

# 1 Italy after Charlemagne

## Scope and Aims of the Volume

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The present volume is the fruit of a small conference held in Vienna in late April 2016 under the title ‘Italy and Its Rulers in the Ninth Century: Was There a Carolingian Italy?’. It was the last event sponsored by the ERC Advanced Grant Project ‘Social Cohesion, Identity and Religion in the Early Middle Ages’ (SCIRE)<sup>1</sup> which very successfully ran in Vienna between 2011 and 2016. Its specific aim was to bring together researchers working on Italy in the times between the death of Charlemagne in 814 and the death of Berengar I in 924, the last emperor to be crowned until 962. The scope was widened to include the period since King Pippin of Italy, Charlemagne’s second-oldest son, who was responsible for Italy until his premature death in summer 810. The ninth-century kingdom of Italy still lacks an in-depth study that avoids dealing with it merely as a time of transition. This is quite surprising, as, for example, the tenth century has received more studies that are comprehensive. The present volume aims to fill parts of this gap.

Italy was in a peculiar situation as part of the Carolingian commonwealth. At times, it seems as if the peninsula was one of the most prized objects of Carolingian interest. For example, in most divisions of the Carolingian realm, the imperial dignity remained attached to Italy. Most likely, this has to do with the personal attachment of the emperor in the first such division, Lothar I. For his rule and for his personal link to Italy, the contribution of Elina Screen in this volume will provide valuable new insights. In contrast, most north Alpine commentators saw the Italian kingdom as a mere appendix to the Frankish Empire. For them, Italy was not the place where the meaningful and important decisions for the fate of the Frankish realm were made. The core area of the Carolingian empire lay north of the Alps. The Carolingian rulers in Italy inspired very few histories or texts that depicted them in a favourable light and

<sup>1</sup> The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement No. 269591.

came from the main part of the kingdom in the Po Plain. We should mention the History of Andreas of Bergamo, a quite short text, and the rather obscure *Libellus de imperatoria potestate*. Both texts were written after the death of Louis II of Italy and did not have a broad impact. Italy thus remained somewhat detached from official Carolingian historiography.

Carolingian rule introduced some momentous textual and administrative practices in Italy – capitularies, the Carolingian minuscule, counts, *placita*, to name just a few of the innovations. Nevertheless, in many respects, we may wonder how deep its impact on Italy really was. The position of Italian Carolingian rulers seems more precarious than in the core area of the empire. They were also depicted as quite weak kings or emperors, both by contemporaries and in modern research. The ninth-century kings did not become pivotal figures in ‘national histories’, much unlike the famous northern Carolingian kings Louis the German or Charles the Bald. In Italy, the only emperor of partly Carolingian descent to be counted as one of the early kings of Italy and thus as a ‘forefather’ of the Italian nation was Berengar I. Contemporary onlookers, too, like Archbishop Hincmar of Reims held the opinion that the rulers of Italy were no emperors, but rather petty kings.<sup>2</sup> Many north Alpine writers and commentators will have felt with Alcuin that real politics were made in the Carolingian places of power, far from Italy.<sup>3</sup>

Were the Italian Carolingians really so ephemeral? Probably not. It was just hindsight, from the fact that neither their rule nor their realm did endure, that shaped the historian’s view on ninth-century Italy. Does that mean that the Italian rulers were the self-confident sovereigns we find Louis II’s famous letter to the East Roman emperor Basil I? Famously, Louis II claimed there that ‘we govern all Francia, as undoubtedly we own everything, which is owned by those with whom we are one flesh and blood and with whom we are one through the spirit of the Lord’.<sup>4</sup> This, too, was not a realistic assessment of the Italian regnum or of the whole western empire. Rather, the letter’s author, the notorious Anastasius, librarian of the Roman church, invented yet another fiction that fit his purpose: creating a larger-than-life version of his protagonist, including as much Louis’ hopes and aspirations in these lines as his own as a

<sup>2</sup> For example, *AB*, a. 856, p. 73, and *AB*, a. 863, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Costambeys, ‘Alcuin, Rome’.

<sup>4</sup> Emperor Louis II, *Letter to Emperor Basil I*, ed. Henze, 388–9, writing about his uncles’ kingdoms: *In tota nempe imperamus Francia, quia nos procul dubio retinemus, quod illi retinent, cum quibus una caro et sanguis sumus hac a unus per Dominum spiritus.*

Roman urban loyalist and imperialist. While his statement is thus true from a strictly legal point of view, it did not reflect the realities in the European political arena.

The aim of this volume is thus to show a multifaceted kingdom of Italy in the ninth century, touching on as many subjects as possible. How did the Carolingians, starting with Pippin of Italy, govern their Italian realm and how, if at all, did they try to expand it? How did they shape their relationship with the other Carolingian realms (at times there were up to four of them after all – in shifting degrees between alliance and open conflict)? How did they shape their relationship with the south or the papacy? How did the communication of the Italian Carolingians with the East Roman ('Byzantine') empire work? How did the Carolingian rulers in the century after Charlemagne (814–924) govern? And finally: How Carolingian was 'Carolingian Italy'?

The volume starts with a section bringing together three overviews covering ninth-century Italy from three different angles: with Thomas Noble, Paolo Delogu and François Bougard, three leading experts in the field give their respective takes on the topic. Noble writes from the grand general perspective and finds a lot of Carolingian influence on the north Italian 'kingdom of the Lombards'. Delogu looks at the names this kingdom in Italy was given by contemporaries, and, connected with it, which functions were ascribed to it. Bougard then rounds off the introductory section by assessing how far this kingdom had actually remained Lombard despite Carolingian rule. He analyses the organization of the kingdom and the literary, cultural as well as legal output of its writing centres and is able to show that the Frankish influence was indeed felt, but only in certain respects.

Drawing on these basic assertions, the second section is dedicated to the organization of the Frankish kingdom in the north. Stefano Gasparri looks at the easternmost regions of the realm, a territory that often seems peripheral to the interests of the rulers but was in fact very important to the Carolingians, who tried to get a closer grip on the duchy of Venice and Istria. To be effective, they had to build on strategies already employed by their Lombard predecessors, but had to refine and expand these to be successful in this region. Giuseppe Albertoni in his chapter then analyses the relations between rulers and high-ranking officers in Italy and their vassals. He detects different types of vassalage, which is reflected in the terminology used in the contemporary sources, and thereby provides important insight into the ways the kingdom of Italy was governed. Connecting with both texts, Igor Santos Salazar uses the two bishoprics of Parma and Arezzo as test cases and provides an in-depth analysis of their political fate during the latter part of the period in

question, when loyalties were often tested and the ‘right’ king to support was not always obvious.

The third section looks at a succession of Carolingian rulers of Italy, illustrating, in addition to the special topics under research, an evolution of government in the early ninth century. Marco Stoffella delivers a detailed study of modes of charter production and specifically of the dating of charters in the time of King Pippin of Italy (787–810). He also focuses on the reactions to the premature death of Charlemagne’s second-oldest son. Elina Screen then takes a closer look at the charters of Lothar I (emperor in Italy 817–855) and how he paved the way for his son Louis’ envisaged rule in Italy. Clemens Gantner adds a study on Louis II’s earliest outing as king of Italy (840/844–875), concentrating on Louis’ expedition to Rome in 844 and the implication of this ‘visitation’ for his rule in Italy and for papal–Carolingian relations in the years to come.

The fourth and last section deals with more regional policies in ninth-century Italy, all addressing cities and courts. Thomas Brown first examines the very special case of Ravenna and its still quite ‘Byzantine’ political culture in a changed world of northern Italy. Caroline Goodson then looks at the oftentimes methodical development of urban centres in the south of Italy in our period, also looking closely at the transfer of saint cults and relics within the region. Francesco Veronese then works in a similar direction, analysing the appropriation of saints’ cults and hagiography coming from important centres like Rome, appropriated in the north of the peninsula. And Giorgia Vocino rounds off the volume with a study on the development of rhetoric and court culture in Italy between the eighth and the tenth centuries. She addresses the learned discourse at the Italian courts and shows the high degree of sophistication that was indeed present – thereby connecting neatly with Bougard’s contribution in the first section.

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