THE PERVASIVENESS OF LORDSHIP (ITALY, 1050–1500)*

In the 1080s, the women of Casciavola, a small village along the Arno ten kilometres east of Pisa, were beaten by their lord as they lay in bed giving birth.[1] Two centuries later in Rémilly, a village in northwest France under the lordship of the bishop of Metz, the arrival of the lord involved all sorts of extraordinary services. Some of the subjects had to host the seigneurial entourage, to transport supplies, and provide in different ways for the lord's stay, including covering the floor of his rooms with hay and watching over his sleep: one of their duties was the *grenouillage*, which involved beating the water in the moat beneath the lord's windows to keep the frogs quiet throughout the night.[2] If we move forward two centuries, the draft agreement that aimed to avoid the *remences*' revolt in 1462 in Catalonia forbade the practice of *ius primae noctis* and the obligation for new peasant mothers to nurse the lord's children, thus condemning their own to death by malnutrition.[3]

Taken at face value, these are examples of burdensome seigneurial practices, which heavily influenced a subject's life. Each of them, in fact, was quite different from how they may at first seem. The beating of mothers in labour at Casciavola was a symbolic act, through which the local noblemen tried to impose their lordship, humiliating the bodies of women and proclaiming the original subjection of inhabitants before they were even born. In the lands of the bishop of Metz, the frantic preparations announcing the lord's arrival only involved a small minority of

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[1] *Lettere originali del medioevo latino (VII–XI sec.)*, i, *Italia*, ed. Armando Petrucci, Giulia Ammannati, Antonino Mastruzzo, Ernesto Stagni (Pisa, 2004), 156 n. 18.

[2] Jean Coudert, 'L'évêque de Metz et ses paysans: l'exemple du ban de Rémilly vers 1300 d'après le rapport des droits', *Les Cahiers lorrains*, iv (2002), 316–17, 335–7.

[3] Paul Freedman, *The Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia* (Cambridge, 1991), 193.

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his subjects (even if they were in great numbers in Rémilly itself), and moreover, they only took place twice a year. Finally, the dark seigneurial practices that Catalonia wanted to put an end to may have been connected more with rebel political strategies aimed at delegitimizing the lords' power than with reality. And indeed, when conceding to the peasants' requests, the lords argued that such rights on the sexual and reproductive abilities of women had never in fact been exercised.[4]

These examples, among many others, remind us that the social practice of lordship requires careful evaluation. At the same time, they point to a more general problem, a gap even, in the rich historiography on lordship: namely, which categories can be used to evaluate the impact on the mass population of what French historians have termed *seigneurie banale* (the kind of lordship that was commonly found on the Continent, but was also present, in a more unusual form, in England)? Categories such as *seigneurie banale*, the Italian *signoria territoriale* and *signoria fondiaria*, the Spanish *señorío solariego*, *dominical* and *jurisdiccional* (in Catalonia *senyoria de la terra*, *senyoria jurisdiccional* and *senyoria de castell termenat*) are not all-encompassing categories that describe every kind of aristocratic *dominium* over peasants and lands.

Rather, they are historiographical constructions, conceptual instruments aimed at highlighting one specific phase within the long, generic and transversal domination exercised by a variety of medieval aristocracies. These historiographical concepts are concerned with looking at the cases in which lords developed authentic prerogatives of local government, extended over all or most of the population of a given territory, and not rooted just in the concession of lands and other relationships of economic or military superiority. These prerogatives were in fact also tied to the exercise of more or less extensive powers over justice, taxation, military levies, and more generally of dominance. These rights, formerly exclusively limited to the monarch and his representatives, were by now controlled by the lords, who made use of them as goods that could be bought, sold and disputed over. In more general terms, we need to ask ourselves how we

[4] On the non-existence of *ius primae noctis* in Catalonia: Rosa Lluch Bramon, 'La servitud i el dia a dia dels remences', in *Històries del dia a dia a l'Edat Mitjana* (Holstalric, 2017), 29–43. More generally, A. Boureau, *Le droit de cuissage: la fabrication d'un mythe, XIII^{e}–XX^{e} siècle* (Paris, 1995).

should then evaluate the consequences that each lordship had on environments administered not only by great territorial lords, but also by a complex array of ecclesiastical bodies, joint lords and lords over individual persons, who also had judicial, fiscal and military powers, and who made up much of the tissue of seigneurial society?

The problem of the extent of lordship's impact over the society that it dominates has not had the centrality it deserves. Even when it is seen as an important piece of the puzzle, it has not been framed sufficiently as a research question, and above all has not really been addressed in a comparative perspective, in order to discriminate between different kinds of lord. Historians have mostly focused on something else: the world that lords moved in. We have investigated the nature of the power of lords, the geographical and social scene over which that power was exercised, the elements it was based on, the political culture it expressed, the reciprocal relationships between lords and the State, the economic effectiveness of lordship, its symbolic and charismatic aspects, and so on. But only rarely has this perspective been turned around, so as to look at lordship from the bottom up, making an effort first of all to understand how much and in which ways lordship weighed on the life of subjects. Moreover, even when this approach has been adopted, it has been without any theoretical engagement, or any attempt to define parameters for judgement that would better allow us to conceptualize the problem of the local impact of lordly power. Chris Wickham, the historian who has best framed the problem of the consequences of Italian *signoria* over the social and economic life of its subjects, has proposed a distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' lordship.[5] The first must be ascribed to lords 'powerful enough to rule over the lives' of their subjects, lords, who, thanks to the scale of the lands they owned and of their prerogatives exercised a 'sometimes outright total power'. Conversely, 'weak' lords were those who were made incapable of truly influencing the lives of their dependants because of other great landowners, a dynamic peasant society, and other limitations. This categorization has the merit of considering the lordship in light of its impact on the lives of its subordinates, enabling research to progress considerably, but it

[5] Chris Wickham, 'La signoria rurale in Toscana', in Gerhard Dilcher and Cinzio Violante (eds.), *Strutture e trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X–XIII* (Bologna 1996), 348–53, 376–93.

remains nevertheless generic if we want to understand the factors that concretely shaped this 'total power'.

My article centres on this need for increased conceptualization. It defines and develops a notion of the pervasiveness of lordship. This concept seems to be the one best suited to highlight the necessity of paying attention to the very real issue of evaluating the ability, or else impossibility, seigneurial power had to influence the environment subject to it in a deep and continuous manner, through diverse, fundamental and all-encompassing forms. We could also speak of the intensity of the lordship. In fact, 'pervasiveness' might seem a bit ambiguous, and could sound as if it is about how much lordship there was in a region overall. However, connected to the idea of intensity are the ideas of strength and power. Pervasiveness best renders the idea of a lordship that permeates the daily lives of it dependants, that is present in all parts of a particular local society, even when that lordship has very little political power.

The notion of pervasiveness helps to discuss the degree to which lordship intruded, and was capable of shaping 'land and people' under its control. It highlights that in the world of lordship there was a disjuncture (or at least a potential disjuncture) between political power and socio-economic domination. 'Power' and 'pervasiveness' should be analysed as independent variables, since not all lords who were powerful in a political sense would have exercised a very tight degree of control over local society, while some lords who were not politically powerful did so. As we shall see, a pervasive lord, who exercised over his subjects a minute, daily, immediate power, was sometimes a powerful and wealthy lord, at the apex of the regional aristocracy. However, quite often a pervasive lord operated at a more modest level. He may have had very few dependants, and a lifestyle that was not too dissimilar from theirs.

Whether wealthy and strong, or badly off and without too many powers, pervasive lords were nonetheless united by the will and ability to keep a close eye on their subjects. Theirs was a daily presence, tightly woven into social practices, time management, the organization of settlements and living spaces. We need to ask ourselves which factors enabled a lordship to become pervasive, and which lords, from which eras and from which regions were best equipped with these characteristics.

Pervasiveness relied both on the characteristics that we might ascribe to stronger lordships, such as wide judicial powers, large landholdings, a high rate of exaction and the practice of seigneurial violence, and on elements of other types. Some of these derived from the lords' active participation in productive activities, others from the seigneurial ability to underpin symbolic relationships, and others again from a tight bond with the most influential among their subordinates. Otherwise, seigneurial pervasiveness could be upheld by structuring the military role of subjects, by careful control over the pivotal moments of their family cycle, and by daily presence in the places where the dependant peasant community lived.

Pervasiveness was, however, neither omnipresent nor common to all forms of lordship. In a few regions and during certain eras, the lords with the greatest scope for oppression in the localities tended not to be those who were the most politically or economically powerful — that is, the lords that contemporaries would have identified as being in the top rank of society — but instead were mostly much lesser lords, at village level, or even lower down at knightly level. But we should not seek to establish an inverse correlation, as we shall see that powerful lords could also be pervasive. We need to ask ourselves which lordships sought to exercise a pervasive form of dominance, and which kinds of lordships were fundamentally indifferent to it. More important, but harder to reach through the surviving evidence, is the problem of what subjects thought, how they lived with this kind of domination, and what advantages and disadvantages it brought them.

I consider here as case studies a set of *signorie* between 1050 and 1500 in several Italian regions. I also keep in mind the situation in France, building on the well-known and influential historiographical tradition concerning its lordships. I look at both high-placed lords, such as the counts and the great abbots of the Kingdom of Sicily, and the *châtelains* of the French *seigneuries banales*, then I move on to the small-scale lords of France and southern Italy, concluding with the analysis of the situation in Lazio and Lombardy. First of all, however, I begin with a brief survey of the main research interests of French and Italian historiographies on lordship.

I

FRENCH AND ITALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHIES

Across Europe, studies of lordship have attempted to harness a historical phenomenon that oscillates wildly between the global and the particular. Starting with the eleventh century, lordship became a Europe-wide phenomenon, which the development of seigneurial power, or, according to other interpretations, the growing explicitness and availability of documents, highlight everywhere. This wealth of sources has meant that lordship has become a fundamental research interest for the historiography of the period after 1000. Conversely, lordship appears to be a fundamentally plural phenomenon, visible in infinite variation in different local contexts, with strong differences between chronological and geographical periods, and not least between different lords. The only (partial) exception can be found in England, where local lordships, however different from each other, still shared a relative homogeneity in their structure and management by bishops, monasteries and aristocrats at different levels. In order to attempt to master the infinite variety of the phenomenon of lordship, historians have analysed some of the themes connected with it, such as *incastellamento* and the patterns of settlement, servitude, the use of violence, the forms of legitimation and political language, the monopoly over the ban, and much more. They have developed definitions and typologies. Each different historiographical tradition has had its own categories of lordship and recurring themes.[6] The two historiographies considered here are those of France and Italy.

In France, the main category has been that of the *seigneurie banale*, invented by George Duby in 1952 (but in fact the

[6] We may gain a sense of the different approaches of seigneurial studies from collective volumes such as Monique Bourin and Pascual Martínez Sopena (eds.), *Pour une anthropologie du prélèvement seigneurial dans les campagnes médiévales (XI^e–XIV^e siècles)*, i, *Réalités et représentations paysannes* (Paris, 2004); and ii, *Les mots, les temps, les lieux du prélèvement* (Paris, 2007). See, in particular, Chris Wickham, 'Defining the *seigneurie* since the War', i, 43–50; Timothy Reuter, 'Forms of Lordship in German Historiography', i, 51–61; Sandro Carocci, 'Signoria, prelievo rurale, società contadina (sec. xi–xiii): la ricerca italiana', i, 63–81; Paul Freedman and Pascual Martínez Sopena, 'The Historiography of Seigneurial Income in Spain: A Double Approximation', i, 83–111, all in Bourin and Martínez Sopena (eds.), *Pour une anthropologie du prélèvement seigneurial dans les campagnes médiévales*.

expression had been created by Marc Bloch in 1935).[7] As is well known, these 'banal' lordships are supposed to have grown quickly around originally royal and comital castles, in the decades around the year 1000, when the kingdom of France, with the exception of Flanders and Normandy, is said to have lived through a wholesale dissolution of public power, and a sudden 'privatization' of power by the comital and royal *châtelains*. The new seigneurial centres were both strong and pre-eminent. They were strong powers, because they were based on the appropriation of the rights of the post-Carolingian state, further developed and strengthened by violence. They were pre-eminent from two different points of view: geographically, because each castle district was a vast and diverse reality, often including dozens of villages; and socially, because they were the monopoly of a relatively small aristocratic elite, as only they managed to acquire banal rights.

In the forty years of studies on French lordship dominated by Duby's influence, this premise was developed in different ways.[8] There has been an insistence, especially for the Midi, on the economic causes of the change, which Duby had not much considered; or else it has been stressed that many fortresses had been built by private powers first, and not by the ruler. It is the very insistence on the revolutionary character of this change towards lordship, however, that has proved to be the weak point of these studies. The French historiography on lordship had already become much tested by the shift in interest towards cultural and religious topics when, in the mid-1990s, it entered a crisis that is still unresolved. French historiography has not adequately reacted to the so-called debate on the 'feudal revolution', which contested the supposed speed of origin and

[7] George Duby, *La société aux XI^e et XII^e siècles dans la région mâconnaise* (Paris 1953); for Marc Bloch and the *seigneurie banale*, see Marc Bloch, 'La seigneurie lorraine: critique des témoignages et problèmes d'évolution', *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, vii (1935), 454–6; cf. François Bougard, 'Genèse et réception du "Mâconnais" de Georges Duby', in Ludovico Gatto and Paola Supino Martini (eds.), *Studi sulle società e le culture del medioevo per Girolamo Arnaldi* (Florence, 2001), 31–54.

[8] For descriptions of research in different regions of France, see Thomas N. Bisson, '*La Terre et les Hommes*: A Programme Fulfilled?', *French History*, xiv (2000); Sandro Carocci, 'Signoria rurale e mutazione feudale: una discussione', *Storica*, viii (1997).

the real novelty of the *seigneuries banales*.[9] This may mostly depend on a dislike for the excessively polemical tone of the debate, but it nonetheless reveals a fundamental disinterest for the theme.

Italian historiography considers lordships in the first place as political and institutional phenomena.[10] Italian researchers, however, have paid attention to the social context within which lordships operated. However, they have still focused more on the lords than on their dependants. Empirical research on the changes caused by lordships to villages and their societies remains rare; instead much attention has been paid to the social physiognomy of the people who held seigneurial powers. Italian historians do not consider the simple fact of landowning as sufficient to qualify as a lordship: in their categorization, lordship required not only land, but also the possession of the fundamental attributes of public authority, that is the administration of justice, the exaction of tax, and the organization of military defence. These seigneurial powers, however, were never the monopoly of relatively few great noblemen, as in the French *seigneuries banales*, but rather, they were present among a large number of lay and ecclesiastical lords of all kinds, from the families that ruled over entire sub-regions to the lords who dominated over only a small part of a village or a small number of peasants. Research tends to favour, partially as a result, the category of *signoria locale* (as a translation of the Latin *dominatus loci*) or its synonym, *signoria territoriale*, which both point to those seigneurial powers that stretched over all of the inhabitants and the territory of at least one village.

French and Italian historiographies, as all other European historiographies, vary not only in their typologies, but also in their categories of judgement, that is to say in the elements judged central in evaluating a lordship. The nature of lordly powers and their public origin have been fundamental in French research; the speed and violence of the 'mutation féodale' of the

[9] For an account of the debate, see Charles West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation between Marne and Moselle, c.800 to c.1100* (Cambridge, 2013), 1–9.

[10] Luigi Provero, 'Forty Years of Rural History for the Italian Middle Ages', in Isabel Alfonso (ed.), *The Rural History of Medieval Europeans Societies: Trends and Perspectives* (Turnhout, 2007), 141–72; Carocci, 'Signoria, prelievo rurale, società contadina'.

1000s has been considered significant, and close attention has been paid to the spread of village lordships in the twelfth century. Italian historians have concerned themselves with the slow birth of the lordship in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and its relationship with both public office and land ownership; another much discussed point is the territorial or non-territorial character of the lordship.

The problem of the impact of lordship on peasant societies has met with different treatments. Sometimes it has simply not been taken into consideration; this has for instance happened in the case of most Italian studies. More often, it has been taken for granted, as an inevitable collateral effect of the establishment of the new seigneurial power: a deep change, certainly, but after all a self-evident one that does not deserve specific categorization. This attitude, which is found in all European historiographies, is especially typical of the so-called 'mutationist' tradition in France, which holds that the ability of the *seigneurie banale* to exercise violence and collect taxation flattened the social layers of peasant societies, cancelling out the differences between freemen and serfs, eliminating all chances of social ascent aside from service to the lord. Significantly, this oscillation between lack of interest and emphasis separates out the two most recent and up-to-date volumes on the genesis of the new kind of lordship. In Charles West's *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*, the theme of the impact of the new power on the subordinates of lordship goes almost unaddressed, given that the book's focus rests instead on a new way to perceive power practices and a new conceptual system to articulate them. By contrast, in Alessio Fiore's *The Seigneurial Transformation*, the rapid growth of the new patterns of lordship in the Kingdom of Italy after 1080 is presented as a disruptive element, which increased the exaction of tax and other lordly demands through violence, allowed a small minority of peasants to become knights and to take part in the new power, and substantially degraded the conditions of the vast majority of the population.[11]

[11] West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*; Alessio Fiore, *The Seigneurial Transformation: Power Structures and Political Communication in the Countryside of Central and Northern Italy, 1080–1130* (Oxford, 2020).

II

LORDSHIP AS SUPERSTRUCTURE: COUNTS AND ABBEYS IN THE KINGDOM OF SICILY

I now begin to conceptualize the consequences of lordship over those it dominates with an example from the Kingdom of Sicily. Choosing the South inverts the geographical approach usually taken in studies about Italy, which tend to privilege the centre and the North, but it offers good potential. Except in Abruzzo and in the zone of Montecassino, in the *Mezzogiorno* lordship came in with the Normans in the second half of the eleventh century. When Roger II was crowned king of the whole of southern Italy in 1130, lordships of different kinds were already widespread throughout all regions. Among the greatest lords there were a few monasteries (Montecassino, San Vincenzo al Volturno, San Giovanni in Venere) and about twenty counts. The counts ruled over tens of castles and villages, and one or, more rarely, two larger centres, called cities, *civitates*. Counts were the highest aristocracy of the kingdom, often joined to the monarch by blood ties, and they were often more politically active in the royal court than in their own dominions.[12]

Let us look for instance at the case of two cousins, Roger and Richard de Aquila, descendants of the lord of the Norman village of L'Aigle. Shortly after the mid twelfth century, they were counts of Avellino (around 50 km east of Naples) and Fondi (on the Tyrrhenian coast, 100 km north of Naples), respectively. In the *Catalogus Baronum*, the census of possessions and military contributions, in certain ways similar to the English *Cartae baronum*, compiled by King Roger II around 1150 and then updated in 1167–8, the two cousins were the fifth and sixth counts of the entire kingdom by wealth, with possessions estimated at around 45 *feuda militis* for Roger, and 40.5 for Richard.[13] Both took part in the great baronial revolt of 1160–1, losing all of their possessions after King William I's victory and finding shelter with Emperor Frederick I of Hohenstaufen. After the death of the king in 1166, both were forgiven, received their

[12] Sandro Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy: Rural Societies, Aristocratic Powers and Monarchy in the 12th and 13th Centuries*, trans. Lucinda Byatt (Rome, 2018).

[13] For Roger of Avellino, see *Catalogus Baronum*, ed. Evelyn Jamison (Rome, 1972), n. 392 (Roger had also inherited from his mother a few Sicilian holdings, but these are not described in the *Catalogus*); for Richard of Fondi, *Catalogus Baronum*, n. 754 and n. 995.

lordships back, and became influential actors in the court in Palermo, where the count of Avellino appears to have been one of the most powerful advisors of the young King William II for a few years.[14]

We are thus talking about extremely powerful men, both in the court and among the noblemen of the kingdom. Yet, the information we have about their lordship shows us the limits, rather than the strengths, of their local power. At the end of 1168, for instance, the count of Avellino, or rather his bailiff, asked three brothers who lived in the comital castle of Mercogliano for the rents and other duties due to the comital *curia* for the houses and lands inherited from their mother; this was the second time that the case was being examined by the comital tribunal. And for the second time, a comital tribunal put the count himself in the wrong: two judges, native to Mercogliano itself, questioned their fellow inhabitants and established that the goods indicated by the count were in fact exempt from any exaction, as the previous judgement had already established.[15]

The count of Fondi spectacularly lost a case against all of the inhabitants of his county as well. In 1179, the latter complained to the king about the unjust acts that Count Richard inflicted on them. The count, summoned to Palermo, was condemned by a solemn meeting of the royal court. But the evil behaviour of which he stood accused may seem like small beer compared to that of many European noblemen. Richard imprisoned those who committed crimes, rather than asking for sureties or bail; he seized the goods disputed in trial before a definitive sentence was passed; he had changed the law relating to damages inflicted by cattle. Finally, the count had tried to bring in line with the practices common in the rest of the kingdom some local *consuetudines* that were unusually favourable to those he dominated. He had for instance asked to receive monetary contributions, regulated by royal law, but absent from Fondi practice, in the case of ransom, the knighting of a son, or the acquisition of a lordship. Moreover, as was the custom in all of the kingdom's other lordships, he

[14] On the lives of the two counts, see Vera von Falkenhausen, 'Dell'Aquila (de Aquila), Ruggero', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, xxxvii (Rome, 1989); Sandro Carocci, 'Fondi 1179', in Bruno Figliuolo, Rosalba Di Meglio and Antonella Ambrosio (eds.), *Ingenita curiositas: studi sull'Italia medievale per Giovanni Vitolo* (Battipaglia, 2018), 47–59.

[15] *Codice diplomatico Verginiano*, ed. Placido Mario Tropeano (Montevergine, 1981), v, no. 490.

demanded payment from those who used pastures or uncultivated land located in territories of villages different from their own, breaking with the old tradition that placed in common the land of all the nine castle-villages of the county. The king demanded that Richard renounce these practices, adding that he could imprison those who were guilty of grave crimes, but only in order to hand them over to the royal tribunals, which had the monopoly on high justice.[16]

However surprising they may seem, these limitations on the seigneurial powers of the greatest noblemen of the kingdom can be found in many of the sources of the time.[17] We quite often find counts losing, sometimes several times in a row, cases judged by their own tribunals, even in the largest county in the kingdom, Molise. Moreover, no count had the right to administer high justice. For all of them it was quite difficult to increase taxation and rents. Those they dominated were always ready to contest them, and they were often listened to and supported by the royal court. The situation of the southern counts as lords was the mirror of the overall situation of the lordship in the Kingdom of Sicily. After the birth of the monarchy in the 1130s, in all regions the royal government structures kept the nobility under control, kept exclusive control of high justice, demanded direct access to the whole population, even those under the control of lords, and protected local customs. The limitations on free agency and on the lords' rights of exaction and command were all the greater depending on how wealthy, how socially articulate, and how well the rural community was able to defend its prerogatives. All the lords regularly delegated to local notables at the head of their community, the whole or a great part of the administration of the lordship. Those same tribunals judged patrimonial cases, whereas lesser crimes were judged by men chosen from among the inhabitants of the lordship, and followed local custom. Royal surveillance, the vitality of the rural community, and patterns of management all limited the space that territorial lords had to manoeuvre, including counts. To these were added other limiting factors, such as the legal freedom of all peasants, the stability of their possession of land, the availability of common

[16] Carocci, 'Fondi 1179'.
[17] Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 176–230, 381–83, 491–553.

lands to cultivate, the relatively quick turnover of lords due to the seizing and re-assignation of fiefdoms by the king, and more.

These limitations to seigneurial power were both the consequence and the cause of another characteristic of the southern Italian territorial lordship: the low level of exactions. For our two counts, we do not have detailed sources on the income and service required from their subjects. Rather, the most detailed document on this topic comes from the following century and another region, Sicily, where Count Roger of Avellino also had some possessions. The document, issued in 1249, contains information about the preceding decades concerning the income provided by two villages of around a hundred families each, Santa Lucia and Sinagra, situated in the north-east of the island.[18] They belonged to the bishop of Patti and the Crown, respectively, but for a few years they had been given in fief to two counts: we thus have an idea of what the counts received from those lordships, which, as often happened, were added to their original county. In this case, we have abundant information, because there is an accurate estimation of all income: rent, leases in kind, gifts, taxes on trade, profits from justice, mills and uncultivated land, even the value in money of the *corvées* undertaken by dependants. The greatest part of the income (over half) came from rents due from the peasants' harvest. The fiscal and judicial powers gave around a tenth of their profits, the demesne around twice as much.

For those who are unfamiliar with the seigneurial situation of the Kingdom of Sicily, the true surprise is in the very low rate of exaction, taken as a whole: the rents in wheat and wine were only a tenth of the harvest, and, taking into account all other income, we can calculate that the lords only appropriated little more than a sixth of the peasants' total production. Everything we know of the seigneurial economy in southern Italy shows that this level of exaction, although much smaller than found elsewhere in Europe, is not extraordinary. In all regions of the kingdom, in the great lordships the most common level of exaction over the harvest was a tenth of the whole, and cases like Montecassino, which asked for a seventh, are fairly isolated. Across all territorial lordships, moreover, can be found the

[18] Dieter Girgensohn and Norbert Kamp, 'Urkunden und Inquisitionen des 12 und 13. Jahrhunderts aus Patti, *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, xlv (1965); Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 413–21.

custom of delegating management: income, including that from justice, was regularly collected by members of the village elite, the mills were put out to contract, and the demesnes themselves were sometimes rented out.[19]

The case of counts like Richard and Roger de Aquila on the one hand, and of abbeys like Montecassino on the other, testify to an apparent contradiction, which brings us back to the heart of our theme. These lords were extremely powerful, both politically and militarily. Sometimes they ruled over immense territories that included a great number of castles and villages. In the case of Montecassino, these stretched over more than eight hundred square kilometres. However, their lordship was not only frugal, but also in a certain sense it was external to the local environment. Only rarely did the lords coordinate productive activity, or intervene in some way in the production process. Thus, the economic role of the lord was simply one of acquiring rents and dues, the collection of which was delegated to the leading figures in the societies over which lordship was exercised. In general, it does not seem that these great territorial lords were interested or able to exercise a minute, detailed control over the societies they dominated. Their dominance was separate from local societies, and was superimposed in the form of an external superstructure. Local people, especially those in the larger centres, were dynamic and articulate, with their own methods of production. They could organize their political and social lives and they made decisions for themselves. They had the support of an effective royal apparatus. These great lordships simply occupied an extra layer on top of the structures created by the communities for their own benefit.

If we leave Italy and look for possible comparisons with the situation of the great territorial lords of the Kingdom of Sicily in the rest of Europe, what leaps to our attention is the French model of the *seigneurie banale*, in the way it has been described for the period preceding the first half of the twelfth century. Certainly, many of its characteristics seem wholly different from the situation in Norman Italy. In France, the *seigneuries banales* did not face effective controls by superior powers. They were excessive, predatory lordships, which deeply affected the societies they dominated. According to George Duby's book on

[19] *Ibid.*, 477–83.

the Maçonnais and much of his subsequent research and the work of numerous other French historians, the income ensured by the arbitrary exactions allowed by the power of the ban enabled great lords to seize much of the production over and above the subsistence needs of the peasants of all conditions and statuses, from poor unfree rent-payers to the wealthiest freeholders. Consequently, social stratification in rural communities was greatly simplified, and economic ascent was possible, not through the accumulation of land, but through collaboration, as a *ministerialis*, in the management of lordly power.[20]

Despite these differences, there is one important point of contact with the territorial lordships of the Kingdom of Sicily: in these studies, the *seigneurie banale* is presented as a large-scale power, able to make a few noblemen very powerful. This power nonetheless remained far from agrarian production and from peasant society, which were clearly fields of action irrelevant to the mentality of the powerful *châtelains*. According to Duby and his followers, the *seigneurie banale*, even as it made for immense profits, was a matter of power, wholly separate from the daily management of agrarian enterprises. More recent interpretations consider the castle lordship of medieval France to be a sort of 'superstructure', arguing that it is not a new entity, but rather that a change took place in the documentation, in that sources began to discuss pre-existing autonomous *châtelains* and the power of the ban only after the year 1000. It is presented as a force that coordinated forms of knightly dominance of ancient origins, essentially fulfilling the same role as the counties and other Carolingian district divisions. But, whether this is true or not, this 'superstructure', this 'coordinating power', remained outside or on the margins of the societies and economies it dominated.[21]

[20] Good summaries of these approaches are found in Jean-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation, 900–1200*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (New York, 1991), and Dominique Barthélemy, *L'ordre seigneurial, XI^e–XII^e siècle* (Paris, 1990).

[21] Dominique Barthélemy, 'Debate: The "Feudal Revolution" ', *Past and Present*, no. 152 (Aug. 1996), 203. A good presentation of the position of the supporters of the Feudal Revolution and 'continuists' is West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution*, 177–81, which convincingly underlines the impossibility of following a 'continuist' point of view, denying that there was any structural difference between Carolingian estate management and later lordship.

III
VILLAGE LORDSHIPS

At the end of the preceding section I presented a simplified version of an environment rich in complexities. Regional studies outline an environment that is first and foremost characterized by specific local characteristics. The *seigneuries banales* only established themselves strongly in the Mediterranean areas (Languedoc, Provence) and in the valley of the Rhône; then further north, in Burgundy and Lorraine; and then further west, in the Auvergne, Berry, and in other regions in the heart of France. The duchy of Normandy and the county of Flanders, instead, evolved in the opposite direction, with the powers of dukes and counts remaining strong and blocking the development of *seigneuries banales*. Other regions (Île de France, Picardy, Anjou and Poitou, and the counties of Chartres and Champagne) found themselves at an intermediate stage, in which the power of counts, dukes and the king held on, however diminished, and prevented the growth of lordships endowed with ample banal powers.[22]

Differences between the regions appear also when it comes to the consequences that the *seigneurie banale* had on the management of the land. In the Charente, the establishment of the *seigneurie banale* encouraged monasteries and noblemen without banal rights to completely reframe agrarian relationships, introducing new *corvées*, transforming and raising rents, leases and taxation in money, imposing duties of hospitality and other *servitia*. There would thus have been a change here that benefited, not only the typical banal lords (*châtelains* and great religious institutions), but also a 'crowd of small lords who had no part in the ban'. In the majority of the other regions, however, the impact of the *seigneurie banale* on managing the land seems to be very limited. Inside the great territories of the *seigneuries banales* the true shift in the lord's ability to intervene in economic activities and village life only began around the middle of the twelfth century. The knights were then able to gain a growing independence from the *châtelains*, and to take away from them the monopoly on banal powers. A few kilometres north of Cluny, a rather widespread knightly family had acquired seigneurial

[22] Bisson, '*La Terre et les Hommes*'; for the possibility to divide France into great areas with similar developments, despite regional differences, see Carocci, 'Signoria rurale e mutazione feudale', 59–60.

rights over the parish of Massilly. After numerous conflicts, in 1285 the Cluny monks reached an agreement with the children of one of these knights. Taking advantage of their minority and their need of money, the monks spent the large sum of 35 silver pounds in exchange for the knight's children giving up their right to exercise high justice in the territory of the parish. The young men acknowledged that they held in fief to Cluny everything they had inherited from their father in Massilly. First of all, they had a part of the seigneurial rights over the entire parish: one twelfth of the donations, *corvées*, and income from the woods, and one ninth of the tithe and the pastures. Moreover, they had a few houses and fields they were renting out, and, most importantly, three holdings (*mansi*), comprising nine houses inhabited by peasants who paid rent in money (42 *denarii* in total) and in cereals, who were bound to reside there, completely subject to the knights in matters of justice, and had to pay a tallage *ad voluntatem*, usually of 60 *denarii*.[23]

Documents such as this bear witness to what has been called the 'knightly translation' of the lordship. In villages where their patrimony was concentrated, from the last few decades of the twelfth century knights could build motte-and-bailey castles and fortresses, and exercise judicial, fiscal and military rights. Thus, we see the birth of small village and parish lordships, dominations where the banal element became inseparable from the patrimonial and landholding element. Sometimes the same village was the seat of two or more lordships. The banal lord was no longer a more or less faraway protector: he was the greatest landowner of the area. *Seigneurie banale* and *seigneurie foncière* (the economic power that a landlord had over tenants) ended up commingled.[24]

[23] Auguste Bernard and Alexandre Bruel (eds.), *Recueil des chartes de l'abbaye de Cluny*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1876–1903), vi, n. 5323, 745–50; for the rights acquired by the family in the previous generation, see n. 4911, 410–13. On this family and its rights, see Duby, *La société aux XI^e et XII^e siècles*, 586–7.

[24] *Ibid.*, 584–99; the definition of 'translation chevaleresque' is found in Dominique Barthélemy, *La société dans le comté de Vendôme de l'an mil au XIV^e siècle* (Paris, 1993), 762. This transformation, which would result in a 'second age of lordship', characterized by the multiplication of *seigneuries de village*, was initially reconstructed by historians who, like Duby, thought of it as a new phenomenon, a product, and at the same time a cause of the crisis of the power of the *châtelains*. But it is now also accepted by others, making up a majority of historians today, who believe that village lordship had its roots in the power that, since the early Middle Ages, knights had exercised in the places where their

(cont. on p. 18)

However, we know very little of the effective capacity of these knight-lords, who controlled a village or just one of its fractions, to truly affect the productive practices and the social life of the peasants. Thus, if historians highlight that a village lordship 'tends to best organize men' and brings with it 'a clear increase in the burden of seigneurial authority and exaction', they also immediately see that these phenomena are sometimes absent, and that in any event the village lordships did not entail 'an absolute dominance over the countryside, because such dominance has never existed'.[25] It is clear that the great variety of local situations renders it impossible to make the same evaluation for all regions and villages. But the problem has never been an object of close analysis, either on a regional or interregional level.

While French studies may lack a clear assessment of the effective capacity of knight-lords to control a village, when we look at southern Italy instead, the answer to this problem is clear. We have seen that if we look at the *seigneurie banale* from below, from the point of view of the societies it dominated, for the first long phase of its history it fits at numerous points with a certain type of lord, the counts of the Kingdom of Sicily. These were lords characterized by the surprising contrast between their political and military strength, based on wide dominions, on the one hand, and on the other, their inability and scant interest in having an in-depth effect on the productive activities and the social relationships of their subordinates. We must ask, however, whether it is possible to find parallels, in the Italian south, to those French *seigneuries* limited to a village or a small part of it, which, in many cases, despite being weaker and smaller than

(n. 24 cont.)
possessions were focused. In this case, the argument has come to be that village lordships developed, not in opposition to the *seigneurie banale*, but rather within it, without engendering any loss of power for the great *châtelains*, whose authority, thanks to its nature as a superstructure, had always left ample space of manoeuvre for the development of smaller-scale powers. Dominique Barthélemy is the historian who has made the greatest contribution to this debate: see Barthélemy, *La société dans le comté de Vendôme*, 750–67, 905–10, 934–42, with the 'anti-mutationist' update of themes already treated in Dominique Barthélemy, *Les deux âges de la seigneurie banale: pouvoir et société dans la terre des sires de Coucy (milieu XI^e–milieu XIII^e siècle)* (Paris, 1984). Richard E. Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine, c.890–1160* (Woodbridge, 2004).

[25] I am quoting from Dominique Barthélemy, 'La mutation de l'an 1100', *Journal des Savants*, i (2005), 17; Daniel Pichot, 'La seigneurie au village dans l'Ouest de la France (1150–1250)', in Martin Aurell and Frédéric Boutoulle (eds.), *Les seigneuries dans l'espace Plantagenêt (c.1150–c.1250)* (Pessac, 2009), 205–23.

those of the great *châtelains*, seem to have had a much greater ability to penetrate into rural societies. It is in fact easy to see that the rich sources for the Italian south allow us, not only to find a local equivalent for the small French lordships, but also to understand more deeply their mechanisms, spread and consequences. Our sources clearly show us a few cases of seigneurial pervasiveness.

While discussing France, I have just compared the *seigneurie banale* with the small *seigneurie de village*; in this paragraph and the next, I move on to southern Italy, highlighting the differences between the great territorial lordships of the counts and those of abbeys, like Montecassino, with innumerable knightly lordships at every level. This comparison will help us to discuss the two criteria of powerful lordship and pervasive lordship.

In southern Italy, besides the territorial lordships of two dozen counts, a few hundred castle lords (*domini castri*), and a few great ecclesiastical lords, there were several thousand lords active on a small or tiny scale. A few dominated the whole of a village, often one that was recently founded. These lords demanded rents and payments in kind, labour service, submission to justice for lesser crimes, and other obligations from the inhabitants. In many cases, however, the village thus dominated by these small lords was not autonomous, either politically or territorially. It continued to be part of the territory of a larger lordship, that of the closest castle, and it shared with it the use of uncultivated land, water and other natural resources; and the lord of the castle continued to ask for some payments and some labour services. He usually judged major disputes, concerning more valuable goods; he was also able to continue to demand gifts, taxes and oaths of fealty.[26] Sometimes the village lords attempted to gain more independence from their territorial lord. In 1221, for instance, the monks of the abbey of Cava, who owned the village of Santo Stefano in Apulia, in the territory of the castle of Rocca Sant'Antonio, gave the lady of the castle, Magdala, four ounces of gold and a horse. In return, Magdala gave up all the labour services, cash and kind payments owed to her until then by the inhabitants of Santo Stefano, which the monks dominated. She still exacted, all the same, sizeable payments for the pastures, forests and arable lands that the

[26] Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 107–9, 212, 228–9.

inhabitants of the village, despite being dominated by the monks, were entitled to use, like all other inhabitants of the territory of Rocca Sant'Antonio.[27]

It is hard to find a general answer concerning the level of intensity of seigneurial power for these small village lordships. Sometimes it must have been considerable, especially in the smaller villages, where all the land belonged to the lord. On other occasions, it seems to have been modest. We can find a clearer answer by examining the largest group of small-scale lords.

IV
KNIGHTLY LORDSHIPS

In southern Italy, the majority of the lesser lords did not dominate a whole village, but only a part, often quite small, of its inhabitants. Their lordship was founded on the concession of lands, but it also had a personal character. These small lords were monasteries, local churches, notables, and, most often, knights. Because of this I call this kind of lordship 'knightly'. In the mid twelfth century, the *Catalogus Baronum*, even though it made a detailed list of only a small part of one of the regions it covered, Campania, identified the lordships of 180 knights, who dominated a total of 2,144 subjects. The number of families a knight ruled over could vary greatly. In 1175–80, in Arce, northern Campania, an inventory describes the lordships of twenty-two knights: nine had control over between thirty and fifty-two *villani*, four between ten and twenty, others less than ten, and the last five knights owned none. Such an abundance of data allows us to calculate that, in the twelfth century, royal officials and the knights themselves thought that a knight should on average be the lord of thirty peasants. There was awareness of the fact, however, that some knights owned more, and some much less, and the sources also show that even individuals with far fewer followers, sometimes less than ten, were still able to qualify as knights.[28]

These small personal lordships, belonging to knights, notables and local churches, appear everywhere, both within great

[27] *Ibid.*, 403–4.

[28] *Catalogus Baronum*, nos. 1263–81; Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 269–75, 283–7.

territorial lordships and in the centres of the royal demesne, depending directly on the king. Like the village lordships, they thus had to deal with the power of the territorial lord, or the king. Moreover, they had to reckon with the pressure of those they dominated, who sometimes appear to have been able to organize collectively, depending on where they lived, and to raise concerted complaints against all of their personal lords. This happened for instance in Sorrento. In 1222, the peasants who lived in the small villages spread around the peninsula, dominated by a great number of knights, five monasteries and three local churches, banded together to contest, with some success, the demands of their many lords. The lords had required the oath of *homagium*, had held control over the marriages of the peasants' daughters and the ability of their sons to become clergy, and had demanded over one hundred and ten days of forced labour a year. So the collective action may have had an effect, but the exactions that the villagers faced were and remained very substantial.[29]

Around thirty years earlier, in 1190, a great territorial abbey, Montecassino, intervened to support the demands of the inhabitants of its castle of Pontecorvo, who were ruled by the personal lordship of a few of the castle's knights under the general overlordship of Montecassino itself. The *charta* that was drawn up concerned only a few aspects of the *dominium* exercised by the knights, those perceived as most damaging to the subjects they dominated, or that most clashed with the power of the abbots. It remains in any event an illuminating document. The abbot limited the threat of physical violence, establishing, for example, that the knight could beat one of his subjects with a stick only in case of clear fault. He would moreover lose his claim to the lordship if he attempted to exercise his authority over the bodies of women, raping (*violenter corruperit*) a woman subject to him or the wife of one of his men. The document limited the damage that knightly rights could cause to the patrimony of a subject: a subject had to be a guarantor for his personal lord in case of debt or similar reasons, but the duty was suspended if he already had to pay because of a guarantee given for his lord. Other conflicts concerned the knights'

[29] Jean Louis Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia diplomatica Friderici secundi: sive constitutiones, privilegia, mandata, instrumenta quae supersunt istius imperatoris et filiorum ejus*, 7 vols (Paris, 1852–61), ii, pt 1, 378–83.

custom of issuing a *bannum* (i.e. a compulsory order backed up by a penalty in case of non-fulfilment), the custom of collecting *adiutoria* at the marriage or knighting of their children, the knights' right to intervene in the marriage of the daughters of their subjects, and in their succession and inheritance practices; Montecassino restricted all these. Notwithstanding, the document does not mention numerous other aspects of the knights' lordship. The abbot of Montecassino had no reason to intervene concerning payments in kind, cash or labour, or on the granting of lands, nor can we expect the monks to describe the forms through which the subjection of the peasants was acknowledged and legitimized, or the right of command through which this subjection was expressed. But the document is clear on other elements: first, on the character of such relationships, which, far from being peaceful, were potentially violent and oppressive. Second, on a potential for exaction that, on an individual scale, was aimed at reproducing the prerogatives of territorial lordships, ranging from demands for *adiutoria* and *bannum* to intervention in marriage and succession (though the *charta* strongly limited this sort of power). We can also see that these lordships implied a certain economic, judicial and political solidarity between personal lord and subject, which could be risky for the subordinate, but could also bring some advantages.[30]

In other cases, we have good evidence of the scale of rents and material duties owed by those subject to knights. Unsurprisingly, we find them to be highly variable. In some cases, the knights had limited rights, restricted to the exaction of rents and a few symbolic gifts. In other cases, the rights were far more substantial, and, as in Sorrento, they could include a high number of *corvées*. The knights also had the right to exercise justice. They could summon a tribunal (*curia*), which like all tribunals in the south entailed the participation of local judges (*iudices*), and could also pass sentence on crimes of blood. However, sometimes part of the judicial profits belonged to the territorial lord, as we see in 1190 in Montecalvo, in northern Apulia, where the lord of the castle was entitled to half of the value of the sentences passed by the tribunal of the

[30] Document edited by Luigi Fabiani, *La Terra di S. Benedetto: studio storico-giuridico sull'Abbazia di Montecassino dall'VIII al XIII secolo* (Montecassino, 1968), 427–30; analysed in Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 278–81.

personal lord on one of his subjects.[31] The territorial lord of the castle was also often entitled to receive part of the rents and labour services due by the subjects to their personal lords. Looking at Montecalvo again, the lord of the castle received from the subjects of the personal lord two *corvées* a year and, moreover, the payment of tolls on trade (*plateaticum*) and the rent (as always in southern Italy, equal to a tenth of the harvest) required for the sowing of cereals. Variety was the norm, even when looking at the relationship between the territorial lords and the lesser lords, whether the latter ruled over a whole village or only a handful of its inhabitants. In a few areas, for instance, judicial rights were very limited, or wholly forbidden, as happened in the dominions of William of Sanseverino, a powerful nobleman from southern Campania, to whose tribunal the knights owed the entirety of the *iustitia* over those they dominated.[32]

Our main sources are statements of customs, legal documents and other descriptions of the powers of the lords and the obligations of peasants. In Italy, there are no account rolls or registers of administration that can show in detail the gap between the ideal situation or legal claim described by the sources, and the actual enforcement of the rules, or the performance of the claimed services. Nonetheless, the gap was sometimes considerable. This is shown by the many court disputes about the powers of lords and the services they claimed, such as those described earlier regarding Fondi, Rocca San'Antonio and Sorrento, or by the attempts of the lords to obtain sworn statements of what was owed by their subjects during public assemblies. Sworn statements certainly reflect a single moment, which is the result of the balance of power in which the assembly took place. It is likely, however, that at that moment, they reflected reality closely enough. In any case, they are precious sources. It is precisely one of these sworn statements that allows us to know more in detail about the reality of knightly lordship.

In January 1182, a knight, the *dominus* Rainone of Sorrento called a tribunal (*curia*) in Maddaloni, twenty kilometres north

[31] Document published by Giandomenico and Alberto Magliano, *Larino: considerazioni storiche sulla città di Larino* (Campobasso, 1895), 397–401.

[32] Domenico Ventimiglia, *Notizie storiche del castello dell'Abbate e de' suoi casali nella Lucania* (1827), anastatic repr. (Sala Bolognese, 1978), n. IX, pp. XXXII–XXXV.

of Naples.[33] In the presence of two local judges and numerous knights and notables, all subjects (*subditi*) of Rainone were called to testify under oath as to the land concessions they had received and the duties they owed. In this case, we have a full picture of a knightly lordship, which extended only over a small part of Maddaloni's population. We do not know the precise number of Rainone's subjects because one substantial group of peasants had been given in fief to three vassal knights. In this case, Rainone was interested in what the vassal knights owed him, rather than what the peasants owed them. Called first before the assembly, the knights declared that they had taken oaths to be faithful, to serve the lord, armed and with several horses, both in the royal army and on other occasions of meetings of noblemen. This last point contains a surprise because, in addition to rather predictable occasions, such as assemblies called by the king and his officers, marriages and funerals, we also find thermal baths, which indicate a kind of aristocratic high-society life not confined to the sphere of the army, the royal court and family.

After the knights, the assembly heard seventeen *homines de persona*, that is, men in a state of personal subjection. They were the most strictly ruled dependants. The first was a squire: he was obliged to give military service with a horse (while the *milites* owed 'horses', plural) on the same occasions as the knights, and to reflect well on his lord by carrying his cloak and silver cup. There were then three more dependants with ministerial duties (seneschal and bailiff) and, finally, thirteen dependants who only had agricultural duties. They all listed the goods they held on concession (houses with orchards and numerous fields) and the dues they owed *de persona et terris*, that is, both because of their personal subjection and their lands. Except in one case, they owed a rent in money, which varied between two and fifteen gold *tarì*, thus reaching sizeable sums; the request for different quantities (varying according to the dependant) of wheat, barley and wine were common, besides gifts of chicken or hens. Only two men did not owe *corvées*, which took place once a week in seven cases, and twice a week in the other four. In total, from the thirteen personal subjects who were peasants, Rainone received

[33] Ignazio Giorgi, 'Confessione di vassallaggio fatta a Rainone da Sorrento dai suoi vassalli del territorio di Maddaloni', *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano*, vi (1888).

a great quantity of wheat, barley and wine, ninety *tarì*, around thirty chickens, and various other gifts. He also received six hundred days of manual labour and at least another hundred and fifty-six days of labour with ploughing oxen (that is to say, an average of 58 days a year per peasant, although with considerable variation); he thus also must have had land in demesne, which the document does not describe. We know moreover that Rainone also owned a dozen houses and fifteen fields in Maddaloni, rented to men not subject to his lordship, which gave him a further profit of forty *tarì*.

Rainone was an ambitious man. He liked to show off his military retinue, in order to have a role in the royal army and shine in regional high society. We can indeed imagine that the great part of his patrimony was spent on this, in order to restate his role as a warrior and an aristocrat, and that it was not invested in consumables. Among all of his dependants, only thirteen gave him an economic income; four were wholly exempt from providing rents and labour because they were squires or auxiliaries; a probably much higher number of peasants and substantial quantities of lands and goods had been given in fief to vassal knights. If we keep in mind the endowment that each of these *milites* needed, it is probable that more than two thirds of Rainone's goods and men were used to support his political, military and symbolic power, rather than his role as an aristocratic consumer. Even a lord on a small scale knew that 'lordship meant the domination of others and the maintenance of one's own honour'.[34] Rainone particularly needed to show off his silver cup, cloak and knightly retinue, as he owned no part of a castle: he was thus deprived of what was both a military tool and the main symbolic marker of seigneurial power in southern Italy.[35]

We can consider Rainone a model of higher-profile knights, close to the level of the lord of a small castle; his three vassal knights, for their part, exemplify those knights who lived on the income of lands cultivated by a small number of subject peasants. Those were a part, perhaps not the majority, but certainly numerous, of the more than ten thousand knights who

[34] Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine*, 19.
[35] Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 76–7.

lived in the Kingdom of Sicily in the mid twelfth century.[36] Counties such as those of Richard and Roger de Aquila certainly contained plenty of individuals like Rainone, knights without a territorial lordship, politically and militarily subject to the counts, but still with some political weight, and power over a good number of men. Just as certainly, there would have been tens of knights like the three we saw swearing vassalage to Rainone.

The great spread of these knightly lordships, on a small and minimal scale, makes all the more important a realization that is in itself significant: everything shows that for these lords it was much easier to influence local economic, social and, in a way, political relationships in depth than it was for great lords like the counts. Many of these small-scale lords exercised pervasive power. The violence and abuse that was forbidden in Pontecorvo, the heavy demand for labour, over a hundred days a year, required in Sorrento and from some of Rainone's dependants, the judicial rights held in numerous places by personal lords, sometimes including crimes of blood, were added to the oaths of fealty, the payment of *adiutoria* and rents in kind and money, the control over the marriage of subjects' children, and the limits imposed on personal mobility. They were elements of subordination, and they were certainly strict. But their impact on local society was multiplied by the relationships of protection and clientele that sustained and accompanied these powers: land concessions, military obligations, solidarity in judicial proceedings, protections against the demands of royal officials or territorial lords, and economic help. Everything points, then, to the fact that for the peasant the role of the knight or local church he or she depended on was more important than any other bond of subjection. It had to matter more than their subjection to territorial lords and their officials (and, in the centres of the royal demesne, to the monarch and his functionaries). In the case of personal lords, moreover, it appears clear that pervasiveness was not only daily surveillance: it was also to an extent an advantageous proximity, which supported and accompanied the subject in their social and political relationships with the other inhabitants of the village.

[36] The *Catalogus Baronum* lists 7,039.25 *milites* (Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 152), to which we must add those from Calabria and Sicily, regions not included in the *Catalogus*, and from the cities of the royal demesne.

V

POWERFUL LORDSHIP AND PERVASIVE LORDSHIP

For France, I compared the *seigneur banale* of a great castle with the much smaller *seigneur de village*, and, for southern Italy, the counts and abbeys like Montecassino with the innumerable knightly lordships at every level. Each element of these couplets (*seigneur banale*/*seigneur de village*; counts and abbeys/knightly lordships) had several variants. It would be a simplification to present them as homogenous realities; the simplification, however, will help us think about these two kinds of lordship as opposing poles, and to re-conceptualize lordship itself with different criteria. First, let us look at the idea of the powerful lordship.

The idea of powerful lordship is quite widespread in the historiography, even if seldom an object of theoretical investigation. This is probably no matter of chance, as work on the political theory of the nature of power is only partly useful here. Nonetheless, such work helps us highlight the multifaceted nature of authority. Here, the most obvious reference, even if not necessarily the most useful for the medieval lordship, is Steven Lukes' analysis on the 'three faces of power'.[37] Of these three faces, one was clearest to medieval lords, namely 'decision-making power'. The second facet, 'non-decision-making power', which allows the establishment of what constitutes a legitimate object of public discussion, was much less important, even if the lords clearly controlled and limited village assemblies. Then we have 'ideological power', that is, the ability to influence the thoughts and wishes of subjects, which leads to the apparently willing acquiescence of dependants to their own domination. We could be tempted to recognize this in the demand for a spontaneous and unconditional loyalty required from subjects, who in many Italian regions swore fealty as vassals to their lord. In practice, however, things went quite differently, and it was rather difficult for the lords to make their subjects want things opposed to their own self-interest. However, there were exceptions to this, especially when it came to devotion towards

[37] Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London, 1974); on Lukes' book and its impact: P. E. Digeser, 'Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*', in Jacob T. Levy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory* (Oxford, 2015).

lordly families of long standing. We shall see, for example, the evidence of military loyalty offered in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by the subjects to Roman barons who were themselves under attack by the popes, or other noble enemies.

In fact, the best way to define the idea of lordship is by operating within the framework of judgement of its contemporaries. What characterized those lords who their contemporaries would have perceived as sitting at the top of the seigneurial rank? If we adopt a similar viewpoint to that of these lords when they judged their peers, first of all we see a series of political and military factors becoming apparent. The strength of a lord depended on the number of villages he owned, on the size and solidity of the fortifications he manned, on the quantity of knights he could field in battle, on his position in the regional aristocratic hierarchy, on his close relationships with kings or great princes, on the ability he had to defend and transmit his prerogatives through his dynasty, and on his honour and prestige. This strength was also supported by his full possession of seigneurial power, be it judicial, military or fiscal. The economic side, that is the sheer volume of his income list, was also significant, but less so. We can ask which French *seigneurs banaux* or southern Italian counts possessed these elements, and if so, how fully. There seems to be no doubt that we can give a wholly positive answer for the great majority of the *seigneurs banaux* before the first half of the twelfth century. These lords controlled immense territories, and belonged to the main dynasties of the kingdom. We can say the same for lords such as the abbot of Montecassino and the counts of the Kingdom of Sicily, despite the tight controls established by Roger II over justice and political fealty, as these were extremely powerful lords from the political and military standpoint.

Here, however, I would like to find categories for the other lordships as well. The most useful criterion, in this case, does not seem to be strength. Using such a measure for the lords of a small village, or of a handful of peasants, would only bring us to the self-evident acknowledgement of the fact that they were not very powerful lords. Rather than assessing these seigneurial bodies through a discussion of their position in the world of political and military forces, or of the breadth of their jurisdictional powers, or of their place in the aristocratic hierarchy, we need instead to turn the perspective on its head,

and look at these lords from the point of view of their subjects. We need to ask ourselves about what I have called the pervasiveness of lordship. In what measure did these lords exercise a minute, detailed, pervasive control? Could they control the rural world and the territory closely and in every detail? It is unlikely that lordly interventions totally determined the ways in which peasants organized their own lives and governed themselves. Except in exceptional cases, such as Cicco Simonetta's manorial enterprise, to which I return later, the main productive unit was the peasant household, which provided its own labour from family members and servants who lived in the house. This basic unit made many choices by itself. A pervasive lord, however, was able to reduce this autonomy much more than one who was not. For this reason, it is important to recognize the importance of the category of pervasiveness.

The possibility of exercising pervasive control on the life of one's subjects also depended in part on local characteristics, independent from the lords' choices. In a few regions, this seems to have been made difficult by the limits imposed on seigneurial power by the strength of the monarchy or, more often, the dynamic resilience of the rural communities; while in other regions such pervasiveness was more feasible. However, this pervasiveness was clearly also the result of a decision-making process. Its ends could be manifold: for lesser lords, such as many southern Italian knights, pervasiveness meant fully exploiting the resources of their small territory. Such economic motives were by no means unimportant for more superior lords either, but for those who were already of substantial rank, other concerns were paramount in pursuing pervasiveness for their power. For the Roman barons, both powerful and intensely active in war, as we shall see in the following paragraph, attentive control of the population that lived in their family territories meant increasing the military potential of the lordship, while at the same time ensuring the loyalty of their subjects. In a probably less self-aware manner, the controls exercised by the barons also served to avoid those strategies for social stratification that ended up threatening the long-term strength of the lordship in other regions. And finally, in other cases, intervening in peasants' daily lives was an end in itself, as in a modern totalitarian state, which allowed a lord to shine through the subordination of his subjects.

Pervasiveness should not be connected exclusively to the size of a lordship. It is a measure of evaluation that is important for all lordships, including those of the great territorial lords. It is not something we should only consider for lesser lords. The lords with the greatest ability to follow closely and influence their subjects' world were of course the very small lords, at village level, or even lower down at knightly level. These lords needed to make use of their small dominion to the full, and they were in the ideal position to overcome the practical obstacles standing in the way of local control. Conversely, affecting deeply their subjects was at once less necessary and more difficult for the great lords, for whom the very size of the territory they ruled made it harder to accomplish a strong presence on the ground. But it would be wrong to then simply posit an inverse correlation between power and pervasiveness of the lords, since very many lesser lords had very few rights. From the aforementioned inventory of 1175–80, we can see that the knights of Arce received truly little from their subjects; but the same source shows that in the neighbouring lands of Aquino and Sora the knights exercised far closer control, which guaranteed them with rents in kind and in cash, *corvées* and recognition gifts, sometimes resulting in conspicuous incomes.[38] These differences depended on local customs, on the strength of the local communities, on the size of the lands granted, and occasionally on the presence of special agreements. They also depended on the lord's explicit decision to exercise a pervasive, attentive kind of control. In southern Italy, many smaller lordships seemed to enjoy relationships of patronage, rather than of outright domination. The lord may sometimes have received very little from a subject, so much so that, according to a jurist, the subject may have said: 'Lord, every year I will give you two hens at Christmas and Easter, or a pound of pepper, or some other thing'.[39] Nothing could better express the clientele nature of the relationship and the limited, almost symbolic character of the resulting services. In these cases, the micro-lords aimed to increase their prestige and to acquire a patronized group to improve their performance in

[38] *Catalogus Baronum*, nos. 1263–1372.

[39] For the interpretation of this phrase by the important jurist from Frederick's reign, Roffredo of Benevento, and for the patronage side of personal relations of subordination of southern Italy: Carocci, *Lordships of Southern Italy*, 297–324 (for Roffredo's quote, 305).

village society. Pervasive control would have been useless in these cases; it was anyway hard to achieve, and it would have in fact undermined the relationship of patronage. In other cases things stood rather differently. In knightly lordships such as that of Rainone di Sorrento, pervasive control over the *homines de persona* was the main guarantee to obtain substantial payments in money, produce and enforced labour. The aim of such lords was not to acquire a group of followers, but rather an economic advantage.

The factors that make seigneurial power pervasive are even more numerous than those that make it strong. Ample political, judicial, military and fiscal prerogatives — in short, seigneurial strengths — are certainly useful: as we shall see, certain powerful lords were also very pervasive. Violence and intimidation can also be useful in the short term. A lord able to beat his subject as in Pontecorvo, to put him in prison or to exercise forms of extra-legal coercion, could increase his pervasiveness to the maximum. But violence was certainly neither the main nor the sole instrument of pervasiveness. We can only follow in part Thomas N. Bisson and other historians, for whom 'the violence of castellans and knights was a method of lordship' and the cardinal element of the lordship in the tenth to twelfth centuries, when a violence that was 'personal, affective, militant, aggressive' was at the basis of 'the abrasive immediacy of personal domination'.[40] This interpretation has been much criticized for the excessive emphasis it put on lordly violence. Moreover, it is doubtful whether a dominance based solely on violence would have lasted very long. Violence was a character only present in a minority of pervasive lordships.

In order to be pervasive lords, to influence in depth and through time the daily life of peasants, it is other elements that weigh more (or most). One example is demesne. To possess ample demesne land, to be able to demand weekly labour from one's subjects, or even daily labour, is important, as it leads to a close relationship between groups of peasants and those who dominate them, through working on the lord's lands, in his stores, in his court, carrying his messages and trading goods, or

[40] Thomas N. Bisson, 'The "Feudal Revolution"', *Past and Present*, no. 142 (Feb. 1994), 18; Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton, 2009), 46.

perhaps keeping the frogs silent throughout his sleep. All direct interventions of the lords in productive processes contribute to this pervasiveness, whether it is through the coordination of the collective open-field system or the exploitation of mines and other natural resources.

Military service also counts in the assessment of pervasiveness. The lords who can require their peasants to defend the castle or even to fight as infantry on the battlefield further condition their subjects, forced as they are to sacrifice time and safety to these duties. At the same time, the role of military leader increases the lord's knowledge of his subjects, and tightens the bonds between them and the one who leads them into battle. The pervasive lord, however, must limit the autonomy of local notables and of local community bodies, ensuring that rents and labour still come to him directly, without being converted into fixed sums or, even worse, being collected by the notables — who often exercised for a long period, or sometimes for life, the role of *ministeriales* — or by the community as a whole. In certain regions of the Mediterranean, a lord was pervasive also because he had managed to concentrate the population inside the walls of his castle-village (the so-called *incastellamento* process), forcing his subjects into a new social world, where the centralization of settlement made social, religious and familial controls tighter, in an overlapping of subjections at whose head stood the lord.[41] More generally, the simple fact of residing stably inside the village and to know directly and deeply the land, men and animals was a powerful and pervasive tool of control for a lord.

The listing of factors that make a seigneurial power pervasive could continue, examining, for example, the seigneurial hold over irrigation systems, machinery, the pacing and the characteristics of the commercialization of products, or over crucial moments of the family life of subjects (even without the need for invasive practices like those we started with, such as beating women in childbirth, appropriating mothers' milk, or the *ius primae noctis*!). Control over the local clergy is also important, with the ability to impose chosen agents on the running of the parish, and any other

[41] The main reference here is of course Pierre Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval: le Latium méridional et la Sabine du IX^e^ à la fin du XII^e^ siècle* (Rome, 1973); for a review of the countless studies to follow, see Andrea Augenti and Paola Galetti (eds.), *L'incastellamento: storia e archeologia. A 40 anni da Les structures di Pierre Toubert* (Spoleto, 2018).

function of the *cura animarum*.[42] More than anything, perhaps, what counts is the ability to impose values, ways of thinking, to exercise psychological pervasiveness, that is, elements we can analyse using Gramsci's concept of ideological hegemony.[43]

None of these factors, on its own, is enough to make a lord pervasive. We need to see which combination of them concretely established itself on a case by case basis. We also need to observe how a given element of pervasiveness structured itself within the overall system of social and power relationships. One example is *incastellamento*. That conditioning environment, woven with social and psychological coercion, created by the centralization of life in a castle-village, could lend itself to increasing the pervasiveness of the lords, who could exercise absolute power there. However, it could easily become a negative element for the seigneurial pervasiveness, should the multiple controls to which the individual was subject not be dominated by the lord alone, but instead, more autonomously, by neighbours, kin and clergy, who together marginalized the role of the lord. Nor, to repeat, did one need to be a small-scale lord in order to be pervasive, ruling over a few men or a small village, and thus being in a position to enjoy a face-to-face relationship with one's subjects.[44]

[42] According to a recent interpretative school widely shared among French scholars, until the beginning of the twelfth century the ecclesiastical aspect would have had a fundamental role in the power of the *châtelains* (see, for example, Florian Mazel, 'Seigneurie châtelaine et seigneurie ecclésiale au "premier âge féodal": puissants laïcs, chapitres castraux et relevé monastique dans le Nord-Ouest de la Francie', in Daniel Russo Iogna-Prat Dominique, Michel Lauwers, Florian Mazel, Isabelle Rosé (eds.), *Cluny: les moines et la société au premier âge féodal* (Rennes, 2013), 401–20.

[43] Chris Wickham has argued for the possibility of applying to the medieval rural world the Gramscian concept of hegemony in 'Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry', *Past and Present*, no. 159 (May 1998), 3–24, against James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990), 82–4; however, see also the more nuanced position argued in James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985), 314–50.

[44] I am not considering here a possible third category: the burdensomeness of a lordship, that is, the overall size of its exactions. A few lordships only exacted a small part of the peasants' wealth, as we have seen with the territorial lordships of the Kingdom of Sicily. Others instead managed to appropriate much higher, and occasionally truly sizeable sums. These differences were fundamental in the considerations of the time. For the subjects, the economic burdensomeness of the lordship must have counted far more than the fullness of a lord's judicial powers, or the strength of his castles and military retinues. For most lords, the quantity of products and money gained from the lordship was of course important, even if prestige, clienteles, and military and political power counted more. The quantity

(cont. on p. 34)

But, if we put all these possibilities together, we not only end up with a clearer understanding of one of the main elements of seigneurial power, but we also find that we have at our disposal a tool to understand better the structuring of rural society itself.

VI

BARONS OF ROME, LORDS OF LOMBARDY

In French studies, dominated as many are by the idea of a sudden and overwhelming change caused by the birth of *seigneuries banales*, we find the argument that the new lordships adopted practices destined to modify the societies they dominated, and to change their overall economic dynamics, thanks to violence and to the introduction of heavy arbitrary exactions, such as the *taille*. A similar evolution has been suggested for the Italian 'seigneurial transformation', which, in the decades around 1100, revolutionized the central and northern regions of Italy. Here the takeover by 'territorial lords' accompanied the militarization of village elites, who set themselves apart from the rest of the populace. They could thus be helpful to the lord in the conscious and brutal exercise of force and violence in order to establish dependants as inferior, and to affirm seigneurial power directly, removing it from the consent of the subjects. The level of coercion rapidly became greater, and with it the level of rents and dues exacted by the lords and their collaborators from agricultural production.[45] In this reconstruction, such violence is very high for about two generations, and returns to lower levels in the second half of the twelfth century, when the sources show a decrease in the weight of lordship.

Pervasiveness is never formalized as a concept in these studies, but many elements suggest that the lordships described, while wide-ranging and strong, were pervasive as well. We have no doubt on this matter in the case of some other kinds of lordship. Here, then, let us look at some examples of lordships that were both strong and pervasive, and which remained so for much

(n. 44 cont.)
of economic resources that a lord could take from his subjects for various reasons could then be a third way of classifying lordship. However, I am not considering it in this article because, however important, as an element it pertains exclusively to the economic sphere. Strength and pervasiveness, instead, relate to the overall framework of social assets and power.

[45] The best study of this is now Fiore, *Seigneurial Transformation*.

longer periods into the second half of the Middle Ages, to see how they worked. A first example is that of the great aristocracy of Rome, the so-called *barones Urbis*.[46] In sources from Rome and Lazio, from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards, we find this expression applied to around fifteen over-powerful, sometimes notorious dynasties, such as the Orsini, Colonna or Caetani. With remarkable speed, these families accumulated wealth and power thanks to their kinship ties to popes and cardinals, to the roles they occupied in the papal *curia* and in the government structures of the Papal State, to the control they exercised over the city of Rome, and to the favour of cities and monarchs. In the countryside, their lordships kept growing steadily, passing in total from around fifty castle-villages in 1250 to around a hundred and fifty at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The seigneurial regime changed deeply in the centres that fell under their domination. The land-owning pattern changed, passing (almost) entirely into the hands of the lord. Besides acquiring possession of the land, the barons limited or suppressed outright the presence of other, rival lords.

In the group of castles (which could be in excess of ten) that constituted the lordship of each dynastic branch of these prolific families, all lands and people were subject to one lord, or at most to a group of siblings. In order to keep succession fragmentation to a minimum, since in Lazio and in the rest of central and northern Italy there was no primogeniture, regular planned divisions limited instances of co-domination, which was common for the lordships of other regions. The power of command exercised by knights and village churches over their peasants was also sharply limited. Justice, and the profits derived from it, became the monopoly of the barons at every level of judgement. Clergy chosen by the baron, often from families known to be faithful to the lord, were put in charge of the local churches. The barons also increased the exaction of rents and dues, taking high income from extraordinary contributions, from taxes of various kinds, a monopoly on mills, demesnes for vineyards and arable land, and harvests. The new lordships exchanged fixed rents in money or in kind for the payment of a partial rent of a quarter or a fifth of the harvest: not a high percentage, but one that had to

[46] Sandro Carocci, *Baroni di Roma: dominazioni signorili e lignaggi aristocratici nel Duecento e nel primo Trecento* (Rome, 1993).

be paid for any land that a subject cultivated. This was also required of the few remaining freeholders and of the lands that a subject of the baron rented from other owners outside the boundaries of the lordship.

Understandably, the baronial lordships were perceived as a threat by the independent peasant communities. We even have the case of the self-destruction of a village, Caprignano, which was demolished and evacuated by its inhabitants to prevent a baron from taking possession of it.[47] The barons were also feared for their great powers of social conditioning. These powers did not come from limitations to personal liberty (the dependants remained free and could emigrate, even if with the burdensome condition of abandoning the goods they held), but from the overall structure of such great and powerful lordships. The barons instituted severe controls on the buying and selling of the land they leased — it was sometimes forbidden outright — and on inheritance. It was often forbidden to add to one's lands any land inherited from a deceased relative. The barons thus made the accumulation of lands impossible, that is, the surest road, in other lordships, to lend strength and stability to the social ascents internal to the peasant world. The villages might only have very weak communal institutions, all the more so when the magistrates who led the rural *comuni* were not elected by the subjects, but were appointed by the lord.

An enormous amount of control was also imposed by military obligations. The barons were military leaders, often engaged in wars inside Rome with rival families, or with other cities in the region, or in the pay of those who hired them. They required sizeable armed contingents from their castle-villages. Each castle gave to the baronial armies the knights who lived in it, as was usual throughout Europe; but what was unusual was the burdensome military service imposed on the peasants. This was an innovation introduced by the barons. Each family had to give at least one armed man, who fought as infantry and had to remain in the baronial army for weeks, following his lord to Rome or to the boundaries of the region. A letter written by the poet and humanist Francesco Petrarca in 1336, during his voyage to Rome, tells us of the surprise of an Italian, who came

[47] Alfredo Pellegrini, 'Il "Castrum Capriniani" (1279–1312)', *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria*, cix (1986), 5–35.

from the more peaceful regions of Tuscany and Veneto, when he saw peasants from Lazio, armed with spear, sword and shield: 'The tilling peasant prods the oxen with his spear, turned by the side of the shaft; the bird hunter masks his net with his shield; the fisherman dangles his hooks from the sword. The silence of the night is broken by the shouts of those who guard the walls. Nothing is done here that is not done in arms!'[48]

To control their great lordships the barons spent both time and resources. Each castle-village was managed directly by closely observed officials. Such control was favoured by regular returns of the lord to the centres he ruled, or by summoning to Rome the head of the local administration. If for any reason the lord had to be away from his lordship for a time, he still exercised control through envoys and a substantial correspondence. An emblematic case is that of the cardinal Napoleone Orsini, head of the Marino branch of the family. Forced to reside in Avignon, he sent long letters of instructions to his local officials. His letter for 1334, for instance, is written on six parchments. He had orders for everything: how best to sell wheat and wine, the upkeep of buildings, the forage for the horses, the kind of coin to be used to get the rents in, instructions for the use of the four strongboxes in the lordly fortress, the times and manner of the collection of credits, the concession of judiciary graces, the remission of money sentences, the guests to welcome, the kind of wine the lordly officials were allowed to drink (the local vintage, not the more expensive *vinum grecum*), and much more, including the controls that the head of the administration needed to exercise over numerous other officers of the lordship. All the officers were bound to respect the strict rules, and to compile in duplicate a series of administration books and accounts to send to Avignon to be double-checked.[49]

In each castle, the power and ability of the lords to influence society was supported by knights and infantry who came from other parts of their dominions; but they were also based on consent. Thanks to the wealth derived from ecclesiastical patronage, from the compensation of mercenary activity, from

[48] Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi (Florence, 1933), i, letter ii/12, 99–101; English translation: Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum familiarium libri*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (New York, 1975), 109–111.

[49] *Regesta Chartarum. Regesto delle pergamene dell'archivio Caetani*, ed. Gelasio Caetani (San Casciano Val di Pesa, 1926), ii, 87–93.

monarchical gifts and other extra-seigneurial sources, the lords had ample resources to provide for their subjects in case of famine or natural catastrophe. They protected them from rival lords and from the fiscal requests of the city of Rome. They shared the loot from their military expeditions and their mercenary pay with their armed men, including the peasant-soldiers. Their exaction was sometimes higher than that of the lords who had preceded them, but it was not very high in absolute terms (it was more or less a quarter of total production). Even if we attribute the absolute lack of revolts, never mentioned in the sources, primarily to the fear inspired by such well-protected military leaders, we also need to consider the positive testimonies that exist of the loyalty of subjects to the barons. An example of this is the loyalty shown during military engagements, the intervention of communities as peacemakers during conflicts within the seigneurial family, and the keenness of the castles taken by the popes from rebel barons to return to the power of their ancient lords. The consent of the subjects is also attested by examples of the effective operation of seigneurial *dirigisme*. In 1379, for example, the Colonna, lords of the castle of Genazzano, agreed with the inhabitants a complete revolution of the pattern of landholding, advantageous for all and destined to last for four centuries.[50] Seigneurial pervasiveness could also bring advantages.

In Lazio, the lesser lordly families did not follow the barons' behaviour. They probably wished they could imitate them, but such a level of pervasiveness was beyond their reach. In other cases, it is clear how the exercise of pervasiveness (or its lack) was fruit of a personal choice of the lord. Let us take the case of fifteenth-century Lombardy, where we find great lords comparable to the barons of Rome. Some chose to exercise pervasiveness, others did not. The double qualification of lordship as strong and pervasive certainly did not characterize the greatest lordship in the region, that of the Borromeo. The family that would give the Catholic Counter-Reformation one of its most famous saints, Carlo Borromeo, and which would continue to dominate a large slice of Lombardy until the arrival of Napoleon's troops in 1797, began its ascent in the second half

[50] Sandro Carocci, 'La grande conversione: Genazzano 1379. Lo *ius serendi* del Lazio', in Laurent Feller (ed.), *Calculs et rationalités dans la seigneurie médiévale: les conversions de redevances entre XI^e^ et XV^e^ siècles* (Paris, 2009), 237–52.

of the fifteenth century. The lands received in fief from the dukes of Milan beginning in 1439 had already allowed them to create a vast lordship, centred on Arona and Lago Maggiore, and extending over one thousand square kilometres. In order to obtain the stable support of their new subjects, however, the Borromeos exercised soft control, which left large autonomy to local societies, protected their economic interests, and exercised an efficient, expeditious and inexpensive justice, which functioned as a true 'avenue of encounter with their subjects'. This political choice to exercise a hardly pervasive lordship, and to limit the level of exaction, was efficient, and it allowed this family of most powerful newcomers to root themselves in the territory for centuries. The Borromeos were great lords, but their lordship was not pervasive.[51]

Conversely, in the same period, the opposite choice was made by the most powerful figure in the Duchy of Milan, Cicco Simonetta, secretary of the duke. In the castle and town of Sartirana, given in fief by the duke in 1451, and in four neighbouring villages, everything possible was done in order to establish a close control over land and men, in order to maximize the potential profit of lands located in the very fertile Lombard plain. The lord made great investments in irrigation and navigation canals, hydraulic systems, land acquisitions, land reclamation, sumptuous improvements to his castle, the purchase of cattle and the hiring of workers. Thus, the guaranteed income of the lordship became, by square kilometre, seven times that of the Borromeos (Cicco collected 235 imperial *lire* per square kilometre, while the Borromeos collected only 35). While highly profitable, the lordship of the man who was considered to be the wealthiest and most influential in the duchy was also pervasive. Sartirana was a well-peopled and socially articulate centre, with landowners, merchants, professionals and noblemen, which had been constituted as its own *comune* for a while. Total control was not feasible. Yet Cicco equipped himself over a few years with formidable ways of intervening: watchful vigilance, witnessed by account books of every kind and by constant correspondence between Milan, where he lived, and his local

[51] Federico Del Tredici, 'Il profilo economico della signoria lombarda: il caso dei Visconti e quello dei Borromeo (secoli XIV–XV)', in Andrea Gamberini and Fabrizio Pagnoni (eds.), *La signoria rurale nell'Italia del tardo medioevo. 1. Gli spazi economici* (Milan-Turin, 2019), 19–54.

agents; the ample retinue and, in general, the great number of foreigners close to the lord whom he moved to Sartirana; the overbearing power of a lord and great landowners who invested great resources in the territory; justice controlled at every level, which condemned to death some of its opponents (one, who belonged to a particularly powerful family, was in fact killed by hirelings in the castle prison). This power was 'inexorable towards dissidents and resisters, especially if wage-labourers, *massari*, or leaseholders'.[52]

We could continue with the examples of Italian cases of pervasive lordship, especially by looking at their archaeological traces. The excavations conducted in the village subject to the monastery of San Pietro di Villamagna, in southern Lazio, show us that the peasants continued to live in simple and small huts until the beginning of the fourteenth century.[53] The floor area of each hut amounted to 12 square metres, and their walls were made of perishable materials, probably wattle and daub. Their material culture appears poor, and there is almost no trace of social stratification. The cemetery shows the close monastic control exercised over the burial strategies of the peasant community. The material remains fit well with the evidence of pervasive lordship found in the documentary evidence. The monastery appears to have been the only landowner of the area, in possession of full judicial powers, and able to collect rents and taxes. The monks, moreover, demanded an unusual quantity of *corvées* for central and northern Italy, where labour duties were generally very low: here, each family had to work on the seigneurial demesne, with their oxen, for around sixty days a year. The monks' peasants who chose to improve their fortunes invariably chose to emigrate.

The best example of pervasive lordship as uncovered by material sources comes from Tuscany. A series of excavations that started halfway through the 1980s on the site of the castle-village of Rocca San Silvestro brought to light material structures that show, for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, very strong

[52] Maria Nadia Covini, *Potere, ricchezza e distinzione a Milano nel Quattrocento: nuove ricerche su Cicco Simonetta* (Milan, 2018), 201; for these calculations by square kilometre, see Del Tredici, 'Il profilo economico della signoria lombarda'.

[53] Elizabeth Fentress, Caroline Goodson. Marco Maiuro, Margaret Andrews, J. Andrew Dufton (eds.), *Villa Magna: An Imperial Estate and its Legacies. Excavations, 2006–10* (London, 2017).

control by the lords. The entire village appears to be the product of strong seigneurial *dirigisme*. There is a clear division between the seigneurial sector, with tower, cistern, palace and church, and the area where the subjects lived, well planned and easily controllable, with material structures that are 'a clear sign of initiative by those who dominated the place'. The placement of the workshops to process copper and silver-bearing lead, of the bread-baking oven and the olive press, shows a close control over the productive processes, most of all over that which made up Rocca San Silvestro's main wealth, the mining of metals for the coinage that was used in his territory. The excavations thus showed that 'seigneurial power had consolidated itself and radicalized in the extreme'. Thanks to the resources extracted from the mines, subjects' houses showed a good level of material culture, but seigneurial pervasiveness appears all the stronger, given that the lords directed the productive processes.[54]

All these examples, with the exception of the Borromeos, show both the strength of lordship and its pervasiveness. But I would argue that the pervasiveness of each is a more interesting sign of lordly authority than the simple strength of the lord. Either way, it shows that the two elements of lordly power are most usefully analysed separately, even in cases where the lord could exercise both. Lordship, in the long term, was not simply a matter of armed men and violence; the control, but also the complicity, involved in pervasiveness, could lead to a greater permanence of power.

VII
CONCLUSIONS

Some lords, whether great or small, stronger or weaker, could exercise over their subjects a rule that, however burdensome, remained distant, as if separate from social and economic relationships. Other lords, instead, exercised a different kind of domination, characterized by a pervasiveness that deeply engaged their subjects and conditioned their daily lives, values and ideological horizons. The concept of pervasiveness must be added to our toolkits as historians of lordship and its rural worlds. We can compare seigneurial powers efficiently by using

[54] Riccardo Francovich and Chris Wickham, 'Uno scavo archeologico ed il problema dello sviluppo della signoria territoriale: Rocca San Silvestro e i rapporti di produzione minerari', *Archeologia medievale*, xxi (1994), 7–30.

the concept of pervasiveness. While the concept is ours, it was nonetheless a very present consideration in the political culture of peasants. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, the study of testimonies from court cases between rival lords shows that their subjects distinguished between different lords by virtue of their pervasiveness above all. In the words and political actions of the peasants, we can easily glimpse the tendency to favour more distant powers, and the attempt to escape the capillary and suffocating power of closer lords, who, endowed with the different kinds of controls and pressures they could bring to bear on local society, distinguished themselves by their pervasiveness.[55] In this context, we can see the disadvantages of the heavy presence of pervasive lords; in other cases, such as in the knightly lordships of the Kingdom of Sicily and the dominions of the powerful Roman barons, the subjects were able to also appreciate the benefits of this closeness. As usual, it is hard to understand the thought-world of dependants through documentation, which (almost) always comes from their lords. This problem has not been addressed systematically in medieval studies, unlike in anthropology.[56] Perhaps the concept of pervasiveness, which makes us look at lordship from below and its effects on its subjects, could encourage us to explore this theme.

The concept of pervasiveness allows us, not just to compare different lordships, but also different regions and periods. An example can help us here: a comparison between Catalonia and England in the thirteenth century. Old Catalonia, from Barcelona to the north-east, is one of the European regions where seigneurial power seems to have been strongest.[57] From the final decades of the twelfth century, the aristocracy and ecclesiastical institutions accomplished a process of subjugation of peasant society, which had begun halfway through the previous century. The inhabitants of the countryside were reduced to a state of servitude (*remença*), burdened by heavy

[55] Luigi Provero, 'Per un'Italia di signori: spazi di confronto tra Nord e Sud', *Reti Medievali Rivista*, xix, no. 1 (2018).

[56] The seminal work remains Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

[57] The most influential studies are Pierre Bonnassie, *La Catalogne du milieu du X^e à la fin du XI^e siècle: croissance et mutations d'une société*, 2 vols (Toulouse, 1975–6); Freedman, *Origins of Peasant Servitude in Medieval Catalonia*; Pere Benito Monclús, *Senyoria de la terra i tinença pagesa al comtat de Barcelona (segles XI–XIII)* (Barcelona, 2003); see also Freedman and Martínez Sopena, 'The Historiography of Seigneurial Income in Spain'.

exactions and *mals usos*, subject to the full jurisdictional power of the lords, who managed to impose the legalization of their powers on the rising monarchy through rebellions and threats. In England, on the contrary, the independence and power of lords were ever more limited. The power of the monarch restricted their jurisdictional authority and their margins of manoeuvre; the lords also had to reckon, at village level, with the development of rural communities, the weight of local usage, and sometimes the presence of other lords. The *dominus* of an English manor, then, was certainly less powerful than his Catalan counterpart. Conversely, he had much greater ability to exercise an effective domination over his subjects, to influence in depth their social relationships and economic activities: English lordships, therefore, appear weaker, but more pervasive.

The English lord's direct and daily control over the life of the peasants derived from the presence of large seigneurial demesnes, from his (occasional) role as co-ordinator of the collective practices of the open-field system, from the support he gave to the village hierarchy, and from his intervention in the sales, purchases and inheritance among peasants. Moreover, the lord regulated to his own advantage the trade of cereals and access to pasture, he could forbid peasants to cut down trees, and he could regulate the upkeep of their houses, the availability of manure, and the way they hunted.[58] By contrast, in Catalonia, the lord, locked in his castle, dominated, from above and outside, peasants who lived in isolated *mansi*, who did not come together in collective agrarian practices, nor had to cultivate seigneurial demesnes, which were almost entirely absent. In fact, the Catalan *remences* abandoned their isolated houses in the fields and came in contact with the lord almost only when they paid rents and other duties. This was therefore a strong lordship, but not a pervasive one. The very lack of pervasiveness was one of the factors that brought the Catalan lords to violently attack the peasant communities, which in turn reacted by addressing famous memorials of complaint to the count and (after 1162) the king.[59]

[58] Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 87–90.

[59] Thomas N. Bisson, *Tormented Voices: Power, Crisis, and Humanity in Rural Catalonia, 1140–1200* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998) makes a wonderful analysis of

(cont. on p. 44)

Finally, pervasiveness can be a useful instrument to compare forms of conditioning of the peasantry that are different from lordship as this article has defined it, that is, an institution based on the power to judge, collect taxation, and demand military aides and other rights. The most obvious reference point here is the manorial system of the Carolingian era, which is also presented as a form of lordship by a common historiographical framework, although one different from that adopted by this article. In the great early medieval estates (*villae*) the division of the landowning enterprise, the presence of slaves, the wide extension of the lands managed directly by the owner, and the great number of labour services asked of free and unfree peasants, often allowed a formidable intervention in the production and in the society of dependants. We need to add that Carolingian manorial regimes were much rarer than the large-scale, but non-pervasive lordship involved in the aristocratic property-holding of the early Middle Ages. Using pervasiveness as a framework, moreover, allows us to make comparisons with eras following the Middle Ages. In Italy, during the Renaissance and the early modern period, we find the widespread system of *mezzadria* as an example of the heavy influence on the peasants by the bourgeois landowners of the city. In Tuscany and other regions of central and northern Italy, the *mezzadro* on a short-term contract rented an entire self-sufficient agricultural enterprise, the *podere*, constituted of house, stables, stores and the surrounding fields. The contract did not give the peasant any claim to the possession of the land, and bound him to pay half of every product, to put his entire family to work on the *podere*, and to take a half part of every expense decided by the owner for cattle, hired help, tools, manure and improvements.

Again, this was not lordship as defined in this article — there were no military or judicial powers involved — but, all the same, here too, the peasant endured a watchful, close, invasive state of surveillance. He was unable to pay for the expenses incurred on the farm; he was always indebted to the owner; and he was constantly threatened with eviction from the property at the end of the contract. The owner or his administrator watched over cultivation methods, decided what to sow, what kind of cattle to

(n. 59 cont.)
the memorials of complaint, but believes that violence is a natural characteristic of the lordship.

keep, and what improvements to undertake. They checked that all members of the family spent their entire time on improving the farm. This control extended to the composition of the peasant family, because a family with too many children was not suitable for the best cultivation of the *podere*. This could result in very burdensome forms of intervention, such as forbidding more than one of the *mezzadro*'s sons from marrying. The oral memory of the older *mezzadri* confirms the ferocious intensity of these interventions, saying that should the peasant ask permission for a second son to marry, thus quickly increasing the number of non-productive children on the *podere*, the administrator would remind him that one of his sons already had a wife and that, as the proverb says, 'one bell is enough for a parish', a chilling invitation to share a single woman, a dehumanizing suggestion.[60] There were numerous facets to the manifestation of the pervasiveness of the lords and to peasant resistance, but as for the birthing mothers of Casciavola, the *ius primae noctis* and the new mothers of Catalonia, and the relationship between knights and subjects in Pontecorvo, it was often on the bodies of women that both the fears of the peasants and the will of those who controlled them were expressed.

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[60] Giovanni Contini on his interviews with elderly Tuscan *mezzadri*, undertaken in the 1980s and now gathered in the *Archivio Cultura Contadina*, Carmignano, <http://turismo.comune.carmignano.po.it/?act=f&fid=6777>, which he built on in Giovanni Contini, *Aristocrazia contadina: sulla complessità della società mezzadrile. Fattoria, famiglie, individui* (Colle di Val d'Elsa, 2005).

ABSTRACT

The impact of medieval lordship on the society it dominated has not received the attention it deserves. This article stresses the need to look at lordship from the bottom up, making an effort to understand how much and in which ways lordship weighed on the life of subjects, by developing the notion of its 'pervasiveness'. Such a concept is arguably the most effective if we want to evaluate how seigneurial power was more, or less, able and willing to deeply influence the people subject to it. It highlights that in the world of lordship there was a disconnect (or at least potentially) between political power and socio-economic domination. Which factors enabled lordships to become pervasive, and which lords, from which regions, were best equipped with these characteristics? Using the influential French historiographical framework as a starting point, the article considers as case studies a set of *signorie* in several Italian regions. It highlights the differences between the great territorial lordships of the counts of the Kingdom of Sicily, the barons of Rome and the lords of Lombardy, on the one side, and the innumerable knightly lordships at a lower level on the other. The use of pervasiveness helps us to re-conceptualize lordship itself with different criteria.