 'Feudal Revolution'"; Wickham, *Sonnambuli verso un nuovo mondo*, 17; Fiore, *Il mutamento signorile*, 53 and 157-8.

⁴⁵ Bresslau, *Die Urkunden Heinrichs II. und Arduins*, doc. 278, 328; doc. 303, 377.

⁴⁶ As at the time of Matilda's deposition as marchioness of Tuscany in 1080 and then at her death in 1115 – when diplomas for cities within the Canossian sphere of influence increased – in 1081 we find the diplomas for Lucca and Pisa (above, n. 33), in 1116 those for Mantua, Bologna, and again Lucca. Provisional editions are available in the MGH database: <https://data.mgh.de/databases/ddhv/> (docs. 174, 179, and 192). For the rise in the number of diplomas granted to communities from the 1080s onwards, see Doublier, *Ein Reich ohne König?*, 65-74.

⁴⁷ Tabacco, *Sperimentazioni del potere*, 136-7; Tabacco, "La sintesi istituzionale di vescovi e città."

⁴⁸ Reuter, *Medieval Politics*, 347; see e.g. the rituals studied by Nelson, *Politics and Ritual*, especially 259-401.

An important change occurred precisely between the 11th and 12th centuries, highlighted by a very specific feature. As early as 1970, Alfred Gawlik – in a study that seems not to have circulated widely⁴⁹ – emphasised the transition from *intervenientes* to witnesses, initiated under Henry IV and completed under his successors. Essentially, until the mid-11th century, imperial diplomas lack witnesses, and in the proem the sovereign often declares that he grants goods and rights through the intervention of certain great figures of the court (the empress, the chancellor, prominent bishops...). From the end of the century onwards, and especially under Lothair III, diplomas regularly include lists – often lengthy – of witnesses.

We can certainly assume that already in the Ottonian and early Salian periods diplomas were normally issued within an assembly framework,⁵⁰ and on a diplomatistic and legal level witnesses were obviously still unnecessary in a royal diploma, whose validity was guaranteed by the sovereign's will and by chancery forms. On the other hand, it is on the political level that the change must be understood: the *intervenientes* were mediators of the petition addressed to the imperial authority and prompted the sovereign to hear it; the witnesses, by contrast, were guarantors not of the deed and its legal validity, but of its publicity and thus its political effectiveness. The transition from *intervenientes* to witnesses brings to the fore the collective and networked nature of imperial power, which found its fullest expression in the ceremonial of the assembly.

Understanding imperial power between the 11th and 12th centuries in terms of network thus requires a partial shift in the framework through which we read diplomas: the prevailing focus on recipients, contents, and ideologies must be complemented by a systematic consideration of political ceremonial, expressed both in the places and contexts of drafting and in the assembly of those who stood beside the emperor, attending to, or more accurately participating in, the ceremonial of granting the diploma. This approach seems to me the most appropriate for interpreting loyalty to the Empire as a political practice: what matters is not so much identifying who was formally a vassal of the emperor, but rather who made this dependence visible and turned it into a determining factor of their own political action.

In conclusion, two key notions have run through my paper: mediation and vindication. They offer useful lenses for understanding the changes that reshaped imperial power. The mediation once guaranteed by royal officials and bishops entered into profound crisis, and the Empire struggled to formulate alternative means of securing its presence in Italy. The imperial response was articulated above all in terms of claim, on three levels: jurisdictional, by asserting royal centrality within the political-military apparatus; ceremonial,

⁴⁹ Gawlik, *Intervenienten und Zeugen*; I owe this reference to Étienne Doublier.

⁵⁰ Settia, "Pavia carolingia e postcarolingia," 109. The convergence of the aristocracy around the king is evident, for instance, in Otto III's diploma for Hugh of Tuscany of 994: *Die Urkunden Otto des III.*, doc. 147, 557-8.

through the assemblies that marked the emperors' intermittent presence in Italy; and patrimonial, through actions aimed at recovering assets of fiscal origin. On these bases – and indeed along these same lines – Frederick I was able to act in the following decades. His intervention, however, had to unfold in a context in which both the political actors and the rules of the game had changed compared to the age of Henry IV (the last phase of intense imperial presence in Italy). This difficulty is vividly expressed in Otto of Freising's famous passage,⁵¹ in which he describes Italy as a world turned upside down, where the cities dominated the princes: a difficulty in reading Italian political geography, and a difficulty in understanding the rules of the game. This is one of the clearest signs of the deep rift between the emperors and the Kingdom of Italy – a world which, in the first decades of the 12th century, they controlled only marginally and understood even less.

The relationship between the Empire and the great Italian aristocracy thus constitutes a specific vantage point, but also a key element for grasping the balances and functioning of 11th-century politics. The decades between 1000 and 1040 marked a first, important phase in the aristocracy's estrangement from the sovereigns – both in terms of the effectiveness of imperial coordination and of the aristocratic willingness and ability to influence imperial power. But this process underwent a further and evident acceleration from the last decades of the century: amid harsh conflicts, a redefinition of the nature and limits of imperial power, and above all a profound crisis of imperial presence in Italy, aristocratic powers repositioned themselves around the Empire in new ways, recognising both their own wide spaces of autonomy and the limited effectiveness of imperial coordination – understood increasingly as a hierarchical relational network. It is not possible here to delve into depth in the wide-ranging debate on the global impact of the 11th-century Reform⁵², but two points seem to me beyond doubt: first, the profound impact of the late 11th-century conflicts in redefining imperial power in Italy; and second, the need to situate these conflicts within a broader context, encompassing a multiplicity of processes and a more extended chronology, as this book as a whole seeks to do.

⁵¹ Ottonis et Rahewini *Gesta Friderici I. imperatoris*, l. II ch. 13, 114-7

⁵² The debate has been widely discussed – often with polemical overtones – especially in France: Barthélemy, “Domination seigneuriale et réforme grégorienne;” Henriët, “Le pangrégorianisme et ses excès;” Mazel, “Réforme grégorienne;” Henriët, “De quelques assertions fausses.” The starting point for this discussion is Mazel, *Nouvelle histoire du Moyen âge*.

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