

Micro-lordship and pervasiveness

by Sandro Carocci

My article is divided into two parts. It deals with two related but not overlapping themes, which share the common feature of addressing aspects of local domination that have hitherto been little studied. It is part of a collective research project begun in autumn 2023. The effort is to move away from the world of middle and high aristocracies, and to direct the analysis further downward: on the one hand, observing forms of domination that, due to their minute, small-scale character, have often escaped the attention of historians (the micro-lordship), and on the other hand, investigating characteristics of domination relations that reflect more clearly the perceptions of subordinates rather than those of the lords (the pervasiveness). In both cases, we are dealing with very long-term phenomena: in addition to analysing the knowledge currently available, the focus of my article will be on the question of whether for pervasiveness and micro-lordships the history of the centuries considered in this volume was a history of change or continuity.

Il mio articolo è diviso in due parti. Tratta due temi correlati ma non sovrapponibili, che condividono la caratteristica comune di affrontare aspetti della dominazione locale finora poco studiati. Fa parte di un progetto di ricerca collettivo iniziato nell'autunno del 2023. L'obiettivo è quello di allontanarsi dal mondo delle aristocrazie medie e alte, e di indirizzare l'analisi verso livelli più bassi: da un lato, osservando forme di dominazione che, per il loro carattere minuto e su piccola scala, sono spesso sfuggite all'attenzione degli storici (la micro-signoria); dall'altro, indagando caratteristiche delle relazioni di dominazione che riflettono più chiaramente le percezioni dei subordinati piuttosto che quelle dei signori (la pervasività). In entrambi i casi, si tratta di fenomeni di lunghissimo periodo: oltre ad analizzare le conoscenze attualmente disponibili, il fulcro del mio articolo sarà la questione se, per quanto riguarda la pervasività e le micro-signorie, la storia dei secoli considerati in questo volume sia stata una storia di cambiamento o di continuità.

Sandro Carocci, Tor Vergata University of Rome, Italy, carocci@lettere.uniroma2.it, 0000-0001-9989-6780

Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)

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

Sandro Carocci, *Micro-lordship and pervasiveness*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-1076-8.14, in Alberto Cotza, Giuseppe Petralia (edited by), *In Search of the High Middle Ages. Change and Continuity in 11th-12th-century Italy*, pp. 241-273, 2026, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-1076-8, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-1076-8

Middle Ages, 11th-12th centuries, micro-lordship, pervasiveness.

Medioevo, secoli XI-XII, micro-signoria, pervasività.

1. *Development of lordship, growth of pervasiveness?*

I will begin with the concept of lordship pervasiveness, because I have dealt with it on several occasions, and so I will be brief here and not make it the focus of my reflections.¹ By lordship pervasiveness I mean the ability of the lord to thoroughly penetrate the dominated world. It is a way of considering seigneurial rule that emphasises its impact on subjects and encourages us to view lordship from the perspective of those who endured it. In Italy and abroad, historians have mainly been interested in something different: the world of the lords themselves. Regarding the lords, we have investigated the nature and intensity of power, the geographical and social sphere in which domination was exercised, the elements on which it was based, the political culture it expressed, the reciprocal relations that lords maintained among themselves and with the state, the economic effectiveness of lordship, its symbolic and charismatic aspects, and other elements.

The theme of pervasiveness helps to reverse the view, forcing us to understand how much, and in what ways, lordship affected the world of the dominated. To what extent were the lords capable – and at the same time eager – to exert daily, conditioning control over their subjects? To what extent were they willing and able to infiltrate deeply into the dominated world, its social practices, and the organisation of settlements and living spaces? What factors enabled a lordship not only to be strong politically, militarily, territorially, and economically, but also to be truly pervasive for the dominated? It must be emphasised: pervasiveness and other elements of seigneurial rule were not at odds. Pervasiveness was supported by the characteristics we consider typical of strong seignories: a vast territory, full seigneurial possession of the rights of justice and command, a large military retinue, high levies, and seigneurial violence itself. But elements of another nature also – and perhaps above all – counted. For instance, the active participation of lords in productive activities mattered: pervasive lordships were often those that possessed large reserves and demanded many corvées from subjects, managed the exploitation of mines, or controlled irrigation systems. Military activity also played a role: lords who required peasants to perform extensive guard duty or even combat duty conditioned their subjects through military service, forcing them to de-

This article was developed as part of the collective research project PRIN 2022 HFMCYY *The Age of the Knights. Knightly Pre-eminence, Local Societies and Powers: New Perspectives on the Italian Countryside (11th-13th Century)*, coordinated by Sandro Carocci, and Maria Elena Cortese: <https://sites.google.com/view/theageofknights/home-page>.

¹ See Carocci, “The Pervasiveness of Lordship;” Carocci, “La pervasività.”

vote time and risks to these tasks. Then there was the lord's ability to maintain close ties with the most influential people among the subjects, or control marriages, successions, and other key moments in the subjects' family cycle. And of course, another vehicle of pervasiveness was the daily presence of the lords in the places of residence of the peasant communities under their rule.

Pervasiveness was not a universal feature inherent in all forms of domination. In some regions and periods, the lords with the greatest capacity for oppression were not necessarily the most politically or economically powerful – that is, those whom contemporaries would have identified as being at the top of society – but rather much smaller lords at village level, or even more modest ones. By and large, the lords with the greatest scope for shaping and closely monitoring the world of subordinates were the smaller lords, who needed to make the most of their modest domains and were in the best position to overcome practical obstacles to local control. Exercising deep influence over subordinates was both less necessary and more burdensome for the larger lords, for whom the very size of their territories made it more difficult to maintain a consistent presence on the ground. However, it would be wrong to establish an inverse correlation between the strength and pervasiveness of lordship. Many small lords had very few rights, while powerful lords could also be pervasive.

So how do we place our centuries from the point of view of the history of pervasiveness? Although in current studies the notion of pervasiveness is never explicitly formalised, it seems to me that the interpretative frameworks prevalent today take for granted a strong increase in it. I am referring, of course, to all the reconstructions that insist on 'seigneurial transformation' – that is, on a sudden and comprehensive change brought about, at a certain point in the 11th century, by the emergence of new seigneurial powers, for the first time fully established and capable of adopting practices destined to reshape dominated societies and alter the overall economic dynamic through violence and the imposition of exorbitant levies. The reference is, first and foremost, to Georges Duby and the entire French mutationist current, which places the turning point at the beginning of the 11th century; and, for north-central Italy, to the now prevalent view of seigneurial transformation triggered during the civil wars of the last decades of the century.² In this volume, Alessio Fiore argues that the sudden development of territorial lordships in north-central Italy led to a marked increase in "the violence exercised upon their subjects" which "was highly spectacular and had a strongly public, visible nature". "It was an act of possession" in a new situation in which "control over bodies tended to be absolute".

These new territorial lords, who imposed a 'harsh and absolute' power through violence, also seemed intent on establishing deep, pervasive control

² A good introduction to the vast bibliography on French mutationism is Fiore, *The Seigneurial Transformation*, XVII-XX, which is also the most comprehensive expression of the line prevailing today.

over their subordinates. Intervening in the daily lives of peasants was the clearest proof of this new power, and perhaps sometimes it was an end in itself – as in a modern totalitarian state – allowing a lord to shine through the subordination of his subjects. The hypothesis, at present, is plausible. The impression remains, however, that this increase in pervasiveness, attributed to the emergence of violent territorial lordships, is often more assumed than demonstrated. Take, for instance, the issue of violence: lords who made violence on subjects a defining element of their practices and identity represented a profound novelty for those subjected to it, but they did not necessarily seek to police every moment of their subjects' lives. They could, so to speak, 'settle' for recognition of their supremacy and an increased share of the peasantry's produce. For lordship to become truly pervasive, the other elements I mentioned earlier were needed, such as the creation of vast reserves managed with *corvées* (attested only in very rare cases) or active forms of intervention in the organisation of production processes (also very rare, with the exception of some seigniories in mining centres). Perhaps less episodic, though certainly far from widespread, was the seigneurial pervasiveness generated by the imposition of military contributions on all subjects, as occurred, for example, with the Guidi in the 12th century. Simone Collavini has highlighted the cases of Monte Croce, Modigliana, and Rosano to show "the centrality of armed service" in the domains of the counts – a feature that characterised their lordship to such an extent that it resulted in lower economic pressure on subjects in return for military service.³ Another possible factor of pervasiveness introduced by the new lordships was the control and limitation of subjects' land transactions and inheritance practices: more widespread than military service, and certainly more frequent than the imposition of compulsory labour on large demesnes these seigneurial interventions, however, have never yet been the object of adequate analysis.

Certainly more studied, and at the same time undoubtedly widespread, is another area of potentially strong pervasiveness of territorial lords: *congregatio hominum*, i.e. operations aimed at forcing or convincing present or future subjects to move within castle-villages.⁴ Pierre Toubert has written, albeit referring to the 10th century and the first two-thirds of the 11th century: 'grouped in closed villages, the peasants then experienced new subjugations'.⁵ The castle-village was a new reality of tightly knit peasants, where family, religious, judicial, and more generally social subjection was very strong. It was an environment well suited to increasing the pervasiveness of the lords.

Even in this field, however, there are not many certainties. The geography and chronology of castle-villages are much debated. In Toubert's Latium, for

³ Collavini, "Le basi materiali," 27.

⁴ An overview of Italian research on castles is provided by Augenti, e Galetti, *L'incastellamento: storia e archeologia*.

⁵ Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval*, 1357.

example, they appear to have spread later than was previously thought.⁶ Some clarification is necessary here. According to an interpretation that prevailed until very recently, from the late 11th century many castles underwent impressive transformations: masonry walls were built to enclose the summit area; robust towers, cisterns, and palaces were constructed; churches were founded and re-founded; and, more generally, the level of monumentality of castles – which had remained very modest until then – was raised. The exact dating of this sort of petrification of the new lordship, however, still needs to be established more clearly. Written sources show that from the end of the 11th century, the castle became central to the sphere of power, to the representations of social pre-eminence, and to the ways of organising the rural population.⁷ Yet, it is debated whether this change in the material configuration of castles really dates back to the late 11th century, or is instead one or two generations later.⁸ It is also doubtful whether it led to a large presence of peasant inhabitants within the walls. On the basis of evidence from southern Tuscany, Giovanna Bianchi has hypothesised that the castles of the late 11th century and the first half of the following century were, for the most part, intended only to house lords with their retinues.⁹ These castles were useful for violently subjugating the peasant population, dominating from outside and from above a population whose settlement structure did not change for the time being. Such a picture appears valid for many other regions, from southern Italy to Lombardy and Trentino. However, a precise geography is still lacking.

Much more solidly established, and attested in nearly all regions, is what I have called the ‘third *incastellamento*’: that process of foundation, re-foundation, enlargement, and settlement concentration which has early examples – such as the foundation of Empoli by the Guidi family in 1119 – but which above all characterises castles from the mid-12th century onwards, promoted by comital dynasties, noble lineages, cities, and even lesser lords or communities of inhabitants.¹⁰ On closer inspection, however, the significance of these material changes seems to run counter to the idea of a direct correlation between population concentration and the pervasiveness of seigneurial control. In medium-sized and large encastellated centres, the regulation of social, familial, religious, and economic behaviour to which individuals were subjected certainly became stronger; yet this appears to have been exercised less by the lord than by neighbours, kinship networks, and clergy. In fact, almost everywhere it is clear that the scale of material and political resources

⁶ This emerges quite clearly from the archaeological research: see Molinari, “Siti rurali e poteri signorili.”

⁷ Here I refer the reader to Carocci, “I tanti incastellamenti,” 526–8.

⁸ See what is noted in this volume, in Cortese’s essay, n. 53. A collective research project on the subject, coordinated by Giovanna Bianchi, is currently underway, the results of which are awaited: *The times of castles. Multidisciplinary researches for a new chronology of the building sites of incastellamento (XI–XII centuries)*.

⁹ Bianchi, “Archeologia della signoria.”

¹⁰ Carocci, “I tanti incastellamenti,” 530–7.

invested in these settlements did not yield an absolute lordly power, but rather fostered the development of dominations of a more consensual character (and, in perspective, communal governments). The new centres were relatively large, populated by notables, and difficult to control in their entirety. The very presence of subjects within the fortifications testified to collaboration, consensus, and negotiation – that is, as a young Chris Wickham put it, a domination exercised not over but through the subject world.¹¹ It is no coincidence that the castles which became more monumentalised in the late 12th century, and which remained hegemonic on the local scene, were almost always centres re-functionalised by local communities and elites rather than lords. For seigneurial pervasiveness, therefore, they represented a negative rather than a positive factor.

To recapitulate: if we want to consider the rise of violent and predatory territorial lordships as a salient element of seigneurial developments in the 11th-12th centuries, then an increase in pervasiveness can indeed be imagined in numerous situations, though it should not always be taken for granted. Adding to this caution is another point: I suspect that the emergence of violent and predatory territorial lordships has perhaps been overstated in recent research, as Maria Elena Cortese also observes in this volume. To clarify this impression, the theme of micro-lordship proves useful.

2. *Micro-lords of the South*

I begin this section with a clarification of terminology. I use the uncommon terms ‘micro-lordship’ and ‘micro-lord’ to denote those forms of rule exercised on a very small scale, involving only a modest number of subjects – ranging from a few units to a few dozen. I therefore avoid the term ‘personal lordship’, even though it is widespread in historiography and apparently anchored to concrete elements (such as oaths, acts of submission, residence on a specific piece of land). It was also theorised by contemporaries, especially from the late 12th century onwards, when canonical doctrine distinguished between peasants bound by contractual, and thus extinguishable, obligations, and those who were bound directly in person and could not free themselves from obligations.¹²

For the purposes of this study, however, speaking of personal lordship entails a twofold disadvantage. First, it risks oversimplifying the nature of lordship. If we examine the dependencies attached to the micro-lord (and indeed not to them alone), we see that at times they had a land basis, being linked to the entrustment of plots for cultivation; at other times they took on a more

¹¹ Wickham, “A che serve l’incastellamento?”, 39.

¹² Useful reflections can be found in Collavini, “I signori rurali,” 303-4; on canon law, Conte, *Servi medievali*, 156.

personal character, deriving from hereditary subjection or from contractual commitments undertaken by the dependent. However, in most cases the personal and the landed were intertwined, since the distinction between these two forms of dependence – so central to legal doctrine and to the legislators of the communes and the Kingdom of Sicily – often remained unclear to the world of lords and subordinates. Peasant subordination typically constituted a complex amalgam, often indecipherable in its original components, arising from land and personal relations simultaneously (and, in dominions larger than micro-lordships, even territorial ones). The cultivation of the lord's land entailed a personal relationship; conversely, a personal type of dependence was rarely separable from the allocation of land. Hence the formulas *pro persona et bonis*, *de persona et tenimento*, *de persona et terris*, and *pro personis et possessionibus*, which in the sources attest to the impossibility of distinguishing between the two forms of subjection.

The other reason why the notion of micro-lordship is preferable to that of personal lordship lies in the need to emphasise the specificity of those who dominated very small groups of dependents, as opposed to larger-scale lords. Personal lordship was in fact also widely practised by major lords – holders of medium and large territorial lordships – who chose to preserve or develop the personal dependence of part of their subjects in order to exercise tighter control and to secure the solid revenues guaranteed by personal domination. For instance, in the vast county of the Guidi there was a double level of lordship: territorial and political on the one hand, over all residents; landed and personal on the other, over the individual cultivators of the counts' lands and other families directly linked to them.¹³ This second, personal and landed, level of lordship is fundamental to understanding the counts' domination, but it risks flattening the distinction between lords of medium or high status and those of a far more modest level, on whom I wish to focus here.¹⁴

Having made these clarifications, my journey will begin with the South. The history of the *Mezzogiorno* is important not only because it covers more than a third of Italy, but also because it shifts our viewpoint and draws attention to dynamics often overlooked. This is true in many fields, yet for the study of small-scale lords the heuristic value of southern Italy is especially clear: between the 11th and 13th centuries, micro-lordships were not only particularly widespread but also, crucially, particularly well documented.

I summarise here the results of research carried out a few years ago.¹⁵ In almost all southern regions, the widespread presence of lords with at most two or three dozen subjects – more often just a handful, sometimes even only one or two – depended both on factors predating the Norman conquest, which were

¹³ Collavini, "Le basi materiali."

¹⁴ For the same reason, other terms developed in French historiography – and sometimes adopted in Italian historiography – such as 'domestic lordship' and 'village lordship', do not seem appropriate to define the phenomenon of micro-lordship.

¹⁵ Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, especially 277-324.

absent or less relevant in central and northern Italy, and on a broader transformation that, from the late 10th century and especially the 11th, strengthened aristocracies and, more generally, militarised social pre-eminence throughout Italy and beyond. Even before the Normans, especially in areas of Lombard tradition, immigrants were obliged to place themselves under the protection of the prince or a lay or ecclesiastical notable, and to accept some form of dependence. In Byzantine territories, and to a lesser extent in Lombard ones, other forms of dependence arose from concessions (*exkousseia*, *ius affidandi*) that allowed powerful churches and laymen to assume from the sovereign the right to demand taxes and public services from residents and immigrants. After 1030, the wars associated with Norman penetration and conquest greatly expanded these small-scale dependencies. The peasant population – let it be clear – did not experience mass confiscations, systematic expropriations, widespread subjugation, massive increases in levies, breaks in local customs, or the other calamities that the ‘mutationist’ tradition attributes to seigneurial rapacity. The major changes brought about by the Norman settlement did not radically alter the peasants’ condition, their freedoms, or the burdens placed upon them. With the partial exception of Sicily, we may even think that the vitality of rural communities was fostered by the conquest rather than undermined.

At the village level, the most consistent effect of the conquest seems to have been the increase in the number of knights and their privileges, which heightened peasant dependence. At the same time, the position of other important local actors – often closely connected to knightly families – was strengthened: monasteries, churches, and the elites of *boni homines* and *iudices*. These developments were decisive for the spread of client relationships within village societies. All evidence suggests that the *milites* already in possession of *villani*, if able to adapt to the new political order, kept them subjugated, exploiting the increased demands of war to expand both the number of their dependents and the obligations they imposed on them. They were then joined by new knights, of Norman as well as indigenous origin, along with churches, monasteries, and notables of various kinds. The wide diffusion of dependency relations attested in the 12th century was primarily due to this dynamic.

The rise of the monarchy has left us written records of these dependencies that are lacking elsewhere. Roger II and his successors had a particular interest in mounted fighters, who were essential to the kingdom’s military capabilities. Their assets, family policies, relations with subjects, and dealings with great nobles were subject to specific regulations and controls, as well as a general redefinition through feudal terminology. Enquiries were conducted, inspections carried out, and censuses compiled. The most famous of these, the *Catalogus Baronum* of 1150, records for certain areas of Campania, for example, the number of subjects held by each knight – revealing that 180 knights together had a total of 2,078 subjects.¹⁶ No comparable source was

¹⁶ Carocci, 273.

ever produced in central or northern Italy. Other information comes from royal grants of *villani* to individual *milites*, as well as from interventions by the kings to protect knightly micro-lordships against territorial lords who sought to deprive resident knights of their rights and dependents. Alongside these sources, compiled to safeguard the kingdom's military potential, other records of micro-lordships derive from policies designed to prevent royal rights from being undermined by the imposition of dependent relationships on inhabitants of the royal demesnes. Further evidence comes from Frederick II's extensive legislation on personal dependencies, which were at odds with his ideology of public power and its insistence on a direct relationship between the emperor and all inhabitants of the kingdom.

The bureaucracy of the sovereigns – and at times of the pre-monarchic states – shaped the documentary practices of certain lords, who drew up lists of dependents, such as the *platee* of the Calabrian bishops. Other documentation was more indirectly connected to royal power. My favourite example is a document from 1182.¹⁷ It describes in detail the lordship held by the *miles* Rainone da Sorrento in the royal demesne of Maddaloni, twenty kilometres north of Naples, and appears to have been drawn up both for management purposes and, perhaps, to protect him against possible intrusions by royal administrators. In Rainone's lordship there were no settlements or fortifications, so there was no territoriality. Instead, there were scattered lands and thirteen peasants who paid rents and performed a fifty to one hundred *corvées* a year, by virtue of personal and land subjection (*de persona et terris*). Rainone, however, was a prominent knight: he frequented the baths and other places where the aristocracy socialised; he had a squire to carry his cloak and silver cup, four subjects with ministerial roles (seneschal, bailiff, squires), and, above all, three vassal knights to whom he had granted land and peasants as fiefs. His was the typical lordship of the highest-ranking knights – without territorial powers, but in terms of assets not far from the lords of a small open settlement (*casale*) or a modest castle. His three vassal knights, in turn, exemplify the vast majority of the kingdom's roughly 10,000 knights, whose patrimony almost always consisted of control over a few peasants and their lands. The number of their dependents varied greatly, as did the command and levy rights they exercised. Usually, however – as in Rainone's case – these rights were quite extensive, including rents, the provision of numerous *corvées*, control over marriages, and certain rights of command and justice.

Much more could be said about the knightly lords of the South. It is worth noting the hostility with which they were regarded by the territorial lords, who sought to obtain revenues and *corvées* from the knights' subjects. Equally interesting are the challenges posed by the subject peasants to the knights: at times, they even organised themselves collectively to negotiate better conditions of dependence. This was the case at the beginning of the 13th century,

¹⁷ Giorgi, "Confessione di vassallaggio."

when the hundreds of *villani* subjected to *milites* and monasteries in Sorrento obtained the halving of certain dues; or in 1190, when the subordinates of the knights of Pontecorvo compelled the territorial lord, the abbot of Montecassino, to promulgate a *charta concessionis* – accepted by the knights – that curtailed the coercive powers of the micro-lord and prohibited a series of abuses and violations.¹⁸ Another point clarified by the southern sources is the gap between the reality of knightly micro-lordships – most of which counted no more than a dozen subjects – and the number of dependents that the royal bureaucracy and the knights themselves considered the optimal endowment of a mounted combatant: around thirty.¹⁹ More generally, the evidence shows how micro-lordships could profoundly shape economic, social, and, in certain respects, even political relations. Violence and abuses such as those forbidden by the *charta concessionis* of Pontecorvo, the heavy demands for labour – sometimes exceeding one hundred days per year – the judicial rights attributed to knights in several places, at times even including cases of blood crimes, were compounded by oaths of loyalty, the payment of *adiutoria* and dues in kind and money, control over the marriages of offspring, and restrictions on personal mobility. They were certainly stringent instruments of subordination and control. Yet their impact on local societies was amplified by the networks of protection and clientele that underpinned and accompanied these powers: land concessions, military obligations, solidarity in the courts, protection from the demands of royal officials or territorial lords, and economic assistance. In short, everything suggests that for the peasant, the role of the knight on whom he depended – and who exercised daily control over him – carried, in most cases, greater depth and weight than any other relationship of dependence, including those towards the sovereign, his officials, or territorial lords and their officers. Of all the forms of subjugation that burdened the peasant, dependence on the knight, when present, must have been the most pervasive.

The case of southern Italy also suggests that the economic factor must be taken into account, since it reveals a connection between the spread of micro-lordships of knights and other local notables and the low amount of resources drained by state taxation and by medium and great lords. It should be recalled that in the Kingdom of Sicily royal taxation only became exorbitant in the mid- and late 13th century, while the overall levies of territorial lords remained very low and were managed in ways that favoured local elites, because they were based on the contracting out of revenues and the delegation of authority to the most enterprising among their subjects.²⁰ The most common fee was just the tenth part of the harvest, and in some cases it is possible to calculate that – taxes and justice included – barely a fifth of the wealth pro-

¹⁸ Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 278-82, 287-90.

¹⁹ Carocci, 269-75.

²⁰ Carocci, 413-46, 477-90.

duced by the peasants ended up in the lord's hands. Rural notables, especially the knights, could thus draw on the many resources that escaped both the tax authorities and the territorial lords. The large number of client relationships, including micro-lordships, that permeated the villages of the royal demesne and of territorial lordships was clearly tied to the volume of resources that remained within local societies. This provides an important point of comparison with the situation in central and northern Italy.

Finally, with regard to the initial question – whether continuity or change prevails in the history of micro-lordships – the South invites a nuanced answer. A certain number of micro-lordships already existed before the Normans, thanks – as we have seen – to the protection mechanisms for foreigners and immigrants, and the sovereign assignments of taxpayers exempted from public demands. There is no doubt, however, that it was the growing unrest and militarisation associated with the conquest that increased both the number and the prerogatives of knights and their micro-lordships. The stabilisation of Norman rule after 1080 and the creation of many territorial lordships led to further allocations in favour of military auxiliaries. From 1140 onwards, the emergence of a strong central government further stimulated knightly micro-lordships, reinforced by royal concessions to *milites* and, above all, protected from the pressure of the great nobility. Contraction set in only at the height of the Swabian age, with royal legislation against the proliferation of patronage and with the redefinition of knightly status, which excluded many mounted fighters with assets fell below those deemed indispensable for the rank (roughly equivalent, as noted, to thirty subjects).

3. *Knights and villages in central and northern Italy*

Two preliminary considerations are necessary to address the subject of knights and their micro-lordships in central and northern Italy. The first is the impossibility of mechanically transposing the southern situation to the rest of the peninsula. Lombard and Byzantine political and juridical traditions, followed by the Norman conquest, and – and above all – the establishment of a monarchy capable of conditioning local realities, influenced the southern knightly world and the small-scale dominations that sustained it in ways absent elsewhere. Yet many elements did unite the South with central and northern Italy. At present – and this is the second preliminary consideration – the southern distinctiveness may appear so pronounced partly because of a certain delay in scholarship. Research on central and northern seignories has tended to privilege those lords who held public powers and, above all, those able to exercise them outside their landed estates. In analyses that take the territoriality of lordship as the most important parameter, micro-lordship relations have received very little attention. For the most part, they have been treated as a form of 'land lordship' (as opposed to territorial lordship), an aspect of the concessions granted by territorial lords to their

clients, or a dimension of the legal status of peasants within the broader context of serfdom. So far, very little attention has been paid to the faculties and social physiognomy of small- and very small-scale lords.²¹ In this case, historians have focused on churches and monasteries, rather than on knights and other members of the rural elite. Similarly, we still know too little about the economic basis of knightly pre-eminence in the countryside, the extent of the landed estates that supported it, and their origin and nature. From the limited available data, it is possible to infer that the rural *militia* had an extremely varied profile in terms of assets and social prestige, even in central and northern Italy, just as has been established for the South.²²

No one doubts that many of the phenomena underlying southern micro-lordships were also present in central and northern regions. Of course, the world of rural knights – their origins, patrimonial arrangements, and relations with lords – still require adequate study, which is now the focus of the collective investigation already mentioned. There is one certainty, however, which I have already mentioned and has long been recognised by scholars: in the 11th and 12th centuries knights multiplied and came to constitute the upper layer of many rural territories. They even appeared in very small towns. Andrea di Strumi recounts that in the early 11th century, in the tiny village of Cucciago, some ten kilometres south of Como, Arialdo's parents were the wealthiest inhabitants and possessed subjects and horses, thereby clearly displaying a knightly status.²³

Mounted fighters, however, were not present everywhere. The detailed analysis conducted by Attilio Stella for the Veronese area reveals a complex picture, with some villages entirely lacking knightly elites, while in others they were well established and active. Several factors explain the absence of local knights: the small size of the population; the complete concentration of land ownership in the hands of a single territorial lord, as in Sabbion; or the early involvement in the villages of families from the town *militia* or from the clientele of great lords. Where these conditions were absent, however, we find groups of knights almost everywhere – indeed, even more widely than Stella himself claims.²⁴ Knights were also absent from those ecclesiastical lordships that chose not to develop a military dimension, placing themselves instead under the protection of a prince, a city, or aristocratic families. For example, the protection of the nobility of nearby Anagni and other local families enabled the monks of Villamagna to make a choice – quite unusual in Latium – that endured for centuries: to centre the identity of their lordship on the

²¹ As noted in Nobili's lucid historiographical review, "Piccola nobiltà di campagna."

²² Cortese, "Rural Milites."

²³ Andrea Strumensis, *Vita sancti Arialdi*, 1050, and the interpretation in Del Tredici, "Castelli, chiese, mutazione signorile."

²⁴ Stella, *Ai margini del contado*, is rich in data and interpretations. However, I disagree with the reductive view of figures such as the Bionde notables, who owned private fortresses, as 'aspiring' knights (243-8).

church and monastery, avoiding both the construction of a castle for the peasants and the recruitment of knights.²⁵

Mounted fighters were especially numerous in towns such as Guastalla,²⁶ which were more dynamic and developed earlier; in centres subject to weak seignories (e.g. Bionde and Cerea, also in the Verona area);²⁷ in localities belonging to vast consortiums composed of dozens of co-lords indistinguishable from other rural knights (e.g. Tevigio, in the Apennines between Piacenza and Parma, where at the beginning of the 13th century there were about forty *domini*);²⁸ and even more so in valleys and other territories ruled by groups of knights, such as the *milites Terre Pofane* in southern Latium.²⁹ To this one may add the knights assembled by large territorial lords – for instance, the abbey of Farfa, the *milites* of Racconigi under the marquis of Saluzzo, or the fifty *milites pulcherrime praeparati* who in 1208 escorted Count John of Ceccano to his meeting with Innocent III.³⁰ And yet *milites* also appear in a huge number of less prosperous, and sometimes tiny, localities, such as Cucciago.

While the process of militarisation of pre-eminence and the increase in the number of horsemen are well established, they still call for further investigation. In particular, the role of territorial lords in this growth deserves closer scrutiny, alongside an evaluation of the paths by which members of the local notability assumed roles as mounted combatants autonomously or semi-autonomously – much as seems to have occurred in the South. At present, however, the emphasis falls almost entirely on the lords.³¹ This historiographical approach already appears in *Les structures du Latium médiéval*, one of the most influential studies on the subject for the past fifty years. In Pierre Toubert's reconstruction, the abbey of Farfa, in the second half of the 11th century, incorporated knights into feudal structures and employed them in the wars triggered by the Reform. Some of these knights originated from the decline of small castle lords, who, because of succession fragmentations and the new climate of warfare, found it convenient to join Farfa's clientele. To a greater extent, however, the abbey's knights arose from the upward mobility of the

²⁵ Carocci, "Conclusions: A peasant village," 408; more generally, Fiore, "La signoria: l'esercizio del potere locale," 10.

²⁶ See below, footnote 41; for an analysis of the early development of some Lombard centres, to which Guastalla can be compared, see Menant, *Campagnes lombardes*, 489–94.

²⁷ In both centres, there are documented elites of clear knightly rank who built fortifications (in Bionde a *dugnonem et castellum cum fossatis*) and were entitled to collect one-third of the judicial penalties paid by their subordinates. For Bionde, see Castagnetti, 'Ut nullus', 42–54 and documents 132–6; for Cerea, see Varanini, "Società e istituzioni," 85–9, and the document published in Castagnetti, 'Ut nullus', 114.

²⁸ Falconi, e Peveri, *Registrum magnum*, 520–6.

²⁹ This group of knights included the consort lords of the castles of Ripi, Torrice, and Pofi, as well as other knights; in the absence of further studies, see the documents published in Theiner, *Codex*, I, 314–5, a. 1195 and 1200; Caperna, *Storia di Veroli*, 292–5, a. 1209; and Scaccia Scara-foni, *Regesti*, 50–2, a. 1230–2.

³⁰ For Farfa, see the following note; for Racconigi, see Pezzano, "Istituzioni e ceti sociali" and Pertz, *Annales Ceccanenses*, 296–8.

³¹ Among the few exceptions, I highlight the recent Lefeuve, *Notables et notabilité*.

wealthiest tenants – those *boni homines castrorum* who, at the beginning of the 11th century, are found participating in the abbey *placita*. These men later consolidated the patrimony granted in concession and, from 1060 onwards, when Farfa began to employ the feudal instrument to organise its military clientele, they became *equites cum fegis*, later known as *milites* and *fideles abbatie*. According to Toubert, they held patrimonies quite similar to those of ordinary peasant tenants, though exempt from all obligations save military service. Here, then, we are faced with a process of social ascent fuelled primarily by the territorial lord.³²

Countless sources show, in fact, that “more or less up to the last quarter of the 12th century, all the observable processes of rural social mobility pivoted on service to the lords”. Maria Elena Cortese, to whom we owe a particularly well-balanced synthesis, has emphasised – drawing on all the available bibliography – the path that led “the ablest and strongest youths coming from peasant families” to recruitment as squires. Thanks to military practice on horseback, proximity to the lord, and a new lifestyle this marked a move away from the *rustici*, consolidation at the top of village societies and finally, in the luckiest cases, entry into the group of true knights.³³ More peremptorily, Alessio Fiore maintains that “up until the third decade of the 12th century, being a *miles* was not a matter of social origin or personal wealth, but purely of being able to serve a lord militarily by fighting on horseback and of creating a particular bond with him through this kind of service, thereby gaining a privileged position within local society”.³⁴ More generally, in the central and northern regions, as in the South, the importance of service to the powerful – and in particular “participation in the exercise of seigneurial powers as minor officials”³⁵ (and, in the South, also in the local administration of the royal demesne) – was undoubtedly crucial for the formation of rural elites. Just as it appears beyond doubt that the centrality of lordship as a vector of social change came to end in the last decades of the 12th century, when “the intensification of economic growth and the commercialisation of the countryside led to the appearance of paths of social mobility in which the seigneurial structure was more a frame than the cause”.³⁶

However, there is a strong impression that in the central-northern regions the predominantly lordly origin of the sources that best document knights and rural notables has led to an excessive emphasis on lords, neglecting the formative processes of knightly groups that unfolded in substantial autonomy from territorial lords, even before the transformations brought about by the economic growth of the late 12th century. The observation is obvious in all autonomous rural communities, where we see the emergence of a knightly

³² Toubert, *Les structures du Latium*, 1103-76.

³³ Cortese, “Rural milites,” 336-7 and 341.

³⁴ Fiore, “Knights and peasants,” 54.

³⁵ Collavini, “Tra campagne,” 11.

³⁶ Collavini, 12.

elite, as well as in those subject to extensive knightly *consorterie*. In pioneering pages, Alessio Fiore has offered an initial sampling – one that requires considerable extension.³⁷ Just as it is obvious that the exponents of vast *consorterie* who collectively exercised a territorial lordship – but who individually held such small shares of it as to resemble simple knights – contributed to the growth of the knightly structure. Some *consorterie* arose from the fragmentation of ancient lineages through partible inheritance; many others concerned lordships that had already come into being as collective lordships through the action of groups of local notables, which over time underwent further fragmentation. This was the case of the aforementioned forty *domini* of Tevigio; of the many noblemen from the Marche, whom we shall see intent on associating to found new settlements; and of many others, such as the six *domini* who in the Umbrian village of Pomonte in 1193 each had between one and four dependents,³⁸ or the twenty or so *domini* of Torre Caetani who in 1180 divided the domination of a population of around two hundred families, with a larger share due to the most important nobleman.³⁹

The formation of a local knighthood, which results firstly from autonomous processes of ascendancy and is only incidentally connected to service to the lordship at a subsequent stage, also transpires in centres subject to medium and large territorial lordships. A notable example of this is the famous agreement between the abbe of San Sisto in Piacenza and the *homines* of Guastalla. In July 1102, the monastery in Piacenza – which, only a few weeks earlier, had obtained the near-complete transfer of the ancient fiscal *curtis* of Guastalla from Matilda of Canossa, endowed with an extensive territory and with revenues secured by trade along the Po River – regulated and restricted seignorial rights, under terms that were further clarified and reaffirmed in 1116 by the abbot of the male community that succeeded the nuns. The *pactum et conventio* can be seen as a response to the demands of a dynamic and rapidly developing community, which secured the recognition of its own political organisation through the election of twelve representatives, among other things. Moreover, the privileged recipients of the monastic concessions were the notables, who were likely to lead the community and benefit most from the exemption from *ripatico* granted to all residents, as well as from the transfer of the *teloneo* on the river ports to the community. It is no coincidence that immediately after the trade concessions, the document records an explicit concession relating to the elites: those who would decide to own a fighting horse to defend San Sisto and themselves (but in 1116 the protection of Guastalla itself was prioritised: *ad terre, ecclesie suique libertatem tuendam*) obtained the right to hold their landed property under the favourable condition accorded to aristocratic possessions, namely that of *feudum cum omni onore*. In 1102, this concession was

³⁷ Fiore, *The Seignorial Transformation*, 125-40.

³⁸ Fortini, *Nova vita*, 357.

³⁹ Caetani, *Varia*, 1-2.

addressed *omnibus curialibus* of Guastalla, an expression usually interpreted as referring to those who were already part of Matilda's vassal-like clientele and lordly retinue. More probably, however, the term *curiales* here designates all the notables of the *curia* of Guastalla, excluding the peasants (*agricole*); this meaning is confirmed by the 1116 redaction, which in several passages clarifies the earlier *conventio*, where the concession to knights refers to *curiales seu burgenses* – i.e. all the notables who lived in the castle or its borough, excluding the *rustici*. The concessions of 1102 and 1116 therefore show that the lords did not so much promote as seek to frame and harness the drive to increase the number of knights, which in dynamic and fast-growing rural centres such as Guastalla was very strong in those decades.⁴⁰

The initial chronology, however, remains to be ascertained. There is no doubt that the desire to increase the number of knights grew stronger in the last third of the 11th century, following the crisis of public institutions, civil wars, and the emergence of new, predatory seigneurial powers. During this phase, while the direct involvement of territorial lords in the formation of knightly groups, through concessions and recruitment, may not have been as extensive as historical accounts suggest, their indirect influence was certainly significant as driving forces of change towards a more localised and more violent world. Violence became a shared discourse, to the point that even rural communities built castles, while – in all likelihood, as we know from the South – relations of authority and subjection within them grew stronger and more coercive. This created the perfect context for the multiplication of mounted combatants and the militarisation of pre-eminence. The situation before the mid-11th century, however, appears different: the sources are less abundant, references to horsemen are much rarer, and the link between pre-eminent roles in local societies and the practice of mounted combat does not yet seem to be taken for granted.

4. *Knightly micro-lordships in central and northern Italy*

A large proportion of these knights held their own micro-lordships. Before discussing this, however, it is worth noting that central-northern Italy shows that, if the knights remained in the countryside rather than moving into the cities, they could establish domination over groups of peasants in various ways and perhaps pursue paths quite different from those of the micro-lordship. Cases such as Crema, and especially the famous pact of 1093 between the counts and knights of Biandrate, show how rural *milites* could accept the invitation to move to the castles of rising territorial lords, perhaps

⁴⁰ Falconi, *Le carte cremonesi*, II, 64-5 and 98-100. For the history of Guastalla, I refer to Tabarrini, "Tasse, rendite, guerra;" for the end of the female community, to Getschmann, "Monachos ob reformandam religionem."

forming a sort of noble commune, which in Biandrate was led by twelve consuls and exercised judicial powers over the knights' peasants.⁴¹ In central Italy, and particularly in the Marche, a 'dust cloud of small lords' – made up of groups of rural knights alongside minor territorial lords – decided in the second half of the 12th century to radically change the basis of their supremacy. Associated in sometimes numerous groups, small *domini*, *boni homines*, *maiores*, and *milites* of the countryside chose to abandon the dispersed villages and tiny castles where they held possessions and subordinates, and to move together to a different settlement – often newly founded – where in many cases they also brought their dependents.⁴² Sometimes, as in Matelica, the purpose of the initiative was to free oneself from the control of a territorial lord; at other times, as in Fabriano, the noble 'dust cloud' that took the initiative was initially free from any superior control. In all cases, however, the main motivation was the desire to "reorganise the power over men and equip themselves with more effective instruments of domination":⁴³ at first, the new centres remained under the control of knights and petty nobles, who retained their rights of levy and justice over the subjects they had transferred to the new settlement. For the knights of the countryside, we also glimpse paths other than those constituted by autonomous rule over small groups of dependants, adhesion to territorial lords, and grouping in large castles with proto-urban aspirations. Federico Del Tredici has shown that the knights of the Milanese area were not controlled by territorial lords – who were almost absent there – nor did they opt for domination over a group of neighbours: some remained outside the rural communities, while others valued their presence within them. This was a long-standing presence, well attested as early as the 11th century. For example, in the above-mentioned passage on the parents of Arialdo, Andrea da Strumi not only emphasises their chivalrous profile, but also their full membership of the Cucciago community and their respect for the *iuste conventiones* that regulated relations between *vicini*. As the 12th century progressed and the city's political and fiscal influence over the countryside grew, these knights' role seems to have primarily become that of intermediaries with the city. They derived political and social supremacy and economic wealth from this role, thanks to the substantial income they earned by anticipating community payments to the city's tax authorities.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Menant, "Aux origines de la société cremasque;" on Biandrate, the pact with the knights in 1093, and the contextual pact with the *rustici-homines* are published in Faccio, e Ranno, *I Biscioni*, 120-2 (the gaps can partly be filled in with a text from 1167: 133-5); among the vast bibliography, I only mention Andenna, "I conti di Biandrate," and Panero, *Servi e rustici*, 165-231.

⁴² The best analyses – often marked by a weak distinction between *domini castri* and *milites* – are Maire Vigueur, "Centri di nuova fondazione" (where the definition of "dust" is found); Luzzatto, "Le sottomissioni;" Pirani, *Fabriano*; Fiore, *Signori e sudditi*, 183-95 and 269-93; Bernacchia, *Incastellamento*.

⁴³ Maire Vigueur, "Centri di nuova fondazione," 91-2.

⁴⁴ Del Tredici, "Castelli, chiese, mutazione signorile;" Del Tredici, *Comunità, nobili e gentiluomini*.

What do we know about the micro-lordships of central and northern knights? Although the research is not yet complete, it leaves little doubt that, as in the South, the possession of dependent men and the land they cultivated seems to have been the standard endowment of most knights. There were, of course, many exceptions. We can imagine that some mounted fighters were maintained directly by the lord, either by residing in his mansion or through frequent donations. Already of secondary importance, their number must have dwindled steadily over the course of the 12th century. A share that is difficult to quantify – but certainly larger than that of those retained by the lord – consisted of knights who had no subordinate peasant families at all. As a result, they derived income only from land entrusted to peasants bound by purely economic relationships, which did not create a stable dependency (as in the case of leaseholders of individual plots), or from the work of labourers and sometimes even members of their own families. This type of knightly patrimony seems typical both of the less well-off mounted fighters and of those who lived within lordships of great strength and pervasiveness. A good example of the latter are the knights of the Roman barons of the 13th century – great lords who sought in every way to avoid sharing any power of command with other actors. They also opposed any authority of the knights of the lordship over those who cultivated the land granted to them: consequently, the *feuda nobilia* assigned to knights could reach considerable size, but with few exceptions do not seem to have included *vassals*, i.e. stable peasant dependents.⁴⁵

However, as I have said, the majority of knightly estates were based on the possession of subjugated workers. It is no coincidence that when a lord provided for his *milites*, he would typically assign them dependent peasants and the corresponding assets. The basic unit used to describe the granted estates was often the men themselves, who were variously referred to as *homines*, *massari*, *vassalli*, *villani*, *rustici*, *angariales*, *manentes*, *coloni*, *habitatores*, or *sedentes*. These terms had substantially similar meanings, even though they might refer to slightly different types of subjection, a distinction that historians have sometimes overemphasised.⁴⁶ Although this was left implicit, peasants were always assigned to the *miles* who received the concession together with their family members. In some cases, the presence of the family was explicitly stated in the description of the property granted, which was then referred to as *caseate*, *domus*, *mainate*, or *familie*. In other concessions, the basic units were instead peasant holdings, usually defined as *mansi*, which could also house more than one family; at other times, the adopted unit was the *sedimen* or *resedium*, i.e. the land on which the granted family's house and other buildings were built.

The examples are literally countless.⁴⁷ In 1105, the Bishop of Fermo granted twenty-one peasant families (*caseate*) to two rural *boni homines* in em-

⁴⁵ Carocci, *Baroni di Roma*, 220-4.

⁴⁶ There are a few exceptions, among which Collavini, "La condizione giuridica," stands out.

⁴⁷ In addition to those cited below, other examples are mentioned by Fiore, *Signori e sudditi*, 84-5.

phyteusis. In 1127, he made another concession of only four *homines*; in 1135, a third of twelve *mainate hominum*.⁴⁸ In the same period, or perhaps even earlier, the Veronese abbot of San Zeno granted Markesio of Ostiglia a series of *homines cum districto et honore*. In the same years, in nearby Nogara, the estates given as fiefs to knights by the Counts Gandolfingi and other nobles consisted primarily of *mansi* (and tithes).⁴⁹ In Isola Comacina, before 1113, Gotefredo della Martesana granted a group of brothers two *massari* as fiefs with *omnis districtus et albergaria et beneficium*.⁵⁰ Around 1160, when the pope, after conquering the Latium castle of Fumone by force, granted it back to the heirs of the ancient concessionaires with many restrictions and stringent pacts, he established, among other things, that he reserved the right to freely choose the knights to whom he would distribute the *feuda militum*. He immediately assigned to one of his own followers a *feudum unius militis* consisting of vineyards, two and a half hectares of arable land and, above all, ten *homines*.⁵¹ Before 1169, the abbess of S. Maria del Senatore in Pavia granted a fief in Voghera to a local personage, who also acted as her *gastaldo*. This fief consisted of *sedimina*.⁵² In 1178, the testament of Guido del fu Catenaccio Figuineldi bound all the goods assigned to him in fief to one of the knights of Figline *cum villanis, colonis, sedentibus et cum omni iure*.⁵³ Lastly, in 1183, two brothers from Marengo were invested by the abbot of the monastery of S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia with a fief consisting of ten *mansi* and some *sedimina* located in various localities, some of which were not close to each other. This fief had previously belonged to another local personage and his five consorts, each of whom owned fractions of the fief ranging from one to four *mansi*.⁵⁴

The possession of subjects could obviously have had an allodial character, which, however, emerges only weakly from the available documentary landscape, predominantly of lordly origin. Yet the two *massari* that Gotefredo della Martesana had granted as a fief before 1113 seem to have been an allodial possession, just as the majority of the subjects held by the *boni homines* and *milites* of Fabriano, Matelica, and many other centres in the Marche and Umbria, or by the large *consorterie* in which each member owned only a few subjects. It has been hypothesised that allodial possessions, together with the related peasant subordinates, increased during the 12th century, as the

⁴⁸ Pacini, Avarucci, e Paoli, *Liber iurium*, 506-7, 512-3, 536-7.

⁴⁹ Castagnetti, *Il processo per Ostiglia*, 367 and 353-4 (with comments 131-132, 147-8 and 219-20). See now Fiore, "Ostiglia around 1100."

⁵⁰ Pezzola, *Le carte dei monasteri di S. Maria dell'Acquafredda*, no. 22. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/co/lenno-smaria/carte/acquafredda1113-06-00/>.

⁵¹ Duchesne, et Fabre, *Le Liber Censuum*, I, 401-2.

⁵² Ansani, *Le carte del monastero di S. Maria del Senatore*, no. 69, <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/pv/pavia-smariasenatore/carte/senatore1169-08-23/>.

⁵³ Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Diplomatico, Riformagioni*, 1178, February 3 (= 1179), kindly pointed out to me by Maria Elena Cortese.

⁵⁴ Barbieri, et al., *Le carte del monastero di S. Pietro*, no. 154. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/pv/pavia-spietro2/carte/spca1183-02-16B/>.

more fortunate knights accumulated resources.⁵⁵ This dynamic is plausible above all for knights of more modest origin, who were more closely tied to the lord, and certainly less so for higher-ranking *milites*, who already by the 11th century appear well endowed with allodial holdings. The visibility of allodial possessions was also obscured by the general tendency to define as a fief any aristocratic possession, as in the case of Guastalla in 1102, when all the possessions held in any capacity by mounted combatants were considered an honourable fief.

5. Honor privatus et specialis

It is difficult to establish when the possession of peasant families entailed powers of command and levy that we can consider lordly in nature, and how pervasive these powers were. As in the dominions of Roman barons, the rights of knights over peasants might not extend beyond the levy of a share of the crops. Other forms of subjection involved only symbolic donations and little else, and – as in the Mezzogiorno – seem to have had primarily a political-clientelistic significance, serving to increase a knight's local influence.⁵⁶ In the majority of cases, however, there seems to be little doubt: from their dependents, knights received tithes, donations, corvées, taxes, and judicial penalties, and their dominance was pervasive.

This lordly character present in most knightly dominations often emerges only with difficulty in the sources. As with every aspect of lordship, the most evident element is variability – the extreme diversification of domination practices according to regions, local contexts, and individuals. At this early stage of research, this makes any attempt to trace a geography of micro-lordships entirely impractical. For now, I will limit myself to noting an apparent difference between central and northern Italy in the type of information available: in central Italy the sources are quite rich in information on the levies in goods and labour made by the micro-lords, but more laconic on their jurisdictional rights; by contrast, in northern Italy we find less detailed descriptions of the levies and more information on the faculties of justice and command.

A representative type of central Italian sources is the series of notarial deeds recording the sworn declarations on the *debitalia servitia* owed by their subjects, made between 1198 and 1202 by the *boni homines* of Fabriano – i.e. the knights and petty lords who had decided to establish the new settlement a few decades earlier, moving there with part of their *homines*.⁵⁷ These documents are well-known and have been studied, among other scholars, by

⁵⁵ Fiore, *Signori e sudditi*, 89–90.

⁵⁶ Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, especially 305–9; Fiore, *Lords and Subjects*, 279.

⁵⁷ Luzzatto, *Rustici e signori*, 17–25; Archivio Storico Comunale di Fabriano, *Carte diplomatiche*, I, nos. 34, 35, 48, 49, 49bis, 59.

Gino Luzzatto, Francesco Pirani, and Alessio Fiore,⁵⁸ from whom I take this passage, relating to a 1199 declaration:

Of the twenty or so *homines* dependent on the three consorts (Alberto, Morico and Cencio), a dozen were subject to heavy dues (mostly in kind), as well as a few dozen days' work for the lord. A couple had lighter obligations, while half a dozen were subject to almost exclusively symbolic donations at festivals. A member of the first group, Raino di Bernardo, was obliged to pay two hams, half a dozen large flatbreads, a basin of mince, two cheeses, two bundles of wood for heating, and two *solidi* annually (on different dates). He also had to provide around 50 days of labour for the lord (six days for sowing grain, the same number for harvesting, two days for haymaking, two days for repairing canals, four days for pruning the vineyard, four days for weeding it, and the same number for harvesting grapes, etc.). On the other hand, the *filiu Iohannis Boni* were only required to provide two hams or, alternatively, two capons and two large flatbreads every year on the feast of St Stephen.⁵⁹

Adding to both the burden of the first group of subjects and the pervasiveness of the lordship was the requirement to lend oxen and donkeys two days a week for transport services, and, above all, to pay *adiutoria* in food and money on the occasion of the marriage of a female member of the seigneurial family, the adoubement of the lords themselves or of other relatives, and their summons to a trial – all *ad sensum et voluntatem* of the lords, but in accordance with what had been customary in previous decades. Very unusually, there was also a heavy military service of at least eight days a month whenever the lords engaged in a *war*.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Pirani, *Fabriano*, 75-9; Luzzatto, *Rustici*; Luzzatto, *Dai servi della gleba*, 234-42; Fiore, *Signori e sudditi*, 269-70, from which the passage quoted in the text is taken (English translation my own).

⁵⁹ Archivio Storico Comunale di Fabriano, *Carte diplomatiche*, I, 48: *In primis Raino de Berardo debet annuatim in festo Sancto Stephani Nativitatis I par spallarum porcine cum II focatiis magnis et II tracturas et in quadragessima I catinum macenate cum I focatia magna et in Sancte Marie augusti II casiatas cum II focatiis magnis aut antea quando domni precipere vellent et II sollos Lucensium et medium in foro magno Gaifane et IIII coltrinas et IIII paria boum ad refrangendum et VI paria ad seminandum et VI operas ad metendum et IIII operas ad aram et II operas cum somario et barastas ad portandum bladum ad aram aut cum bovis et I ad pallareum et debet commodare somarium et saccum ad portandum bladum domi dum necesse esset dominis, et II operas ad faciendam peraturam et II ad portandam eam ad vineam et IIII ad vineam potanda et IIII ad eam levandam et II ad ea palmandam et IIII ad vangandam et II operas ad vegetes et canales adtandas et IIII operas ad (ven)deminadum cum sporta et sporta relinquit dominis et II somas lignorum in yeme quando mitti iamdictis dominis petere vellent et hec omnia predicta servitia annuatim debet dare bonis predictis dominis suis. A total of 51 corvées were required, of which 22 were for the vineyard (the *peratura* or *paratura*, as well as the repair of barrels and *torcolari*, called *canales*), and 27 were for arable crops, 14 of which required oxen (the *coltrina* is a small plough used for fallowing).*

⁶⁰ *Suprascripti homines debent predictis dominis facere adiutorium ad placitum et ad nuptias et ad corredum de pane et annona et carne et pullis et ovis et tortocleis et denariis ad sensum et voluntatem predictis dominis sicut fecerunt a XXX annis usque nunc; et cum domini predicti haberent guerram quilibet suprascriptorum hominum debet stare cum eis saltim ad minus octo dies per mensem quando domini precipere vellent cum armis; et debent prestare iamdictis dominis duos dies in qualibet edomada boves et asinos in aliis et baractis eorum ad voluntatem predictis dominis. Less stringent on *adiutoria* for marriages and adornments are the pacts of 1198 (published in Pirani, *Fabriano*, 169-75) at the origin of the *servitia* declarations.*

Declarations of this type, along with other statements of peasant obligations, are quite numerous in Fabriano and other towns in the Marche region from the last decades of the 12th century onwards. They reveal, among other things, the individualised nature of these obligations, which often varied among the subjects of the same lord. This suggests that lords with a large number of subjects – sometimes more than thirty – based their declarations on some form of written record. Lords with fewer subjects (from one to fifteen), by contrast, seem to have lacked such records, and their declarations not surprisingly reveal doubts and second thoughts that forced notaries to make additions and changes to the declarations.⁶¹ A common obligation, at least for peasants burdened with numerous corvées and recognitive gifts, was the provision of *adiutoria* for nuptials, adoubements, and *placita*.

The rights of micro-lords also extended to coercive, judicial, and fiscal faculties. Around 1150 in Fonte Avellana, in 1198 in Fabriano, and in 1203 in the Assisi countryside, the agreements concerning the rights of *boni homines* included the faculty to prey (*predare*) upon subjects who failed to perform the *debitum servitium*;⁶² in the Perugino area, until the restrictions imposed by the city statutes in 1279, the local lord could even freely beat his subjects.⁶³ The sources, however, are not very explicit, and we often have to rely on formulations that are both elusive and evocative – such as the *omnis usus* owed to the church of Fermo *et decimas de ipsa et placitum et bannum de vobis et de vestris omnibus*, granted in 1135 together with twelve peasant families.⁶⁴ We do, however, have clear evidence of the ordinary and widespread nature of the judicial rights over subordinates in cases where the power of a territorial lord, the pressure of dependents, and above all the establishment of major settlements obliged the knights to cede the administration of justice to the lord or the rural commune; in return, they obtained a share of the proceeds. In the Latium castle of Cave, where around 1260 the Annibaldi had not succeeded in detaching all the subjects from the *milites* – as the Roman barons and the Annibaldi themselves normally did in their other dominions – the knights were entitled to a share of the judicial revenues and taxes (*de bannis, plazis et obfensis*) paid by their *vassalli*.⁶⁵ In the Marche, in Fabriano, where the administration of justice had passed to the commune, according to the 1198 agreements between the *boni homines* and the *plebei qui debent servire prefatis bonis hominibus* the micro-lords were entitled to half of the judicial revenues, tolls, and market taxes.⁶⁶ In 1205, the pacts established between the inhabitants of Ripatransone and the Bishop of Fermo stipulated that the

⁶¹ For example: Archivio Storico Comunale di Fabriano, *Carte diplomatiche*, I, 34.

⁶² Pierucci, Polverari, e Bernacchia, *Carte di Fonte Avellana*, 120-1; Pirani, *Fabriano*, 169-75, § 11-2; Fortini, *Vita nova*, 556-9, esp. 557.

⁶³ Tiberini, *Le signorie rurali*, 199 and 265; Fiore, *Signori e sudditi*, 274.

⁶⁴ Pacini, Avarucci, e Paoli, *Liber iurium*, 536-7.

⁶⁵ Carocci, *Baroni di Roma*, 221.

⁶⁶ Pirani, *Fabriano*, 169-75, § 10.

dominus of an inhabitant would receive half of the judicial punishments inflicted on his *vassallus*.⁶⁷

These provisions on the division of judicial revenues sometimes reveal realities deeply interwoven with pervasive micro-lordship. In 1194, in Montalboddo – a commune established under the superior seigniorship of the Archbishop of Ravenna – the murder regulations described a population largely composed of *minores* subject to the lordship of *maiores idest de generatione militum*: the *maior-miles* guilty of murder was fined 10 *libre*, while the *minor* lost all his movable property, half of which went to the archbishop, a quarter to the commune, and the remaining quarter to the knight who was his *dominus*, and who was also entitled to all the offender's immovable property (*possessio eius*).⁶⁸ Some fifteen kilometres further west, in Serra (probably Serra de' Conti), the population was completely divided between subjects and micro-lords, as evidenced by regulations stipulating that the three consuls, to whom the administration of justice had been delegated, should deliver half of the fines to offender's *dominus*. Additionally, legislation on murders stipulated that the culprit had to reimburse the dead man's *dominus*. If he refused, his *dominus* would take his entire patrimony and reimburse the deceased's *dominus*.⁶⁹

In northern Italy, as mentioned, the documentary landscape appears different. So far, research has not identified detailed listings of dues, works, gifts, and *censi*. On the contrary, references to judicial prerogatives occur more frequently. In reality, these are often generic – though nonetheless indicative – formulations: the assignment of subjects *cum discripto et honore et dabant michi fictum et decimam* obtained by Markesio of Ostiglia at the beginning of the 12th century;⁷⁰ the possession *de omni districto et albergaria et beneficio* claimed over two *massari* of Isola Comacina in the same years;⁷¹ the *ius districti et castellanie* retained in 1164 by the *milites* of Mongrando, near Biella, even over *mansi* donated *pro anima* to a church by any one of them;⁷² the right to take possession of anyone not already subject to the bishop – while also receiving from him *fodrum et drictum* – held in 1196 in the Asti area

⁶⁷ Pacini, Avarucci, e Paoli, *Liber iurium*, 205-8.

⁶⁸ Menchetti, *Storia di un comune rurale*, 121-4: *De omicida autem dicimus: si de maioribus, idest de generatione militum fuerit, unusquisque persolvat . x. libras consulibus et d(omino archiepiscopi); si de minoribus fuerit, omnia sua mobilia amittat: medietatem sit consulum et domini sui, equaliter dividant; aliam medietatem sit domini archiepiscopi. Possessio vero eius sit ad libitum domini sui.*

⁶⁹ Zonghi, *Carte diplomatiche fabrianesi*, 46-7 (checked against the original: Archivio Storico Comunale di Fabriano, *Carte diplomatiche*, I, 55): *si quis fecerit omicidum per totum districtum Serre solvat pro bando V libras et emendet hominem domino cuius est in arbitrio consulum, et si nollet omicida facere, omnia sua deveniant domino omicide et ille dominus emendet mortuum domino cuius est in arbitrio consulum.*

⁷⁰ Castagnetti, *Il processo per Ostiglia*, 367 and 353-4 (with comments 131-2, 147-8 and 219-20).

⁷¹ Pezzola, *Le carte dei monasteri di S. Maria dell'Acquafredda*, no. 22 <https://www.lombardia-beniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/co/lenno-smaria/carte/acquafredda1113-06-00/>

⁷² Faccio, e Ranno, *I Biscioni*, 140-3.

by the *milites* of Bene Inferiore;⁷³ again in the Asti area, in Vico, where high justice was a monopoly of the bishop, the knights (i.e. feudal lords) *faciebant racionem de suis hominibus*, and even minor judicial powers pertained to simple inhabitants over their sons and peasants of all kinds (*de suis filiis et de inquilinis et manentibus suis et de superficiariis*);⁷⁴ again in the second half of the 12th century, the disputes over *honor et districtus* and *iurisdictio vel quasi iurisdictio* over peasants in Lumellogno, claimed by town owners and local allodiers are well known in the historiography;⁷⁵ and, finally, to close an already overlong list, the right to *suos homines tenere cum successione et curaia et placitis et bannis* was recognised in 1203 to the knights and *alii boni homines* of Carmagnola, at the end of a dispute with the marquis of Saluzzo, who only retained jurisdiction over major offences.⁷⁶ Even in the northern regions, when justice was administered either by the lord alone or by a community body, a share of the judicial revenues – and sometimes of the taxes – went to the micro-lord. In Bionde, Cerea, and other castles belonging to the bishop and cathedral chapter of Verona from 1137 onwards, for example, there is evidence of local notables, certainly knights, who were entitled to receive one-third of the judicial penalties paid by their peasants, and sometimes also of what was paid in *placita*.⁷⁷ In Biandrate in 1093, it seems that all judicial profits went to the twelve consuls drawn from the knights, and in Mongrando in 1164 jurisdiction over *mansi* alienated to churches was attributed to all the *milites* in general.⁷⁸

Two further elements confirm the diffusion of members of the knightly elite endowed with judicial rights over subordinates. On the one hand, we find cases in which the right to *distringere suos habitatores ante se ad racionem faciendam* also belonged to persons of less than fully chivalric status, such as the local notables who, in the ‘fiefs *de colmello*’ of the Padova area, were collectively responsible for providing a knight to the bishop.⁷⁹ On the other hand, witnesses and judicial disputes attest that the very spread of micro-lordship rights undermined the jurisdictional claims of territorial lords, creating situations that contemporaries themselves perceived as sources of conflict and confusion, and compelling jurists to introduce distinctions that were in many respects new.

Well known to historiography is the case of Lumellogno, a few kilometres from Novara, where from 1148 onwards we find evidence of a series of judicial disputes between the town canons – who appear to have succeeded in acquiring the territorial lordship of the village – and certain landowners, probably

⁷³ *Historiae Patriae Monumenta*. 6. *Chartarum*, II, 168–70.

⁷⁴ *Libro verde*, 43–51, esp. 47; for some context, see the bibliography in Provero, *Le parole dei sudditi*, 80.

⁷⁵ Andenna, “Formazione,” 127–42; Panero, *Servi e rustici*, 190–9.

⁷⁶ Menocchio, *Memorie storiche*, 197–9.

⁷⁷ Above, footnote 26.

⁷⁸ See above, footnotes 39 and 71.

⁷⁹ Castiglioni, *L'altro feudalesimo*, 265, 280 and 288.

knights of Novara, who claimed full lordship over the peasants on their lands. These landowners asserted rights not only to dues, *albergaria*, and *corvées*, but also to judicial faculties concerning offences committed both within their own group of peasants and externally, between their subjects and those of other lords. Widely diffused, moreover, was an oath of allegiance that was, so to speak, *ligia*, i.e. superior to the loyalty sworn to the canons. First the bishop and then the judges of the commune established the territorial nature of the canons' domination, but without denying the micro-lords' rights: they merely stated that the *honor et districtus* of the canons, extending over the entire territory, were superior (*pociores*) to those of the knights. The ruling exposes a structural difficulty in distinguishing different and clearly defined levels of lordship in rural life. For the inhabitants of Lumelloigno itself, after all, the situation was far less clear than the communal judges maintained. More than once, peasants who had received land in concession from the town landowners and obeyed them incurred the wrath of the canons – even to the point of the remarkable episode in which one peasant was harshly reprimanded by the canons' representative for daring to say that his lords (*domini mei*) were the town knights. As a result, disagreements resurfaced for generations, including with a wealthy local allodier, Alberto di Lumelloigno, who obstructed the canons in administering the *districtus*, claiming jurisdictional rights over his own subjects.⁸⁰

We also find a similar dispute in Codogno. Owned by the Bishop of Lodi since at least 1127, the large village had from the outset been partially enfeoffed to certain *capitanei*, who in turn made concessions in favour of town knights, mainly from the Vaierano and de la Pusterla families.⁸¹ By the mid-century, these knights were already in conflict with the bishop over the rights of *fodro*, *albergaria*, and *districtus* with respect to their villeins; the quarrels continued until 1180–81, when the judge of the *podestà* of Lodi heard the case concerning payments for grazing, which the bishop claimed as his exclusive competence as territorial lord. On that occasion, several village notables – each styled *ser* by the notary – were heard as witnesses. They were questioned in order to ascertain whether the bishop possessed jurisdiction over the entire territory (*honor curtis*), whether the *milites* really owned half of the *sedimina* in Codogno, and whether they exercised *honor* over the peasants living there. The testimonies and the ruling attest that roughly half of the peasant population was in fact subject to knights (of eight depositions, six answered positively and two negatively to the question). Among the knightly lordships, the largest by far appear to have been those of the Vaierano and de la Pusterla families, each encompassing about one-eighth of the peasants. Yet there were also members of the local elites involved – probably most of the

⁸⁰ I will only refer to Andenna, "Formazione," 127–42; Panero, *Servi e rustici*, 190–9.

⁸¹ Grossi, *Le carte della Mensa Vescovile*, nos. 40, 82–89, 137 (testimonies) and 145 (sentence). <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/lo/lodi-vescovo/carte/>. Federico Del Tredici provided me with valuable advice on these documents.

witnesses, and certainly *ser Petrus Zimellus*, who, when asked whether the entire *honor* on the territory belonged to the knights, replied laconically that his *massari* acknowledged his jurisdiction (*suum drictum*). Although the surviving testimonies are only those produced by the bishop, they nonetheless reveal hesitations that point to how overlapping and confused the distribution of seigneurial rights was in practice. While, as I have said, a large majority agreed that the knights held about half of the *sedimina*, doubts arose over the seigneurial nature (*cum honore*) of their possession of men, affirmed by four witnesses but denied by three; and confusion was greatest regarding the possession of the *honor curtis*, a question to which almost all the witnesses declared themselves unable to respond. It is therefore not surprising that, in his ruling, the *podestà*'s judge formulated a definition that was in many ways innovative: only the bishop was recognised as holding territorial lordship (*honor curtis*), but the knights were guaranteed the right to possess the *sedimina* and their inhabitants *cum onore privato et speciali*, which entailed the administration of justice and the collection of related revenues.⁸² *Honor privatus et specialis*: this may be taken as a contemporary definition of knightly micro-lordships.

6. Ongoing research

On all the issues addressed here, research is still ongoing. It remains necessary to map the geography of the attestations of knightly micro-lordships, to identify their local characteristics, and to attempt their interpretation. Further analysis of documentary practices is also required – for example, to explain why in the northern regions attestations of dues and corvées appear rarer, while references to justice rights are more frequent. In any case, certain elements are already clear for the central-northern regions: the widespread presence of mounted combatants in the countryside; the routine ownership of peasants by the majority of knights; their frequent exercise of jurisdictional prerogatives over dependents; and the crucial economic resources they derived from their subordinates.

Equally clear is the strong economic, social, and political significance that micro-lordship held for the knights. The possession of dependent men played a fundamental economic role, providing a steady flow of dues in kind, gifts, labour services, and money payments. It was also a visible and continually reaffirmed marker of status and pre-eminence. Moreover, it served as a tool to strengthen political relations: downwards, by mobilising one's clientele in local politics, and upwards, by forging relations of collaboration, service, and even opposition with higher-ranking lords. For the peasants, by contrast, it seems that the most pervasive domination – just as in the South – came

⁸² On the 1181 ruling, see the insightful remarks in Tabacco, *Dai re ai signori*, pp. 80-2.

from the knights, who could shape the social and economic life of their small groups of subjects far more directly than the great territorial lords. The right to *predare* upon and beat subjects was compounded by the frequent demand for numerous days of compulsory labour, the concession of family working lands, and countless other forms of constraint. The fact that the micro-lords often lived in or near the village was an additional and powerful factor of domination. Much to the irritation of the canons of Novara, and in spite of their claims to territorial lordship over Lumello, as we have seen, it was primarily the knights who were called *domini mei* by the peasants who cultivated and inhabited their lands.

At times the conditioning exercised by the micro-lords, and their potential pervasiveness, was also reinforced by a proximity that might almost be described as intimacy – based on the sharing of material culture and food tastes, on common labour, and on the experience of living in the same places. The *pacta* of 1180 for the subjects of the knights of Torre Caetani, in Latium, for example, distinguish between work obligations owed to the lord (*prestare domino*), the heaviest, and those simply involving *adiuvare dominum* (especially in domestic tasks such as supplying and transporting wood or repairing roofs). This suggests a collaborative working relationship between knight and subject.⁸³ At present, there is no clear evidence to the extent to which the impact of micro-lordships on local societies was multiplied by relationships of collaboration, protection, and clientele, as was largely the case in the South. A few clues, however, make this hypothesis plausible. In Torre Caetani, for instance, if the *dominus suus* invited a subject to form a *societas* with him for livestock breeding or other ventures, refusal was not permitted. The anger with which the lord of a small village in the Marche shouted at one of his subjects who had decided to move to the rural commune of Rocca Contrada – “from then on the sons of whores would defend him, since he was no longer his man (*ita filii pucte qui defendent te, non es meus homo*)” – is significant of how micro-lordships implied protection.⁸⁴ The same harsh legislation mentioned above, which in Serra and Montalboddo assigned all the assets of the murderer to the micro-lords, suggests some form of protection from municipal justice, given the likelihood that the lord would maintain the concession of assets, perhaps taking advantage of it to increase the burden.⁸⁵

From an economic point of view, there is little doubt that the knights were able to extract substantial resources from peasant labour. However, this was not only a heavy demand that absorbed a large share of peasant families' labour force and harvests, but also a significant drain on overall resources. In many regions, it was likely greater than that imposed by territorial lords, since knights were far more numerous, were present even in areas where ter-

⁸³ Caetani, *Varia*, 1-2.

⁸⁴ Villani, *Rocca Contrada* (Arcevia), 226.

⁸⁵ See above, footnotes 67 and 68.

ritorial lordship had not developed, and, indeed, demanded more from each subject. It is also for this reason that, at the end of the first section, I suggested that the emergence of demanding territorial lordships may have been over-emphasised by recent research. One may wonder, for example, whether the sharp acceleration of exactions revealed by many material indicators in the mid-12th century depended less on the violence of territorial lords than on the pervasive local presence of *milites*.⁸⁶ This would be another distinctive – and highly significant – feature of the period under consideration.

As for the question that runs through this article, namely whether the history of micro-lordships was one of continuity or change, it is important, even for the central-northern regions, to provide a nuanced answer, distinguishing the 12th century from the 11th. In the 12th century, and with particular intensity from 1140 and 1150 onward, micro-lordships as a whole underwent strong expansion, partly for the same reasons, well-illustrated by Simone Collavini, that fuelled the broader growth of personal lordships of all kinds at the time, including those headed by citizens and great nobles.⁸⁷ One contributing factor, for example, was the fragmentations of territorial lordships through succession, with shares divided among heirs, each of whom was assigned a group of men. A stimulus to the growth of micro-lordships must also have come, on the one hand, from the imitation of seigneurial practices by rising figures and, on the other, from the reaction of lords to the new opportunities for physical and social mobility opened to peasants by economic growth and urbanisation. Some of the same elements that were at work in the South also played a role here, primarily the wealth being accumulated by knightly notables. However, the Lombard-Byzantine influences characteristic of the South, and later the presence of an effective monarchical power, were obviously absent in the centre-north. Much rarer, by contrast, appear those relations of domination arising from the protection of immigrants. The only evidence identified so far is in the *consuetudines* of Bene Inferiore, issued in 1196 by the Bishop of Asti, which allowed all *milites* to subjugate – by granting them possessions – immigrants (and indeed any *homo*) who had not previously been episcopal subjects.⁸⁸ Another important difference from the southern situation, where micro-lordships were sometimes headed by *iudices*, physicians, and other *boni homines* with no explicit military role, is the the apparently exclusive chivalric character of the central-northern micro-lordships. The only exception noted so far is again in the Asti area: the aforementioned judicial powers over their peasants granted to all the inhabitants of Vico.⁸⁹ This too

⁸⁶ See Del Tredici, “Castelli, chiese,” especially 43-5, and Cortese’s chapter in this volume, notes 60-62.

⁸⁷ Collavini, “I signori rurali”, especially 303-4, 310 e 314.

⁸⁸ *Historiae Patriae Monumenta*. 6. *Chartarum*, II, p. 169: *licet ipsis militibus de proprijs possessionibus homines sub se facere qui non essent prius homines Episcopi, in quibus dominus episcopus neque fodrum neque drictum debet habere*.

⁸⁹ See above, footnote 73.

is an aspect that requires further investigation, and is certainly linked both to the greater capacity of southern elites to build clienteles – guaranteed by the relatively small share of wealth subtracted from the rural world by state taxation and territorial lords – and to the weaker attraction exercised by cities on village elites.

One point, however, seems clear: if the expansion of personal lordship after the mid-12th century has rightly been attributed “a reactionary character”, as a response to the threats that social mobility and economic growth posed to domination over men,⁹⁰ the micro-lordship of knights appears instead as an older and more consolidated reality, where any such reactionary element was, at most, marginal. The impression regarding the central-northern knightly micro-lordships is that their growth began, as in the South, as early as the 11th century, and was consubstantial with rising levels of violence, the multiplication of knights, and the militarisation of pre-eminence. For the Marche, it has been persuasively observed that the seigneurial burdens described in detail in the sources from the late 12th century onwards correspond closely to practices already attested a century earlier.⁹¹ Certainly, it is likely that knights imitated the behaviour of higher ranking nobles in their claims to territorial lordship, benefiting from the hardening of rights of seizure and command; stimuli may also have come from the diffusion and conceptual clarification of personal lordship rights in the hands of great territorial lords and urban landowners. It is equally possible that the updating of documentary forms during the 12th century led to the first written codification of what had previously been oral and customary agreements – perhaps even involving upward renegotiations of levies – although there is no evidence that this was common practice among *milites*. This too remains an issue for ongoing research to clarify.

⁹⁰ Collavini, “Tra campagne,” 25-6.

⁹¹ Fiore, *Signori e sudditi*, 272-3.

Works cited

- Andenna, Giancarlo. "I conti di Biandrate e le città della Lombardia occidentale (secoli XI e XII)." In *Formazione e strutture dei ceti dominanti nel medioevo. Marchesi, conti e visconti nel Regno italico*, 57-84. Roma: ISIME, 1996.
- Andenna, Giancarlo. "Formazione, strutture e processi di riconoscimento giuridico delle signorie rurali tra Lombardia e Piemonte orientale (secoli XI-XIII)." In *Strutture e trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X-XIII*, a cura di Gerald Dilcher, e Cinzio Violante, 123-67. Bologna: il Mulino, 1996.
- Andrea Strumensis, *Vita sancti Arialdi*, cur. Friedrich Baethgen. MGH *Scriptores*, 30/2, 1047-75. Leipzig: Societas apierendis fontibus rerum germanicarum medii aevi, 1935.
- Ansani, Michele, a cura di. *Le carte del monastero di S. Maria del Senatore di Pavia (714-1200)*. Pavia: Codice Diplomatico della Lombardia Medievale, 2008. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/pv/pavia-smariasenatore/>
- Assandria, Giuseppe. *Il Libro verde della chiesa d'Asti*. Pinerolo: Chiantore-Mascarelli, 1904-7.
- Augenti, Andrea, e Paola Galetti, a cura di. *L'incastellamento: storia e archeologia. A 40 anni da Les structures di Pierre Toubert*. Spoleto: CISAM, 2018.
- Barbieri, Ezio, Maria Antonietta Casagrande Mazzoli, e Ettore Cau, a cura di. *Le carte del monastero di S. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro di Pavia. II (1165-1190)*. Pavia: Codice Diplomatico della Lombardia Medievale, 2001. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/pv/pavia-spietro2/>
- Bernacchia, Roberto. *Incastellamento e distretti rurali nella Marca Anconitana (secoli X-XII)*. Spoleto: CISAM, 2002.
- Bianchi, Giovanna. "Archeologia della signoria di castello (X-XIII secolo)." *Archeologia Medievale* 40 (2014): 157-72.
- Caetani, Gaspar. *Varia: raccolta delle carte più antiche dell'Archivio Caetani e regesto delle pergamene del fondo pisano*. Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1936.
- Caperna, Vincenzo. *Storia di Veroli*. Veroli: Tip. Reali, 1907.
- Carocci, Sandro. *Baroni di Roma. Dominazioni signorili e lignaggi aristocratici nel Duecento e nel primo Trecento*. Roma: École française de Rome - Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1993.
- Carocci, Sandro. "Conclusions: A peasant village in a world of castles (eleventh to thirteenth centuries)." In *Villa Magna: an Imperial Estate and its Legacies: Excavations 2006-10*, ed. by Elizabeth Fentress, Caroline Goodson, Marco Maiuro, Margaret Andrews, and J. Andrew Dufton, 401-10. London: The British School at Rome, 2017.
- Carocci, Sandro. *Lordships of Southern Italy. Rural Societies, Aristocratic Powers and Monarchy in the 12th and 13th Centuries*. Roma: Viella, 2018 (It. ed. *Signorie di Mezzogiorno. Società rurali, poteri aristocratici e monarchia (XII-XIII secolo)*). Roma: Viella, 2014).
- Carocci, Sandro. "The Pervasiveness of Lordship (Italy, 1050-1500)." *Past & Present* 256, no. 1 (2022): 3-47.
- Carocci, Sandro. "La pervasività della signoria." In *La signoria rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo*, 4, *Quadri di sintesi e nuove prospettive di ricerca*, a cura di Sandro Carocci, 299-316. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2023.
- Carocci, Sandro, e Vito Loré. "Accedere alla comunità. Italia meridionale, XI-XIII secolo." In *Cittadinanze medievali. Dinamiche di appartenenza a un corpo comunitario*, a cura di Sara Menzinger, 27-43. Roma: Viella, 2017.
- Carocci, Sandro. "I tanti incastellamenti italiani." In *L'incastellamento: storia e archeologia. A 40 anni da Les structures di Pierre Toubert*, a cura di Paola Galetti, e Andrea Augenti, 513-38. Spoleto: CISAM, 2018.
- Castagnetti, Andrea. *Il processo per Ostiglia. L'arbitrato di Oberto dall'Orto tra Ferrara e Verona (1151)*. Verona: GoPrint, 2016.
- Castagnetti, Andrea. "*Ut nullus incipiat hedificare forticiam*". *Comune veronese e signorie rurali nell'età di Federico I*. Verona: Libreria Universitaria Editrice, 1984.
- Castiglioni, Bruno. *L'altro feudalesimo: vassallaggio, servizio e selezione sociale in area veneta nei secoli XI-XIII*. Venezia: Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, 2010.
- Collavini, Simone Maria. "La condizione giuridica dei rustici/villani nei secoli XI-XII." In *La signoria rurale in Italia nel medioevo. II Convegno di studi (Pisa, 6-7 novembre 1998)*, a cura di Cinzio Violante, e Maria Luisa Ceccarelli, 331-84. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2005.
- Collavini, Simone Maria. "Le basi materiali della signoria guidinga (1075 c. - 1230 c.)." In *La lun-*

- ga storia di una stirpe comitale: i conti Guidi tra Romagna e Toscana*, a cura di Federico Canaccini, 315-48. Firenze: Olschki, 2009.
- Collavini, Simone Maria. "I signori rurali in Italia centrale (secoli XII- metà XIV): profilo sociale e forme di interazione." *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Moyen Âge* 123 (2011): 301-18.
- Collavini, Simone Maria. "Tra campagne e borghi: forme di mobilità sociale nella Toscana rurale (XII-XIII sec.)." In *La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo italiano. 4. Cambiamento economico e dinamiche sociali (secoli XI-XV)*, a cura di Simone Maria Collavini, e Giuseppe Petralia, 1-26. Roma: Viella, 2019.
- Conte, Emanuele. *Servi medievali. Dinamiche del diritto comune*. Roma: Viella, 1996.
- Cortese, Maria Elena. *L'aristocrazia toscana. Sette secoli (VI-XII)*. Spoleto: CISAM, 2017.
- Cortese, Maria Elena. "I destini di un gruppo dominante: la media aristocrazia del territorio fiorentino tra XII e XIII secolo." In *La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo italiano. 4. Cambiamento economico e dinamiche sociali (secoli XI-XV)*, a cura di Simone Maria Collavini, e Giuseppe Petralia, 27-64. Roma: Viella, 2019.
- Cortese, Maria Elena. "Le frange inferiori della cavalleria nelle campagne toscane: *scutiferi* e *masnaderii* tra inquadramento signorile e mobilità sociale (secc. XII-XIII)." *Archivio storico italiano* 179, n. 1 (2021): 3-41.
- Cortese, Maria Elena. "Rural Milites in Central and Northern Italy between Local Elites and Aristocracy (1100-1300)." In *Social Mobility in Medieval Italy (1100-1500)*, ed. by Sandro Carocci, and Isabella Lazzarini, 335-53. Roma, Viella, 2018.
- Cortese, Maria Elena. *Signori, castelli, città. L'aristocrazia del territorio fiorentino tra X e XII secolo*. Firenze: Olschki, 2007.
- Del Tredici, Federico. "Castelli, chiese, mutazione signorile e crescita economica. Milano e il suo territorio nei secoli XI-XII." *Reti Medievali Rivista* 25, no. 1 (2024): 7-54.
- Del Tredici, Federico. *Comunità, nobili e gentiluomini nel contado di Milano del Quattrocento*. Milano: Uricopli, 2013.
- Del Tredici, Federico. "The houses of knights. *Milites*, buildings and conflicts in rural areas (eleventh to thirteenth centuries)." In *Building and Conflict in Southern Europe (1000-1300)*, ed. by Sandro Carocci, and Federico Del Tredici, 229-45. Turnhout: Brepols, 2026.
- Duchesne, Louis, et Paul Fabre, éd. par. *Le Liber Censuum de l'Église Romaine*. Paris: École française de Rome, 1910-1952.
- Faccio, Giulio C., e Maria Ranno. *I Biscioni*, 1/2. Torino: Regia Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, 1939.
- Falconi, Ettore, a cura di. *Le carte cremonesi dei secoli VIII-XII*. Cremona: Biblioteca Statale di Cremona, 1979-84.
- Falconi, Ettore, e Roberta Peveri, a cura di. *Registrum magnum del comune di Piacenza*. II. Milano: Giuffrè, 1985.
- Fiore, Alessio. "Knights and peasants. Definition of personal status and frameworks of local power (northern and central Italy, c. 1080-1130)." *Quaderni storici* 55 (2020): 49-69.
- Fiore, Alessio. "Ostiglia around 1100: A Window on the Transformation of Local Power in the Countryside." In *'Deutschland' und 'Italien' jenseits des Investiturstreits (ca. 1050 - ca. 1130)*, hrsg. von Étienne Doublier, und Enrico Faini, 155-80. Berlin-Boston: de Gruyter, 2025.
- Fiore, Alessio. "La signoria: l'esercizio del potere locale tra continuità e rotture." In *Profili del secolo XI*, 213-40. Spoleto: CISAM, 2024.
- Fiore, Alessio. *The Seigneurial Transformation: Power Structures and Political Communication in the Countryside of Central and Northern Italy, 1080-1130*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. (It. ed. *Il mutamento signorile. Assetti di potere e comunicazione politica nelle campagne dell'Italia centro-settentrionale (1080-1130 c.)*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2017).
- Fiore, Alessio. *Signori e sudditi: strutture e pratiche del potere signorile in area umbro-marchigiana (secoli XI-XIII)*. Spoleto: CISAM, 2010.
- Fortini, Arnaldo. *Nova vita di san Francesco. 3: Appendice: Assisi al tempo del Santo, gli archivi assisani, i documenti*. Assisi: Edizioni Assisi, 1959.
- Getschmann, Katrin. "Monachos ob reformandam religionem in eandem ecclesiam introduxit. Das Kloster San Sisto in Piacenza am Beginn des zwölften Jahrhunderts." In *Konflikt und Wandel um 1100. Europa im Zeitalter von Feudalgesellschaft und Investiturstreit*, hrsg. von Thomas Kohl, 133-54. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020.

- Giorgi, Ignazio. "Confessione di vassallaggio fatta a Rainone da Sorrento dai suoi vassalli del territorio di Maddaloni." *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano* 6 (1888): 89-99.
- Grossi, Ada, a cura di. *Le carte della Mensa Vescovile di Lodi (883-1200)*. Pavia: Codice Diplomatico della Lombardia Medievale, 2004. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/lo/lo-di-vescovo/>.
- Historiae Patriae Monumenta*. 6. *Chartarum*, II. Torino: Officina Regia, 1853.
- Lefevre, Philippe. *Notables et notabilité dans le contado florentin des XII^e-XIII^e siècles*. Rome: École française de Rome, 2023.
- Luzzatto, Gino. *Dai servi della gleba agli albori del capitalismo. Saggi di storia economica*. Bari: Laterza, 1966.
- Luzzatto, Gino. *Rustici e signori a Fabriano alla fine del XII secolo*. Milano: Stab. tip. Luigi di Giacomo Pirola, 1909.
- Luzzatto, Gino. "Le sottomissioni dei feudatari e le classi sociali in alcuni comuni marchigiani." *Le Marche* 6 (1906) 114-45.
- Maire Vigueur, Jean-Claude. "Centri di nuova fondazione e comuni di castello: riflessioni sulle strategie della piccola nobiltà signorile." In *La Marca di Ancona fra XII e XIII secolo: le dinamiche del potere*, a cura di Gabriella Piccinni, 71-92. Ancona: Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche, 2004.
- Menant, François. "Aux origines de la société cremasque: l'immigration bergamasque et cremoise." In *Crema 1185: una contrastata autonomia politica e territoriale*, 109-136. Cremona: Turrin, 1988.
- Menant, François. *Campagnes lombardes du Moyen Âge. L'économie et la société rurales dans la région de Bergame, de Crémone et de Brescia du X^e au XIII^e siècle*. Rome: École Française de Rome, 1993.
- Menant, François. *Lombardia feudale. Studi sull'aristocrazia padana nei secoli X-XIII*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1992.
- Menchetti, Andrea. *Storia di un comune rurale della Marca Anconetana (Montalboddo, oggi Ostra)*. I. Jesi: La Tipografica Jesina, 1908.
- Menocchio, Raffaello. *Memorie Storiche della Città di Carmagnola*. Torino: Roux, 1890.
- Molinari, Alessandra. "Siti rurali e poteri signorili nel Lazio (secoli X-XII)". In *Mondi rurali d'Italia: insediamenti, struttura sociale, economia. Secoli X-XIII*, a cura di Alessandra Molinari, 129-42. *Archeologia medievale* 37 (2010).
- Nobili, Mario. "Piccola nobiltà di campagna fra autarchia e mercato nei secoli XI-XIII: un modello e una breve ricognizione storiografica." *Quaderni storici* 41 (2006): 703-27.
- Pacini, Danilo, Giuseppe Avarucci, e Ugo Paoli. *Liber iurium dell'episcopato e della città di Fermo (977-1266). Codice 1030 dell'archivio storico comunale di Fermo*. Ancona: Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche, 1996.
- Panero, Francesco. *Servi e rustici. Ricerche per una storia della servitù, del servaggio e della libera dipendenza rurale nell'Italia medievale*. Vercelli: Società storica vercellese, 1990.
- Pertz, Georg Heinrich, cur. *Annales Ceccanenses*. MGH *Scriptores*, 19, 275-302. Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1866.
- Pezzano, Paolo. "Istituzioni e ceti sociali in una comunità rurale: Racconigi nel XII e nel XIII secolo." *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino* 74 (1976): 619-91.
- Pezzola, Rita, a cura di. *Le carte dei monasteri di S. Maria dell'Acquafredda di Lenno e di S. Benedetto in Val Perlana (1042-1200)*. Pavia: Codice Diplomatico della Lombardia Medievale, 2011. <https://www.lombardiabeniculturali.it/cdlm/edizioni/co/lenno-smaria/>
- Pierucci, Celestino, Alberto Polverari, e Roberto Bernacchia, a cura di. *Carte di Fonte Avellana*. Roma: Storia e Letteratura, 1972-1994.
- Pirani, Francesco. *Fabriano in età comunale. Nascita e affermazione di una città manifatturiera*. Firenze: Nardini, 2003.
- Provero, Luigi. *Le parole dei sudditi. Azioni e scritture della politica contadina nel Duecento*. Spoleto: CISAM, 2016.
- Scaccia Scarafoni, Camillo. *Regesti delle carte dell'archivio capitolare della Cattedrale di Veroli (Sec. XIII)*. Veroli: Comune di Veroli, 1985.
- Stella, Attilio. *Ai margini del contado: terra, signoria ed élites locali a Sabbion e nel territorio di Cologna Veneta (secoli XII-XIII)*. Reti Medievali E-Book, 42. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2022.
- Tabacco, Giovanni. *Dai re ai signori. Forme di trasmissione del potere nel Medioevo*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000.

- Tabarrini, Lorenzo. "Tasse, rendite, guerra: San Sisto di Piacenza, Cremona e il valore economico delle *curtes* fiscali di Guastalla e Luzzara (secoli IX-XIII)." *Reti Medievali Rivista* 24, no. 1 (2023): 371-93.
- Theiner, Augustin. *Codex diplomaticus dominii temporalis S. Sedis. Recueil de documents pour servir à l'histoire du gouvernement temporel des États du Saint-Siège, extraits des archives du Vatican*, I. Rome: Impr. du Vatican, 1861.
- Tiberini, Sandro. *Le signorie nell'Umbria settentrionale. Perugia e Gubbio, secc. XI-XIII*. Roma: Ministero dei Beni Culturali, 1999.
- Toubert, Pierre. *Les structures du Latium Médiéval. Le Latium méridional et la Sabine du IX^e à la fin du XII^e siècle*. Rome: Écoles Françaises de Rome, 1973.
- Varanini, Gian Maria. "Società e istituzioni a Cerea tra XII e XIII secolo." In *Cerea. Storia di una comunità attraverso i secoli*, a cura di Bruno Chiappa, e Arturo Sandrini, 73-90. Verona: Cassa rurale e artigiana di Cerea, 1991.
- Villani, Virginio. *Rocca Contrada (Arcevia): ceti dirigenti, istituzioni e politica dalle origini al sec. XV*. Arcevia: Comune di Arcevia, 2006.
- Wickham, Chris. "A che serve l'incastellamento?" In *L'incastellamento. Actes des rencontres de Gerone (1992) et de Rome (1994)*, éd. par Miguel Barcelò, et Pierre Toubert, 31-41. Rome: École Française de Rome, 1998.
- Wickham, Chris. *The Donkey and the Boat. Reinterpreting the Mediterranean Economy, 950-1180*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Wickham, Chris. "La signoria rurale in Toscana." In *Strutture e trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X-XIII*, a cura di Gerald Dilcher, e Cinzio Violante, 343-409. Bologna: il Mulino, 1996.
- Zonghi, Aurelio. *Carte diplomatiche fabrianesi. Collezione di documenti storici antichi inediti ed editi rari delle città e terre marchigiane eseguita da una Società di studiosi ed eruditi, coadiuvata e sussidiata dalla Commissione conservatrice dei monumenti nelle Marche*, a cura di Carisio Ciavarini, II. Ancona: Tipografia del Commercio, 1872.

Sandro Carocci
 Università degli Studi di Roma 'Tor Vergata'
 carocci@lettere.uniroma2.it
 ORCID: 0000-0001-9989-6780