The dissolution of fiscal assets as a factor in structural economic change between the 11th and 12th centuries

by Simone M. Collavini

Recent studies have demonstrated the fundamental importance of fiscal assets in the functioning of Tuscan society from the mature Lombard period to the end of the 11th century. The wide distribution of these assets, their purposes – to supply the court and reward those loyal to it – and their modes of management – which are marked by the precariousness of concessions and the rapid circulation of property – had a profound impact on the regional economy. Drawing on archaeological evidence, recent studies have highlighted the role of fiscal *curtes* as centres of specialised production. Yet an even more significant function of theirs would appear to have been the rationalisation and coordination of existing production, as well as their role as hubs through which consumer goods and products were channelled towards the region's political centres – above all Lucca, with its palace and marquisal court. This movement of goods and the subsequent circulation of surpluses did not take commercial forms; it was governed instead by extra-economic mechanisms of control (as exercised by the royal fisc) and redistribution (in the form of gifts). Even at the local level, production in the fiscal *curtes* and in the 'private sector' showed little sign of integration. The collapse of the fiscal system at the turn of the 12th century brought about a fundamental transformation for several reasons. On the one hand, it ensured greater stability for the assets of churches and aristocrats, encouraging them to expand their investments – as is evident in the spread of fortifications and the growth of local lordship. On the other hand, it ended – at both the local and regional levels – the artificial division between the fiscal production circuit and the private economies. Finally, it compelled aristocrats and churches to seek on the market those products they had once received as gifts; among other consequences, this led to increasing pressure on the peasants to provide the resources which were by then indispensable for accessing the market. In this way, the structural change that marked

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the end of the fiscal system contributed directly to the expansion of the Tuscan economy, which became particularly visible from the second half of the 12th century onwards.

Studi recenti hanno dimostrato l'importanza fondamentale dei beni fiscali nel funzionamento della società toscana dalla piena età longobarda fino alla fine del secolo XI. L'ampia diffusione di tali beni, le loro finalità – il rifornimento della corte e la ricompensa dei soggetti a essa fedeli – e le modalità della loro gestione – caratterizzate dalla precarietà delle concessioni e dalla rapida circolazione della proprietà – esercitarono un'influenza profonda sull'economia regionale. Sulla base delle evidenze archeologiche, la storiografia più recente ha messo in luce il ruolo delle *curtes* fiscali come centri di produzione specializzata. Una funzione ancora più rilevante sembra tuttavia essere stata quella di razionalizzare e coordinare la produzione esistente, nonché di fungere da nodi attraverso i quali beni di consumo e prodotti venivano convogliati verso i centri politici della regione, primo fra tutti Lucca, con il suo palazzo e la corte marchionale. Questa circolazione delle merci e il successivo movimento dei surplus non assunsero forme commerciali, ma furono piuttosto regolati da meccanismi extra-economici di controllo – esercitati dal fisco regio – e di redistribuzione, sotto forma di doni. Anche a livello locale, la produzione delle *curtes* fiscali e quella del cosiddetto 'settore privato' mostrano scarsi segni di integrazione. Il collasso del sistema fiscale a cavallo del secolo XII determinò una trasformazione strutturale per più ragioni. Da un lato, esso garantì una maggiore stabilità nel controllo dei beni da parte delle chiese e delle aristocrazie, incoraggiandole ad ampliare i propri investimenti, come risulta evidente dalla diffusione dei castelli e dal rafforzamento delle signorie locali. Dall'altro, pose fine – tanto a livello locale quanto regionale – alla divisione artificiale tra il circuito produttivo fiscale e le economie private. Infine, costrinse aristocratici e istituzioni ecclesiastiche a reperire sul mercato quei prodotti che in precedenza avevano ricevuto sotto forma di doni; tra le altre conseguenze, ciò comportò una crescente pressione sui contadini, chiamati a fornire le risorse ormai indispensabili per l'accesso al mercato. In questo modo, il mutamento strutturale che segnò la fine del sistema fiscale contribuì direttamente alla crescita dell'economia toscana, divenuta particolarmente visibile a partire dalla seconda metà del secolo XII.

Middle Ages, 11th-12th centuries, Tuscany, fiscal assets, economic expansion.

Medioevo, secoli XI-XII, Toscana, beni fiscali, fisco regio, crescita economica.

1. *Introduction*

In the context of a multifaceted study of the structural transformations that marked the transition from the Early to the High Middle Ages, such as the one conducted in this volume, it is undoubtedly useful to reflect on the effects that the dismantling of the system for managing, circulating, and exploiting fiscal assets had on the society and economy of the Kingdom of Italy, and in particular of Tuscany. This topic also deserves attention due to the growing focus that fiscal assets (in their various forms) have received in recent historiography, especially in Italy.[1] On the other hand, in recent years,

ChLA[2] = Cavallo Guglielmo, e Giovanna Nicolaj, edited by. *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-edition of the Latin Charters prior to the Ninth Century, 2nd Series: Ninth Century*. Dietikon-Zürich: Urs Graf Verlag, 1954-2019.

[1] Bougard, et Loré, *Biens publics*, on which see Marazzi, "Beni pubblici," and the *PRIN 2017* project *Fiscal Estate in Medieval Italy: Continuity and Change (9th-12th centuries)*, PI M. Vallerani, whose initial results have been published in two monographic volumes: Lazzari, e Tabarrini, "Beni del fisco regio ed economia" and "Dalla *Res privata* ai patrimoni pubblici altomedi-

partly in response to Chris Wickham's book *The Donkey and the Boat*, the debate on the timing of economic growth in the High Middle Ages has regained momentum in Italian historiography – an issue of central importance to the theme of our conference.[2]

This essay, which was conceived and written before the publication of that volume, does not aim to provide an account of this complex and ongoing debate, but rather to offer a further reflection on the economic transformations that took place between the 11th and 12th centuries. This analysis will therefore focus on describing some structural characteristics of the large fiscal properties that played a key role in Tuscan society from the late Lombard period to the 11th century. The rapid disintegration of the power of the king and marquises at the end of the 11th century not only transformed the region's political and social structure, with the emergence of seigneurial and communal powers, but also brought an end to an economic structure – the 'fiscal system' – that had long been central to the Tuscan economy. Outlining the characteristics of this system can help us understand, by contrast, the new economic structure that emerged at the end of the 11th century and allow us to question the effects of this structural change on the regional economy by asking whether the collapse of the 'fiscal system' may have contributed to the growth of the regional economy – and how.

The flourishing of studies on fiscal assets is in full swing, making it difficult to summarise the results. The decision to focus specifically on the economic aspect further complicates the task of providing a synthesis. I will therefore centre my subsequent reflections on Tuscany, the region I know best and one that benefits from a rich and varied body of studies, thanks in part to the integration of written and material sources – although this remains an area of study that is far from stable.

2. *The fisc in Tuscany. Basic structural characteristics*

What are the main findings emerging from research on fiscal assets regarding the functioning of Tuscan society in the 8th-11th centuries? The solid land-ownership base of the region's public authorities (kings, dukes, marquises, and counts) has been known to historians for decades, but it has been more widely discussed than studied in terms of its content and consequences. Thanks to individual studies and more extensive censuses that are still in progress, we now know that fiscal assets in the region were very extensive,

evali." For the archaeological aspect, see in particular Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*, Cantini, "La gestione della produzione," and Cantini, "Alla corte di re e marchesi."

2 *La crescita economica,* Wickham, *The Donkey and the Boat,* and the numerous discussions in this volume – most notably including "Una discussione su 'L'asino e il battello' di Chris Wickham" and "About «The Donkey and the Boat» by Chris Wickham;" see also Del Tredici, "Castelli, chiese" as well as the recent update by Fiore, Poloni, *L'economia medievale*, 67-137.

and in some subregional (or local) areas, even dominant.[3] This vast accumulation of assets circulated rapidly – not only outwards through diplomas and donations. Individual sources, such as the Marturi *proclamatio*, as well as an impressive series of specific – albeit fragmentary and occasional – findings show that individual fiscal units could be conferred on people of various ranks and later recovered, only to be granted again to others. There is still debate as to whether and in which cases the transfer of assets to ecclesiastical bodies through diplomas or acts of foundation and endowment marked an actual discontinuity. There are positive examples of the recovery of assets granted to churches by public authorities, however, at least for certain churches and at specific times.[4]

This process was favoured by the general rule (understood more as a shared principle rather than a legal norm) which held that the granting of fiscal assets to third parties could take place only through acts which were temporary and precarious by nature – except royal diplomas and perhaps the founding deeds of monasteries and rectories. It was therefore illegal to negotiate assets through the documents that normally served as *munimina* and which constitute the core of the archival records through which we study early medieval Tuscany. To use the words of a key text for understanding this phenomenon, it was not possible to *donare*, *venundare*, or *libellare* fiscal assets.[5] Many transfers of ownership must have occurred through oral dispositions (which were then possibly recorded on parchment in *memorie*, lists, and *brevia*) or through acts of disposition (letters and mandates). This resulted, among other things, in these assets having very low visibility due both to the limited production of written texts concerning them, and above all, their limited probative value (which differentiated them from *munimina*), leading to their poor preservation and transmission given that they were seen as 'useless'.

Some positive examples and a series of indirect clues also demonstrate the immune and exempt nature of fiscal *curtes*, particularly when they were, as was often the case, compact complexes. When directly under the control of the king and/or marquis, they were administered by officials autonomous from the normal official hierarchy. On an ecclesiastical level, they were ex-

3 Schneider, *Die Reichsverwaltung* is the traditional reference point on the subject. A fundamental turning point was Vignodelli's study, "Berta e Adelaide," which is to be integrated with Collavini, Tomei, "Fra le città." The database Tabarrini, et al., *Fiscus. Fiscal Estate in Medieval Italy* now offers an overview, albeit still partial.

4 The 'Marturi *proclamatio*' is published in Cambi Schmitter, *Carte della Badia di Marturi*, doc. 11; for a detailed discussion see Collavini, "Un'esegesi." For the further description of fisc in Tuscany, I will refer to the following studies: Collavini, Tomei, "Beni fiscali e scritturazione," Bianchi, Collavini, "Beni fiscali e strategie economiche nell'altomedioevo toscano," Tomei, "The Power of the Gift," Bianchi, Cantini, Collavini, "Beni pubblici di ambito toscano," Tomei, "Una nuova categoria documentaria," Tomei, *Milites elegantes*, Collavini, "Empoli," Tomei, "Il sale e la seta," Collavini, "L'origine," Collavini, "'Mutazione signorile' e trasformazioni economiche," Collavini, "La formazione," Collavini, "Un'esegesi."

5 See Cambi Schmitter, *Carte della Badia di Marturi*, doc. 11 and Collavini, "Un'esegesi."

empt from paying tithes to the parish according to Carolingian legislation, with these tithes instead diverted to fiscal chapels (which were often later transformed into parishes when the fiscal complexes were privatised). The immune and exempt nature of fiscal assets was a decisive factor in activating the mechanisms of patronage that seem to have contributed powerfully to the growth of the larger fiscal complexes, through donations or other forms of transfers to the fisc by neighbouring actors.

Not all fiscal assets circulated in the same forms or at the same speed. Specifically, those assets that had been granted by political leaders to third parties in one circumstance or another were the first to be redistributed in the event of recovery. By contrast, some fiscal units may not have circulated at all and may have remained in the direct possession of the public authority until the collapse of the system. In short, amid the fundamental obscurity that fiscal assets represent in the landscape of our sources, there are even darker areas (almost like the centre of black holes) corresponding to the most significant and 'central' fiscal assets. We often know them only as places of rogation, primarily for royal diplomas or acts of senior officials, through exceptional individual documentary evidence, or even only from their sudden appearance in 12th-century documentation in the context of disputes between various claimants to the inheritance of the *publicum*. Where fiscal assets formed large, compact nuclei (and where sources allow for more solid arguments), it was typically the more peripheral parts of the patrimonial complex that circulated, while the more central parts remained static. As a rule, however, it is impossible to fully grasp the extent of fiscal presence, even in the most central areas, and it is imprudent to proceed *ex silentio*, especially when the information we have is fragmentary.

The different pace of the circulation of public goods is an important factor to consider, both in understanding how the system functioned as well as its impact on the economy. Indeed, it must have had a significant influence on management methods and investments: 'immovable' assets likely attracted greater investment from sovereigns and required more stable management practices; the others, although they could attract investment from beneficiaries, were still precariously-controlled assets, and the continuous (and sometimes rapid) change of ownership (which sometimes involved integration with assets held in other capacities, as in the case of the *livelli* granted by the bishop in Lucca) likely necessitated frequent reorganisations of management and forms of production. It is also possible that the continuity of managers (*gastaldi* and *actores*), which is well attested at the local level, helped mitigate discontinuities in value creation, despite changes in ownership. Pending further studies, however, we remain in the realm of pure speculation in this area.[6]

[6] Tomei emphasises the attraction of fiscal assets to investments by beneficiaries (*Milites elegantes,* 82-4, 416-29). Frequent reorganisations of business complexes, sometimes in connection with the spin-off of part of the assets, are clearly attested: Collavini, "La formazione," Collavini, "Empoli," Collavini, "Un'esegesi." In the latter case, the most significant example, the

What is certain is that the rapid and continuous circulation of fiscal assets, a sort of gaseous rather than solid body, concerned not only the upper echelons – through the concessions of kings and marquises to counts, viscounts, gastalds, and major aristocrats – but also affected large sectors of society, including the middle and lower aristocracy, and probably even local notables. These dynamics cannot be fully unravelled even in the most fortunate cases, but can only be glimpsed.

What has been explained so far makes it difficult to answer unavoidable questions such as: 'How vast were the fiscal assets?' or 'What were the revenues of Otto I or Adalbert II of Tuscany?' It also complicates the use of individual documents that 'capture' more or less broad sectors of fiscal assets at a given moment and in a specific political context as indicators of long-term holdings or even as measures of the 'wealth' of particular entities or families.

Two other aspects should also be highlighted, both of which are equally decisive in challenging the paradigm of 'seigneurial development' that has thus far structured our understanding of the transition from the Early to the High Middle Ages in Tuscany on the political, social, and economic levels.[7] The rapid circulation of fiscal assets continued to play a central role in the regional political system at least until the first half of the 11th century and remained strongly controlled (if not directed) by political leaders, including kings and marquises. It also remained decidedly oriented towards the cities as the places where those assets were negotiated – and therefore, the aristocrats' residences. In particular, Lucca and its court were key locations for this process of continuous, negotiated distribution of both material and immaterial resources. This process continued to include – alongside land assets – movable assets, offices, and immaterial resources.[8]

In order to operate in this context, relational skills and networks of alliances were fundamental – more so than military strength and a solid allodial patrimonial base. This helps explain the enduring importance of family structures, that tended to be extensive, preferably in a horizontal sense; the role of women in the transmission of patrimony; and the integration of external and occasional elements into family groups. Lineage, estates localisation, military strength, local clientele, investment in castles, and the development of seigneurial powers – though all widely available options for aristocrats since the late 10th century – were not the paths that guaranteed the greatest success for individuals and families. These routes were therefore mostly taken by the 'losers' in the court game. What mattered most in political competition was

transfer of ownership of the *curtis* – and even its division into halves between the fisc and the monastery – did not affect the role of the gastald Bonizo, who remained in charge of managing the *curtis*. This continuity in the official responsible for management may have been matched by continuity in management practices.

7 Violante, "La signoria rurale;" Wickham, "La signoria rurale in Toscana." See also Collavini, "I signori rurali in Italia centrale" and Cortese, *L'aristocrazia toscana*.

8 Cortese, *Signori, castelli, città* (on urban dwellings) and Cortese, *L'aristocrazia toscana*; for Lucca, see Tomei, *Milites elegantes*.

a broad network of friends and relatives who could exert pressure on peers and higher authorities, as well as reliable and skilled patrons who could plead their clients' cases, thanks to direct and effective access to those who redistributed wealth, whether it was the king, the marquis, an abbot, a count, or a wealthy aristocrat.

In such a context, alliances and bonds of solidarity were fluid and highly volatile. Even family ties – though they clearly represented a fundamental resource – had limited strength in the absence of well-defined family assets or shared interests. We find as many traces of solidarity as of intra-family tension. These tensions were qualitatively different from those later triggered within agnatic lineages by the division of inheritances, however. In short, what prevailed were individual careers and short-term success rather than the long-term consolidation of family power. In this sense, family ties were not much more significant than those forged through *amicitia* or *fidelitas* with individuals outside the family nucleus.

Finally, one last element of complexity in the system must be considered: not only did fiscal assets circulate rapidly and often benefit different individuals, but offices also remained unstable and negotiable for a long time, being more often personal than family possessions. We also have numerous examples – especially among the best-studied families and contexts – showing that, for many 'comital families', offices and the endowment of fiscal assets were only weakly connected, if not entirely independent. It has often been taken for granted that a count's (or viscount's) endowment of assets was primarily located in the territory he was appointed to govern, and that assets outside that territory, when attested as being in his or his family's possession, were allodial or otherwise unrelated to the office. When, in the second half of the 11th century, some families developed their first lordships precisely from these 'marginal' or 'extra-comital' assets, this was often interpreted as the 'application (or generalisation) of comital powers' over allodial lands, or explained through the notion of the 'imitation' of comital powers.[9]

Several specific contexts that have recently been investigated, along with a fresh reassessment of already-known cases, nevertheless suggest that many of the endowments of the counts (and subsequently of those 'comital families' who were in some way their heirs) remained outside the areas they governed with greater or lesser continuity. The gradual stabilisation of control over these fiscal complexes (or at least parts of them), and/or a reaction to attempts to put them back into circulation, may have formed the basis for the seigneurial turn attested for these patrimonial complexes in the second half of the 11th century. To explore such developments, it would be useful to recover

[9] See, in general, Violante, "La signoria rurale" and Provero, *L'Italia dei poteri locali*; I have offered a similar perspective in relation to the Aldobrandeschi counts in Collavini, *Honorabilis domus*, 109-74.

and reinterpret the category of *signoria immunitaria* as outlined by Cinzio Violante in his syntheses on lordship in the 1990s.[10]

3. *Fisc and economics*

While significant progress has been made in understanding how the 'fiscal system' functioned at the political and social levels – despite the persistence of many uncertainties – the same cannot be said of its economic dimension, notwithstanding the insights offered by historiography, the existence of several relevant case studies (particularly archaeological ones), and more recently, the attempt at synthesis presented in Giovanna Bianchi's latest book.[11]

The extent of the fiscal patrimony and the characteristics of its management described above undoubtedly had an impact on the economy. Moreover, several case studies (particularly archaeological excavations) and numerous indications – derived from written sources and the distribution of fiscal assets – seem to suggest that fiscal properties were generally wealthier, more complex, and exhibited a higher degree of productive specialisation than private ones, including those belonging to major churches that fell outside the fisc.[12]

This impression rests on a few clear examples and on clues that are meaningful only in relation to them, however. The still considerable limitations of the available evidence render any interpretative proposal provisional. Indeed, the discovery of a new, readily-investigable context – or the reinterpretation of an existing one – could lead to a substantial rethinking of a model that has so far been sketched only in broad terms. These considerations explain why, in the remainder of this essay, I will refer only to a few economic effects of the 'fiscal system', starting from two concrete case studies, and then I will seek to understand how the crisis of the system influenced the transformation of Tuscan economic structures during the transition from the Early to the High Middle Ages.

To pursue this aim, I will begin with an element which has been repeatedly highlighted by those who have discussed the characteristics of the 'fiscal economic system': the presence of advanced productive specialisations within certain fiscal complexes, both rural and urban. This is evident in Paolo Tomei's study of silk production and its exploitation within the orbit of the marquisal court; in some of my own observations on the control of raw mate-

[10] Collavini, "'Mutazione signorile' e trasformazioni economiche" for this interpretative hypothesis; on the notion of *signoria immunitaria*, Violante, "La signoria rurale," 13-7 and Provero, *L'Italia dei poteri locali*, 79-84.
[11] Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*; see also, among other products of the nEU-Med project, at least *Origins of a new economic union, The nEU-Med project* and Bianchi, "Comunità costiere tra forme di potere e ambienti 'ostili' nella Toscana altomedievale."
[12] See Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici* for the concept of 'off-scale sites'; on the logic of fisc's distribution, partly linked to the control of important strategic natural resources, see Collavini, "L'origine" and Tomei, "Il sale e la seta."

rials – suggested by the location of certain fiscal *curtes* – and on specialised production, such as the manufacture of *arche* (stone chests) that appears to derive from them; as well as in public actors' interventions in the production of iron artefacts, which are recognisable in the urban *curtes* of Pisa and Lucca (as shown by Cantini) and even more clearly in the rural *curtis* of Vetricella (Bianchi). The latter case has recently been extended by Bianchi to other contexts and forms of production.[13]

The first point I would like to address concerns production specialisation and the interventions in production that can be identified within the fiscal *curtes*, with particular attention to their significance and limitations. If a clear leading role of the fisc in this sphere – extending also to the agricultural sector – could be established, it would mark a distinct break from the seigneurial phase of the Tuscan rural economy. Indeed, Sandro Carocci has repeatedly emphasised the limited capacity of lords to influence production, except indirectly – either by encouraging extraction or by stimulating specific forms of demand. This assessment, albeit with some nuances regarding the seigneurial management of natural resources, can also be extended to Tuscany.[14]

Addressing this issue through two specific examples also enables me to clarify more precisely those cautions which were previously expressed only in general terms. In short, until recently I would have answered in the affirmative if asked about the role of the fisc (and his administrators) in the field of production; now, however, I am more cautious.[15] This reconsideration stems, first and foremost, from the same 'erratic boulder': the Vetricella excavation. The updated interpretation of the excavation data offered by Giovanna Bianchi in her recent synthesis leads me to a different reading from the one I had developed on the basis of the first available evidence. This new interpretation also appears to be supported by the other case I will discuss, which is based on written sources. With this cornerstone (the 'erratic boulder') no longer secure, the traces that once seemed to confirm a model can now also – though not exclusively – be read in a different way, and no longer seem to me to constitute sufficient evidence, at least for the time being.

13 Silk: Tomei, "Il sale e la seta" and Tomei, "The Power of the Gift;" stone chest: Bianchi, e Collavini, "Beni fiscali e strategie economiche nell'altomedioevo toscano," 224-5; iron: Cortese, "Beni fiscali e attività minerario-metallurgiche;" see also Bianchi, Tomei, "Risorse e contesti insediativi nelle Colline Metallifere" for the alum. In general, see Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*.

14 E.g. Carocci, "The Pervasiveness of Lordship." For Tuscany, some nuances are appropriate only for the 13th century and the management of certain natural resources such as pastures and transhumance (see Collavini, *Honorabilis Domus*, 531-3, 537-54) or mineral resources (Paganelli, "Montieri, l'argento"). In these sectors, the lords' control over production appears to have been more incisive.

15 As is evident from a comparison between Bianchi, e Collavini, "Beni fiscali e strategie economiche," 223-7, 230-1 and what follows.

4. *Two case studies. Vetricella: the production of metal objects*

I will attempt to summarise – while hoping not to make too many mistakes – what we currently know about the production of the metal objects discovered in the Vetricella excavation, setting aside their chronological development, which is not essential to my argument.[16]

First, an exceptionally large number of iron objects were found at Vetricella – objects which were absent from the nearest sites that have been investigated archaeologically, but were comparable to more distant sites that share with Vetricella (the centre or an annex of the *curtis* of Valli, which was included in Adelaide's dowry in 937) their belonging to the fisc.

The production of these objects was made possible by the arrival at Vetricella – an isolated tower overlooking the lagoon – of iron ore and semi-finished products brought from the Island of Elba, and probably from the Metalliferous Hills, to which may have been added discarded or damaged objects that were intended for remelting. Most of the metal artefacts were found in the area surrounding the tower, which was enclosed by two concentric ditches; only a few were discovered in more distant locations or in the agricultural settlements connected with Vetricella. However, the processes of metal purification, smelting of semi-finished products, and manufacture of the objects did not take place near the tower (the hypothetical *caput curtis* of Valli), in a building similar to the *gynaecaea* attested in the polyptychs. This is suggested by the absence of smelting slag and furnaces on the site and confirmed by the lack of any building in which prebendaries could have lived and worked.

As Giovanna Bianchi suggests, ironworking activities must have been carried out by the men residing in the *massaricium* (listed in the 937 dowry as comprising 30 *mansi*), who were probably *manentes* – to use the term found in Tuscan sources between the 9th and 10th centuries to denote those *massarii* employed by the fiscal *curtes*, but who resided outside their central nucleus.[17] Archaeological evidence indicates that these men lived in more or less clustered settlements surrounding Vetricella, as revealed by surface surveys and the discovery of burials. The presence of iron slag at these sites supports this interpretation, even in the absence of stratigraphic excavations.

What, then, was Vetricella's function within this productive context? The large number of metal objects found at the site, in the absence of local production, suggests that Vetricella primarily served as a place for storing the finished products, which must have arrived there as rents paid by the *manentes* of those surrounding villages where production is attested. It is also possible that metal goods produced by *massari* and *livellari* (leaseholders) – who were not *manentes* and were therefore not included in the dowry because they were

[16] Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici,* 15-40, which summarises the data presented in *The nEU-Med project*. The reflections developed by Cortese, "Beni fiscali e attività minerario-metallurgiche" are likewise fundamental.

[17] Tomei, "Sulle tracce dei *manentes* altomedievali."

located on the margins of the *curtis* of Valli – were brought there as well. This, of course, assumes that we can apply to this *curtis* what is known from the cases of the *curtis* of the nearby *Cornino* (for the *livellari*) and from S. Salvatore al Monte Amiata and the bishop of Lucca (for rents in metal objects).[18]

The tendency towards standardisation in production (knives, nails, and so on), accompanied by variations in the quality of the finished goods, reveals another one of Vetricella's functions within the production process, while at the same time highlighting its limitations. Production was subject to control – probably of a non-economic nature – which required that certain objects be produced and others not (for instance, swords or other weapons). This policy did not amount to control over the production process itself, however, which was managed at the individual or village level, where uniform standards could not be imposed. The absence of evidence for the local circulation of iron artefacts indicates that the authority based at Vetricella (probably a gastald) controlled the distribution of the products, over which the *manentes* had no power.

We can only speculate, I think, about the supply of metal. The presence of semi-finished products and scrap metal at Vetricella strongly supports the hypothesis that the metal was supplied to the blacksmiths by the public authorities. The same may be said of the raw materials from Elba – certainly a major fiscal district – and from the Metalliferous Hills, which were likewise dotted with fiscal assets. I nevertheless do not believe there is conclusive evidence to exclude other possible forms in which the blacksmiths were supplied with ferrous material (which would be difficult to imagine had they lived and worked in the *caput curtis*), such as the independent purchase of ore or, more plausibly, the recycling of metal objects.

In short, Vetricella coordinated and stimulated the production of iron objects by the populations of the surrounding villages, perhaps by relying on, reorganising, and strictly controlling those economic activities and skills that already existed in the area. In doing so, it encouraged and rationalised these activities and improved their efficiency, as suggested by Giovanna Bianchi's hypothesis of a production boom in the second half of the 10th and the early 11th centuries.

Rather than a production centre, Vetricella thus appears to have been a site whose economic character was defined by the organisation, control, and (non-commercial) movement of iron products.

[18] The presence of *livellari* in the *curtis* of *Cornino* is indirectly attested by the place name *Livellaria* (Collavini, "S. Quirico di Populonia," 65); on rents in metal objects, see Cortese, "Beni fiscali e attività minerario-metallurgiche," 259-60.

5. *Two case studies. Vetricella: the production of agricultural goods*

As for the production of agricultural goods – which are attested primarily and indirectly by the numerous storage containers[19] – we have no certainty that there was a large estate at Vetricella whose output was managed, controlled, and planned by the centre. As mentioned earlier, the archaeological evidence suggests the absence of *prebendari*, and the mere 30 *mansi* recorded in the dowry (although this represents only a snapshot) make the existence of a large cereal-producing estate unlikely. The *manentes*, moreover, must have been primarily engaged in metalworking and the transport of manufactured goods. It is therefore difficult to imagine that they could also have been subjected to the heavy agricultural corvées required to cultivate the estate in the absence of *prebendari*.[20]

The storage of agricultural products at Vetricella can therefore also be interpreted as evidence of the activities of management, organisation, and the indirect promotion of planned production carried out by producers (in this case, farmers). Peasant production thus remained autonomous, except where it was subject to external, non-economic constraints – obligations and prohibitions – or to the choices of rent forms which were determined by large landowners, in this case the fisc.

According to Bianchi's estimates, Vetricella was thus used to store not only food for local consumption, but also the agricultural rents paid by the *massari*, *manentes*, and *livellari* employed by the *curtis*. Vetricella must nevertheless primarily have served as a site for the temporary storage of agricultural products from other fiscal *curtes* located along the *Teupascio* – the king's river – from Massa Vecchia downwards. It is likely that the surplus production of these *curtes* (about whose organisational structures we know nothing) was moved downstream for transport to the main centres of consumption, perhaps Lucca and Pisa. Vetricella's key role within this system can be explained by its easy access to the lagoon and to *Portus Scabris*, situated on the coastal shipping routes of the upper Tyrrhenian Sea. The use of ceramic containers, rather than silos or granaries, as a form of storage suggests the short-term preservation of agricultural products, with a view to their relatively rapid transfer outside the area.

This interpretation of the data from the Vetricella excavation suggests a possible alternative model to that of centralised production in fiscal workshops for other contexts in which our knowledge is more limited. It now seems plausible – though not certain – to me that the production of *arche*, which

[19] Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*, 30-1.
[20] Other scenarios are nevertheless also possible, confirming the caution with which fragmentary and partial data must be interpreted. The 30 *mansi* mentioned in the dowry may have been those specifically associated with ironworking, while the remaining *manentes* (who were engaged in agriculture) could have been assigned to other beneficiaries at the time the dowry was established. This would point to a different model of the *curtis*' operation prior to the dowry.

gave its name to Fibbialla di Versilia at the end of the 9th century, took place in similar ways: namely, that the *curtis* served as the place where the *arche* produced by the *manentes* were collected, rather than the place where they were manufactured by the *prebendari*.

At present, we do not know whether this form of organising production was dominant. It is quite possible that in other contexts – urban ones, for example – or for more valuable and strategic goods, such as weapons or silk, different approaches were adopted. For the moment, we must resign ourselves to acknowledging that we do not yet know how ironworking was organised around the Lombard *curtis* of S. Sisto in Pisa, the excavation of which is currently being published by Federico Cantini; nor do we have any certainty about how silk was produced in Lucca. Did this take place in fiscal workshops, or did the *actores* and gastalds merely coordinate and oversee existing, partially autonomous forms of local production?[21]

It is clear that these different forms of production – or combinations of the two models – complicate the interpretation of those contexts – indeed, the vast majority – in which the presence of fiscal assets is accompanied by more or less direct traces of specialised craft production. For this reason, I believe that at this stage the priority should be to increase the number of studies – preferably detailed case studies – before attempting any synthesis that seeks to propose a coherent model.

6. *Two case studies. The* Inventarium *of the bishop of Lucca: structure and stratification of the text*

We must now turn from the production of artefacts to agriculture in order to consider whether the model outlined for Vetricella – control and guidance, but limited intervention in production – can also be extended to this sector. In the absence of documents relating to the management and allocation of land by public authorities, and given the very poor preservation of written sources concerning fiscal assets, such an undertaking might appear hopeless. Yet here, too, recent studies open up new avenues for reflection.

The group of late 9th-century inventories from the bishopric of Lucca – the only surviving Tuscan polyptychs – has been extensively studied. However, Paolo Tomei's discovery of a third inventory, the *Breve de multis pensionibus*, together with the reissue of the three lists in the *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores* and a better understanding of the situation in Lucca at the end of the 9th cen-

[21] Preliminary data on S. Sisto in Cantini, "S. Sisto Project 2020;" the production of silk goods (Tomei, "Il sale e la seta") and wool processing in the monastery of S. Michele in Florence, which was dependent on S. Silvestro di Nonantola (Fiore, "The Knots and the Nets," 200), would appear to have been centralised. On the contrary, the production of tiles at Carignano, on the *Teupascio* river west of Lucca and beyond the bridge of the marquis, was decentralised and entrusted to *manentes*: see Tomei, "Sulle tracce dei *manentes* altomedievali," 8.

tury, now allow for new studies. We know the commissioner, the reference models, the context, and the overall purpose of the political and patrimonial initiative that led to their drafting. Bishop Peter, in view of asserting his political and judicial claim to the patrimony of his church and of renegotiating the assignments to his dependants and clients, had three different lists prepared and/or recovered. These correspond to the three fundamental categories into which the patrimony of the bishopric of Lucca was divided: the assets directly under episcopal control, which were included in the *Inventarium* (perhaps already compiled under Bishop Gerard, 869-95); the assets granted as benefices – whether the property itself or its income – and thus transferred through an oral provision, as included in the *Breve de feora*; and the assets granted by written deed (*libella*) by Bishop Gerard, which were included in the *Breve de multis pensionibus*.[22]

The most useful text for our purposes is the *Inventarium*, on which I will henceforth focus. Although it is a carefully planned and well-organised list written by a single author, it nevertheless has a composite appearance. This is clearly evident from the text's structure as well as from a series of paratextual features. As already noted by the editors, the *Inventarium* consists of three different parts. The text opens with a list – which is severely damaged at its beginning – of movable property (sacred furnishings and books) (*ChLA*², 117, no. 16, ll. 1-14). This is followed by a list of the Church of Lucca's assets, beginning with those closest to the city (*ChLA*², 117, no. 16, ll. 15-83). The third section comprises a list of *curtes*, which were located in different parts of Tuscany and are described in a standardised form (*ChLA*², 117, no. 16, ll. 84-150). The two lists of immovable property are clearly distinguished from each other by the presence of a summary of the bishop's income at the end of the second section (*ChLA*², 117, no. 16, ll. 82–83) and by at least two lines left blank by the scribe to separate the sections. The internal structure of each section also differs. The first is characterised by continuous writing, with limited use of distinguishing features (*litterae notabiliores*, paragraph breaks, internal spacing), whereas the second is divided into entries corresponding to each *curtis*, each separated by a line break.[23]

The second and third sections of the *Inventarium* differ from each other not only in layout but also in the forms of management and levels of work organisation they reflect. In the first text, the assets are listed in no particular order and are not explicitly linked to manorial centres but are rather organised by geographical location. References to demesne lands are few, and in any case they appear to have been small in extent; nor are there any descriptions of their infrastructure. The customary dues and fixed rents are

[22] See Luzzati, "Vescovato di Lucca," n° 1-2; Tomei, "Un nuovo 'polittico' lucchese." New edition of the three inventories in *ChLA*², 117, nos. 16-18.
[23] See *ChLA*², 117, no. 16, p. 83 for a description. Note that the partial sums (relating to each *curtis)* have, in some cases, caused the blank line to disappear. These are additions which were made after the text's first draft, however.

highly varied, and the corvées are few and only occasionally connected to the *dominicum*.[24] This picture of an imperfect adaptation of episcopal properties to the 'ideal forms' of manorial management is echoed in the *Breve de feora*. Although in this case the nature of the list of benefices makes it harder to reconstruct patterns of land management, we can nevertheless recognise the presence of demesne estates (which were generally small in size) and a fairly significant use of corvées – yet only in a minority of cases are these two elements fully integrated with each other. Such integration occurs in farmsteads explicitly defined as *curtes*, albeit small ones, and in the estates of certain *plebes* (baptismal churches). In any case, there are no detailed descriptions of the infrastructure of these farming complexes.[25]

The second list of assets in the *Inventarium* displays different characteristics in both origin and textual structure. The text is divided into a series of entries recording the assets of individual *curtes*, each beginning with the term *invenimus*. Each of these short sections is graphically distinguished from the preceding and following ones by a line break. It is therefore only this third section that can be regarded as the result of an *inquisitio* – and not the entire *Inventarium*, as its most recent editors have suggested. The *inquisitio* was a procedure through which the assets and rights of the fisc, and of those churches which were granted the privilege to make use of it, were certified and described.[26] It is the use of this kind of procedure that explains the standardisation in the descriptions of the *curtes* in this part of the *Inventarium*. All the *curtes* are shown as possessing extensive demesne lands (also, but not exclusively, for cereal cultivation), and as having been accompanied by substantial infrastructure: manorial houses, *kaneve* (cellars), granaries, barns, vegetable gardens, and sometimes churches and *kaminate* (heated rooms). They depended on *manentes* whose principal and uniform obligation consisted of heavy labour, generally amounting to three days' work per week. In all cases there is no mention of *prebendari*, but as Gianfranco Pasquali has observed, the corvées would have been sufficient for the cultivation of the estates described without the need to resort to *prebendari*. Pasquali also noted that

24 The only partial exception is *ChLA*², 117, no. 16, l. 15: *Item de territoriis in circuitu ipsius civitatis terra indominicata ad seminandum modiorum XXXII et in Lunata te[rra…]*, followed by a list of nine *angariales* which were required to perform corvée labour three days a week and three others who had to work 12 weeks a year (ll. 16-21). The link between demesne and corveés is weaker in all other cases: a *dominicum* capable of producing 12 *staia* of grain in Segromigno (with four *angariales* with unspecified duties), and a vineyard yielding two *amphorae* of wine in Saltocchio, a *silva castaniensis domnicata* in Molazzana, one *angarialis* in Controne and another in Celle, and four *angariales* that were required to perform *operae* for seven weeks a year, in *Carfaniana* (ll. 37, 40-1; 56; 67-8; 60 and 69; 73-6).

25 *ChLA*², 117, no. 17, ll. 11-6 (*plebs* of Corazzano), ll. 28-32 (*plebs* of S. Frediano di Lunata), ll. 48-50 (property of S. Michele in Foro in Benabbio), ll. 60-2 (property in Castelfranco di Sotto), ll. 68-70 (church of S. Agata di Tempagnano), ll. 108-11 (*corticella de Caterana*, in the Coreglia area), ll. 145-7 (*corte de Cammiana*), ll. 168-71 (*curte de Sancto Vito*, in *Cornino*), ll. 196-9 (*plebs* of *Vaiano*).

26 Bougard, *La justice dans le royaume d'Italie*, 194-203 and Esders, "Die römischen wurzeln der fiskalischen *inquisitio*."

these estates were much smaller than those attested in the polyptychs of the Po Valley.[27]

The *curtes* of the third section are not connected by geographical proximity, as they are distributed across the Val di Serchio, the Valdarno, and the Maremma. What links them is their recent separation from the fisc. A study by Paolo Tomei on the two 'fiscal' churches of S. Silvestro and S. Frediano in Lucca, and their transfer to the bishopric following the diploma of Carloman in 877, allows us to state this with certainty.[28] The *curtes* of the *Inventarium*'s third part had, in fact, until then formed part of the patrimony of these two churches, which Tomei describes as genuine 'safes' in which the political authorities concentrated numerous fiscal assets for distribution among their clientele. Only after the imperial diploma of 877 were S. Frediano and S. Silvestro (together with their dependencies) partially 'privatised' and incorporated into the bishop's patrimony. It is possible that the *inquisitio* on which the text of the *Inventarium*'s third section was based was conducted at the time of the transfer of the churches to the bishop, in order to define their assets precisely. It seems to me more likely that the *inquisitio* was drawn up earlier, however, and that its results were transmitted to the bishop along with the *curtes* when these were donated by the king.[29] Moreover, the right of *inquisitio* does not appear to have been granted to the church of Lucca by the Carolingians.[30]

7. *Two case studies. The fiscal* curtes *in the* Inventarium *of the bishop of Lucca*

Whatever the intermediate stages may have been (which are still to be clarified), we can assume that the *Inventarium*'s third section provides a snapshot of the functioning of certain fiscal *curtes* before their transfer to the Bishop of Lucca. We can therefore use it as a guide to the forms of the economic organisation of fiscal property in Tuscany – although not necessarily the only model that existed, given the lack of similar case studies – a conclusion supported by our text's structural proximity to the *Capitulare de villis* and the *Brevium exempla*. It is not possible to dwell on the description here, so I will limit myself to highlighting those elements which are most useful for further reflection. The fiscal *curtes* described were organised in a homogeneous and standardised way; they were well equipped with infrastructure and all operated according to the same production and management model, in which agricultural labour was provided through the corvées of the *manen-*

[27] Pasquali, "L'azienda curtense," 27-9.
[28] Tomei, "Chiese, vassalli, concubine."
[29] To clarify these passages, it is useful to draw a parallel with the *Churrätische Urbar*, which, after the transfer of a fiscal complex to the Church of Chur, reused its previous census, which had been carried out through *inquisitio*: see Esders, "The Church as a Governance Actor," 22, 24-5, 28 as well as the detailed analysis by Cortese, "Beni fiscali e attività minerario-metallurgiche," 256-8. See also Esders, "The 'Staffelsee Inventory'."
[30] See MGH DD Lu II., n° 6 (852); n° 55 (*ante* 871); and MGH DD Km, n° 10 (877).

tes, in the absence of *prebendari*.[31] Production was partly adapted to specific ecological conditions. Everywhere, the demesne land was cultivated primarily with cereals, most likely wheat. With the sole exception of the *curtis* of *Quaratiana*, hay cultivation was ubiquitous, perhaps to support cattle (not mentioned, but which was certainly present) and the horses required by the marquis and his retinue. Vineyards are also widespread – they are absent only in the *curtis* of Accesa – with production appearing stable at around 10 *amphorae* per *curtis*. Additional production (always listed after the three just mentioned) occur more sporadically: olive groves are recorded in four cases (Filettole, Vecchiano, Capannoli, and S. Giorgio di Ravi), forests for pig breeding in another four (*Quaratiana*, *Cornino*, S. Giorgio di Ravi, and Accesa), while salt pans are mentioned only for *Asilatto*. The quantities of produce vary considerably, indicating the specialisation of certain *curtes*: for oil, the quantities range from 100 pounds in S. Giorgio di Ravi to 20 in Vecchiano; for pigs, from 200 in *Cornino* to just three in *Quaratiana*. The customary dues and fixed rents imposed on the *manentes* were more varied, being differentiated on a sub-regional basis and likely connected to their specific production practices. They nevertheless almost never included rents in cereals (which are also rare in the *Breve de feora*). This suggests that, with regard to cereals, there were two entirely distinct production circuits: one fiscal and probably focused on high-quality grains, being closely controlled by the centre and reflected in the *Inventarium*; the other, which is entirely invisible in this text, managed autonomously by the farmers themselves.

We might be tempted to conclude that the fisc exercised considerable influence in the agricultural sector. It was able to manage and plan production and labour from the centre, controlling both the rationale and execution of these activities through corvée labour. In this sense, cereal production would appear to display a greater degree of lordly involvement than that observed in the craft sector at Vetricella. This image must be tempered, however, by the fact that the absence of cereal rents – and thus the existence of two distinct production circuits, a lordly one based on demesne lands and the other managed by the peasants themselves – is also a characteristic feature (though less systematic) of the *Inventarium*'s first part, which provides for fewer corvées and a greater number of rents in wine, other produce, or cash, as well as of

[31] There are several possible explanations for the absence of *prebendari* from the list. It is conceivable, though unlikely, that they were not recorded even though they were present (it should be noted that *prebendari* are also missing from the Bobbio polyptych – a possible model for the Lucca one; see Pasquali, "L'azienda curtense," 27). Alternatively, they may already have been absent when the *curtes* formed part of the fisc, or it may be that, when these estates were granted to the Bishop of Lucca, only the lands and *manentes* were transferred, while the *prebendari* were assigned to other fiscal *curtes*. Pasquali's observations on the correspondence between the amount of labour and the extent of the demesne lands may suggest that the inventory reflects the *curtes*' traditional management. Moreover, even in the *Breve de feora* there is no mention of *prebendari*.

the *livelli* and other management contracts concerning peasants.[32] This dual circuit may therefore have been not so much the result of direct intervention by the fiscal authorities as a peculiarity of the production system in the Lucca area, one common to both fiscal and episcopal properties. The latter, it should be noted, were not established through the donation of fiscal complexes, but rather through a multitude of private gifts. In this case as well, then, the action of the fiscal authorities, operating through the *curtis* model, did not impose a new productive structure, but instead directed, reorganised, and made more efficient existing forms of specialisation and production that had already developed – albeit less effectively – within private estates. What stands out once again is the system's managerial dimension, which was aimed at rationalising forms of extraction and ensuring the uniform distribution of infrastructure – *case dominice*, *kanave*, granaries, barns, and so on – that maximised production and above all made the management, collection, and transport of surplus produce more effective. The appearance of corvées connected with the transport of foodstuffs also points in this direction.

8. *Fisc and economics. A provisory conclusion*

Although it likely varied over time and is therefore difficult to quantify – especially with regard to its actual managers and beneficiaries – the fiscal patrimony constituted a very extensive and important component of the early medieval Tuscan economy. Understanding its functioning – which thus far has only been briefly outlined – is crucial to gaining insight into the region's production system.

The fiscal authorities' main role seems to have been to ensure more structured forms of economic activity, primarily through the use of extra-economic instruments which were guaranteed by the public and judicial authority of those who controlled and managed these assets. The Tuscan corvées – which are attested even before the Carolingian conquest – originated within this sphere, and as we have seen they were quite decisive for cereal production. Control over the production and circulation of manufactured goods that we have identified at Vetricella likewise derived from this same sphere. These instruments were used to stimulate production – which was made possible by the existing infrastructure – and to direct it towards goods and objects that were considered desirable by the fiscal authorities. For the moment we must remain at this general level of analysis, since current research does not yet allow us to identify the (undoubtedly real) differences between the assets which were directly managed by kings and marquises, the endowments of counts, and the goods granted to aristocrats and churches. Although it is clear that the surpluses produced in the fiscal *curtes* were largely transported – often

[32] See Collavini, "Luoghi e contenitori di stoccaggio" and Bianchi, e Collavini, "Lieux de stockage."

over long distances – for the benefit of the holders of those assets, there is no evidence that their movement had any commercial implications. In fact, the coins found at Vetricella appear to constitute a hoard and therefore do not point to active trade at the tower.[33] Cereals, wine, oil, metal objects, and silk products were primarily intended to meet the needs of the Lucca court – the marquises and their entourage – as well as those who depended on it, both in the city and elsewhere. They were then likely used to reward political followers and clients through gifts and other forms of remuneration.[34] Although it is possible that some of these goods and products were sold in the city, I do not believe there is – as yet – any positive evidence for such activity.

We have seen that in both the agricultural and craft sectors, the fiscal production circuit operated separately from the rest of the local and regional economy – what we might call the 'private sector'. There is no evidence of trade between the dependants and administrators of the fiscal estates on the one hand, and the surrounding population on the other. Nor is there evidence for the presence of markets open to external actors within these estates, as hypothesised by Violante and Toubert, who viewed the *curtes* as the origin of rural markets.[35] Let me be clear once again: I consider this hypothesis plausible, but I do not think there is sufficient evidence to support it, particularly in the archaeological record. Regulated from above, carried out primarily by specific categories of dependent farmers – particularly the *manentes* – and not commercialised but redistributed along the network of *curtes* to sustain the court and its structures, the fiscal economy did not interact with the rest of the regional economy, except perhaps in urban contexts (or in large *curtes* located along major road routes), either through limited forms of commercialisation or, more likely, through the high purchasing power enjoyed by the holders of fiscal assets who benefited from the political elite's generosity.

Oriented towards the urban world – and towards Lucca in particular – for political and structural reasons, the system ensured the economic centrality of urban centres not on productive or commercial grounds, but on the presence of the ducal court in the city. This residency, together with the consequent presence of prominent political groups which were both secular and ecclesiastical, not to mention their spending power, drew to the city those who supplied them with various goods and services. The spending of prominent

33 This is in line with the claims made in Rovelli, "The Medieval Coins from Vetricella," 99, and more explicitly in Rovelli, "Archeologia mineraria, archeometria ed emissioni monetarie," 135-40. More inclined to consider the coins an indicator of active trade at the *curtis* are Fiore, "The Knots and the Nets," 202, and Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*, 33, 39, 197.

34 Tomei, "The Power of the Gift."

35 Violante, *La società milanese* and Toubert, "Il sistema curtense." The first markets attested in Lucca's sources are located within the city – at the royal court, the *Teudici solarium*, and the church of S. Matteo, an urban dependency of the great royal monastery of S. Pietro di Monteverdi (a very similar situation is found in Florence). Outside the city, markets are recorded at Istia d'Ombrone (1032) and at *Lucutuoro* (1056), near Passignano (see Tomei, *Milites Elegantes,* 106-7, and Collavini, e Tomei, "Fuori dalle città," 231-2).

groups concentrated in the city, which was made possible by the generosity of political leaders, was to be reproduced in a cascade effect, involving increasingly modest entities and individuals in the system and its basic logic: this was how the system became pervasive, first in the city, and then in other places where the aristocrats and ecclesiastics resided. Spending had to focus on those forms of ostentation that contributed to the creation of consensus among peers as well as competition to assert one's status and get as close as possible to the source that dispensed wealth. We can therefore assume that conspicuous consumption played a particularly significant role – essential in a courtly social milieu – and that this investment was directed not only towards building projects, but even more towards personal adornment and display. It is in this context that specialised luxury goods, such as the silk *guindangassie* (silk bands to be twisted around the legs) studied by Paolo Tomei,[36] come into play. Other, more or less exotic, objects – occasionally attested in written sources as well as in the archaeological record of Lucca – may likewise have carried considerable weight in this milieu.

Within this same framework we may also place those specialised craft activities which are attested in urban contexts, particularly in Lucca. These were sustained by courtly commissions, but they were also financed by those who, benefiting from the flow of resources filtering down from the marquis, possessed both the means and the ambition to compete with the court itself in the sphere of self-representation. It is in this context that, from the late Lombard period onwards, we can envisage the careers of those artisans who are known from the documentary record: always active in 'high' productive sectors, always connected with public authority, often foreigners, sometimes founders of distinguished family lineages. From the *pictor* Auripert – who worked first for the Bishop of Lucca and later for King Liutprand – to the *magister casarius* Natalis; from the swordsmiths to Peter the *smerator* (precious metal refiner), who came to Lucca from Milan in the 10th century and was endowed with property adjacent to fiscal complexes. The latter was probably the father (or grandfather) of judge Flaipertus Amicus, marquisal advocate, *visdominus* of the bishop, and perpetual imperial *missus* in Lucca, who was a central figure in the city's political life throughout the first three quarters of the 11th century.[37]

[36] Tomei, "The Power of the Gift."

[37] Auripert (Collavini, "Le origini," 15-6); Natalis *magister casarius* (Violante, "I *Transpadani* in Tuscia", 408-13); *Gottifredi forbitore* (weapons' polisher or sharpener) (Tomei, "Un nuovo 'polittico' lucchese," 576); Peter the *smerator* (Tomei, *Milites Elegantes*, 381 and Giacomelli, *L'«honor» e il suo «effectum»*, 12-5). To this gallery of portraits of 'professionals' linked to the court of Lucca, we can add doctors such as Gaidoald in Pistoia (Stoffella, "Crisi e trasformazione," 9) or Auripert *medicus,* who is attested in Lucca in 854 as *iudex domni imperatoris* and who uses a style of writing with a marked chancellery influence (*ChLA*² , 79, no. 25; *ChLA*² , 80, no. 40)

9. *The effects of the crisis of the 'fiscal system' on the economy*

In the 50 years around the year 1100, the political, social, and economic system based on the fisc collapsed in Tuscany, bringing down with it what had been the region's most important political and institutional structure since the late Lombard period: the Duchy of Lucca, later the March of Tuscany.[38]

This was primarily a political crisis linked to the 'Investiture Controversy' and the ensuing 'civil war' that swept through the Kingdom of Italy during those years, shaking the foundations of the Canossa family's power in the region. In a recent essay, I argued that the economic transformations of the 11th century were a fundamental precondition for the catastrophic effects of this crisis, since for the first time they made it both conceivable and advantageous to abandon the traditional political system based on the fisc. This shift opened the way to new forms of personal and familial affirmation as well as to the accumulation of both material and immaterial resources among those who had previously moved mainly within the orbit of the marquisal court. The outcome was a society that we can regard as fully post-Carolingian – i.e. as belonging to the High Middle Ages.[39]

This structural political change – which I do not think it an exaggeration to describe as a 'revolution' – disrupted the fiscal assets' economic organisation. The impact of this transformation was intensified by the fact that the characteristics of the 'fiscal economy' described above were all essentially rooted in political and institutional control over economic life. The overall political framework ensured the breadth of the 'fiscal nebula': a vast patrimony continuously sustained by the possibility of reclaiming previously distributed assets and offices, by the guarantee of the 'inalienability' of fiscal property, and by the constant flow of transfers generated within the system of marquisal patronage. The rapid circulation of assets among different holders had a political foundation, with the consequences that have already been described. That same political foundation likewise underpinned the centrality of the cities – and of Lucca in particular – as places for the negotiation of resources, and consequently for the spending of the court, the aristocracy, and the clergy. Extra-economic factors supported both the capacity to coordinate and direct production and the maintenance of an artificial divide between the 'fiscal economy' and the 'private economy'.

For precisely this reason, the crisis of the traditional political order quickly undermined many of the pillars of the early medieval Tuscan economy.

It placed a large amount of resources – primarily land – at the disposal of churches and aristocrats in an increasingly stable and secure way, accompanying and encouraging the expansion of the aristocratic class, which was

[38] Wickham, "La signoria rurale in Toscana;" see also Collavini, "I signori rurali in Italia centrale" and Cortese, *L'aristocrazia toscana*.
[39] Collavini, "'Mutazione signorile' e trasformazioni economiche."

already underway as a result of population growth and the social advancement of the *milites*. Insofar as the political authorities continued to possess a landed base, it had now become indistinguishable in its formation, accumulation, and operation from that of other regional political actors: thoroughly seigneurial, connected to the market, and integrated into a single, unified system.

The crisis of the fiscal system drastically reduced the circulation of non-commercial goods. For aristocrats and churches, the loss of gifts from the court made it essential to turn to the market – both to purchase manufactured goods and prestige items, and to obtain the money needed for these purchases, whether by marketing their own products or by imposing increasingly heavy obligations on peasants as part of the consolidation of seigneurial power.

This new structure of demand, which emerged in a period of general demographic and productive growth, inevitably engaged, stimulated, and redirected the activities of artisans and merchants who had previously been connected to the court, offering them the opportunity to operate in a freer and less regulated market.

The end of the precariousness of fiscal property ownership marked another decisive transformation, also in the economic sphere. For many families and certain churches, fiscal property had in fact constituted the most substantial part of their assets. The stabilisation of ownership – which was never a painless process given the conflicts among the various parties competing for the inheritance of the fisc – had important repercussions. It encouraged an increasing flow of investment by landholders. This is reflected in the emergence of ever more imposing military structures; in the appearance of new infrastructure – bridges, roads, rural markets, and the like – and of productive facilities within castles; and in the wager on lordship as an economic resource. It also prompted many aristocratic families to shift their focus towards the countryside, bringing with it a reorientation of spending patterns to the benefit of the rural world, and in particular its principal centres.[40]

This led to a temporary decline in the centrality of cities within the region's economic structures – and not merely from a political standpoint. Yet, this decline was only a brief lull: demographic pressure, productive expansion, the rush to seize the substantial urban and peri-urban properties and fiscal rights, and above all the vast concentration of resources and expertise that the fiscal system had previously gathered in the cities enabled urban societies to recover successfully, ushering in the high medieval phase of Tuscan urbanism. Significantly, it was precisely in those cities where the fiscal authorities had most heavily concentrated their resources – by virtue of their political centrality – such as Lucca, and later, Pisa, that the departure of the aristocracy and the resulting disconnection between the urban world and its

40 Cortese, *L'aristocrazia toscana*.

rural hinterland were least pronounced.[41] Among other effects, this also contributed to the slower and more uneven development of rural lordship within their diocesan territories.

If I had to identify a single factor of change that most profoundly influenced the Tuscan economy's evolution in the High Middle Ages, I would have no hesitation in pointing to the disappearance of the dualism and separation between the 'fiscal economy' and the 'private economy'. This dualism concerned the very logic of production and exchange and rested on a political and institutional division between the two spheres. It extended across the entire region, both geographically and socially, manifesting at the local level as well as within the peasant world that was the regional economy's driving force – both before and after the seigneurial revolution. In other words, the concentration of high-grade cereals within demesne estates and the inflow of other goods and resources through the labour and transport *operae* of the *manentes* to urban and rural *curtes* controlled by the fisc cannot be explained by an economic logic linked to the market, but rather served the needs of higher political authorities, who then redistributed them according to political imperatives.

Of course, the cases of Vetricella and the Lucca *inquisitio* discussed above are not sufficient to make us certain that this separation always and everywhere functioned effectively; nonetheless, we must assume that the forms of the organisation and management of the fisc tended in this direction. The collapse of the political and institutional constraints that had characterised the 'fiscal system' must have created new opportunities for economic integration, commercial exchange, and the division of labour even at the local level and to the advantage of socially modest groups – possibilities that had previously been unthinkable, having been suppressed by the fiscal authorities' strict control over their dependants and their production.

Even those *manentes* who, directly or indirectly, passed from the fiscal to the seigneurial system – retaining many of their former burdens – now found themselves operating in a new world.[42] Although still harshly exploited through the combination of older obligations and new seigneurial levies, they were now free to choose what to produce, to enter and leave the market at will, to interact with their neighbours, and to allocate their accumulated surpluses as they wished. They thus became part of a rapidly expanding economy that offered new opportunities, spurred both by the rapacity of the nobility in its various forms and by the growing pressure of a market that was becoming pervasive even in rural areas, especially those closest to the cities.[43]

In short, we can assume that, alongside the 'natural' processes of economic growth in Tuscany that had been active since the Early Middle Ages – and

41 Cortese, 299-314.
42 Tomei, "Sulle tracce dei *manentes* altomedievali;" Wickham, "*Manentes* e diritti signorili," and Collavini, "Il servaggio in Toscana."
43 Tabarrini, *Estate Management.*

whose cumulative effects made them increasingly rapid and dynamic – the crisis and ensuing privatisation of fiscal assets acted as an accelerant, amplifying both the pace and scale of development. This in turn was one of the key factors behind the leap forward in the Tuscan economy that becomes clearly visible only in the second half of the 12th century, when the effects of the structural transformations I have tried to outline had fully taken shape across the region.

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