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The nEU-Med project: Vetricella, an Early Medieval royal property on Tuscany's Mediterranean

edited by

Giovanna Bianchi, Richard Hodges



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**The nEU-Med project:
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edited by Giovanna Bianchi, Richard Hodges

with contributions by

Alexander Agostini, Veronica Aniceti,
Giovanna Bianchi, Arianna Briano, Mauro Paolo Buonincontri,
Isabella Carli, Letizia Castelli, Cristina Cicali, Luisa Dallai, Gaetano Di Pasquale,
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Pierluigi Pieruccini, Marta Rossi, Alessia Rovelli, Luisa Russo,
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Alexander Agostini for contributions:

Introduction by G. Bianchi, R. Hodges

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Virna Pigolotti for contributions:

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Sergio Knipe for contributions:

The Knots and the Nets: Fisc, Rural Estates and Cities in the Written Sources (Northern Italy, c. 800-1000) by A. Fiore

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THE KNOTS AND THE NETS: FISC, RURAL ESTATES AND CITIES IN THE WRITTEN SOURCES (NORTHERN ITALY, C. 800-1000)

1. ECONOMIC MODELS

The past is a foreign land: a land with its own language, culture, society, and (obviously) economic system, which differ from those familiar to the historian examining them. Therefore, grasping the modes of functioning of an economic system of the past implies, first of all, an effort to avoid reading the present into the past, if one is to understand the peculiarities of a given system of production and trade, i.e. what we label as economic activities. Significantly, a real leap forward has been made in the study of the Late Roman economy over the last few decades, as historians have finally started grasping the fiscal way in which it functioned, which is to say the way in which commercial activities intertwined with and complemented – from a structurally subordinate position – the broad fiscal transfers managed by the Roman State (BANAJI 2016). It is worth noting, moreover, that it is not enough to apply a ‘different’ label like ‘fiscal economy’, instead of those of ‘redistributive’ or ‘reciprocity-based’ economies: at times this may prove merely a handy shortcut to avoid the challenge of understanding and analysing otherness¹. Rather, it is necessary to deploy these categories as (essential yet not sufficient) heuristic tools allowing us to make sense of a specific economic system and to decipher its inner logic and mode of functioning, in order to then use this information to build models that are as sophisticated and refined as possible, and at the same time fully consistent with the available empirical data (DEVROEY 2003).

While the development of an overall model for the Early Medieval economy is still a distant prospect, here I will endeavour to provide some initial and provisional suggestions. I will outline some possible research trajectories in relation to the specific case of production and exchange structures in northern Italy in the 9th and 10th centuries, based on research conducted on material and especially written sources. Given the limited space available, and my own field of expertise, I will be focusing mostly on written documents. In particular, I will attempt to make use of lesser-known sources, while always keeping the archaeological data in mind, for which – at any rate in relation to the specific topic under investigation – I will refer to Giovanni Bianchi’s contribution to this volume (see BIANCHI *infra*).

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¹ As regards the categories ‘market’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘redistribution’, I cannot but refer to POLANYI 1944.

A first preliminary element worth stressing is that for decades now according to Italian – but also international – studies on the Early Medieval economy, large estates (of fiscal or non-fiscal nature) constituted the very heart of the system and its most dynamic and best-developed sector between the 8th and 10th centuries (TOUBERT 1990; MCCORMICK 2001; VIGNODELLI forthcoming). Therefore, if we wish to investigate the specific Carolingian-Ottonian phase, it is to the large (aristocratic, ecclesiastical, and royal) properties that we must turn first of all, in order to understand how large aristocratic/ecclesiastical estates and fiscal assets worked from a structural point of view. As already anticipated, the area I will be exploring is northern Italy in the 9th and 10th centuries: a cohesive social-political context characterised by underlying unity in its basic workings.

I will be dealing first of all with the processes at play in the countryside, by particularly emphasising the role of large estates and of what Giovanna Bianchi has described as ‘out-of-scale’ sites, namely large productive sites that had their *raison d’être* in a complex trading system (BIANCHI, COLLAVINI 2018)². Secondly, I will focus on the evidence for production and trading activities in urban contexts, in an effort to grasp their peculiarities in this phase. Within this short investigation, particular attention will be paid to the issue of specialised production, which constitutes – among other things – a significant indicator of the complexity of the system. The way in which a specific society develops and organises specialised productive niches, and integrates them, constitutes a key to understanding the overall functioning of the system.

Finally, in the light of the data just mentioned, and of a more detailed analysis of a specific narrative source, I will endeavour to identify possible research paths to understand the ways in which the rural and urban economies interacted within the specifically Italian context of this period.

2. RURAL NETWORKS

In the next few pages I will discuss rural productive specialization, mainly focusing on non-agrarian sites, which are particularly useful for exploring the relation between production and exchanges. As is widely known, the sources which best describe the structure of large rural estates are the polyptychs pertaining to certain northern-Italian churches (generally

² The (sometime problematic) notion of ‘productive sites’ is discussed in HODGES 2012, pp. 29-31.

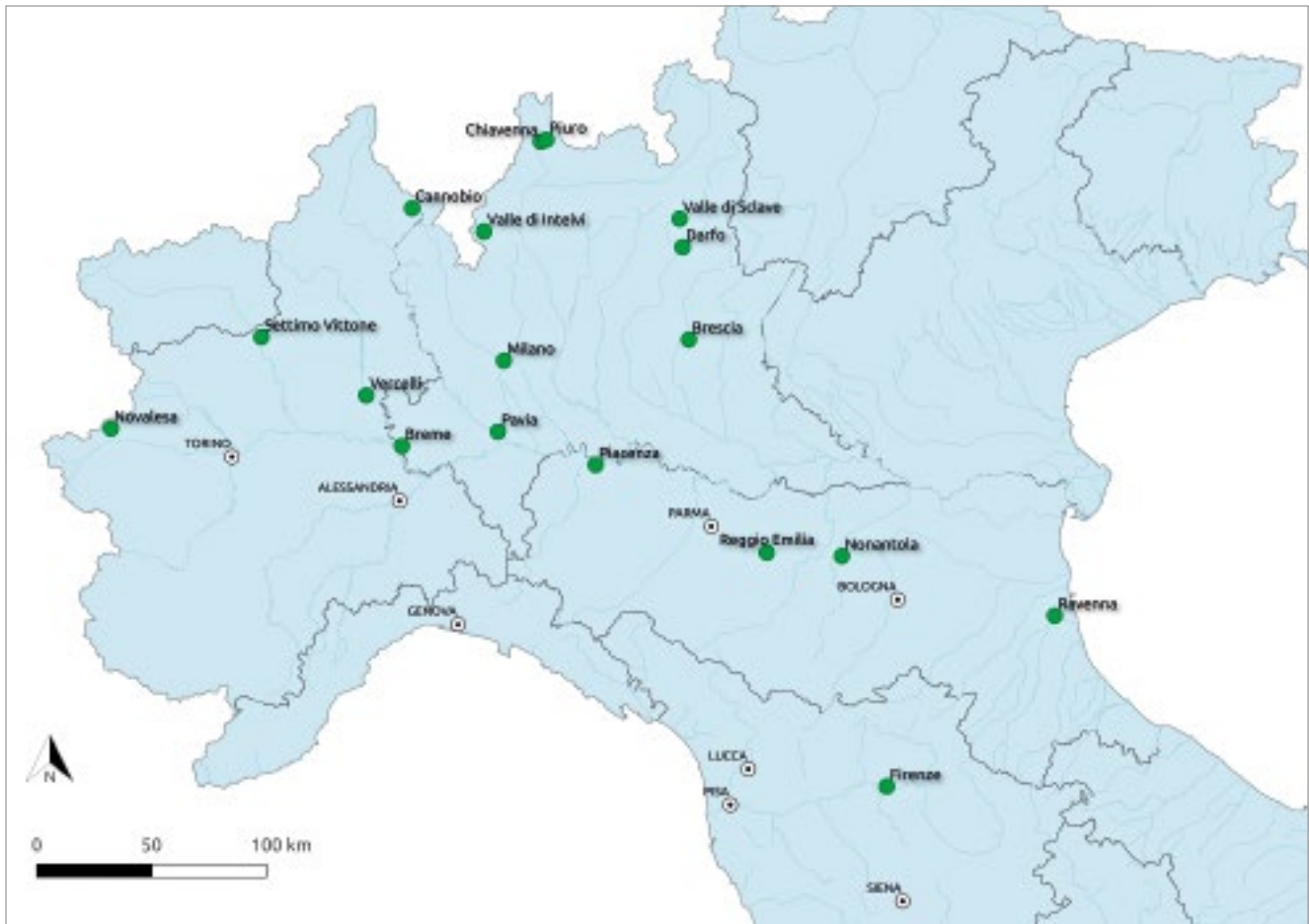


fig. 1 – Location of sites mentioned in this article.

episcopal or monastic ones). These documents have elicited particular interest in recent decades as they provide a more or less complete description of the patrimony of an institution, for management purposes (ANDREOLLI, MONTANARI 1983). Polyptychs – usually dating to the 10th century, in the case of Italy – show that, despite the clear predominance of cereal cultivation (and, to a lesser extent, vineyards), Italian churches also tended to promote more specialised forms of production. We thus find specialised cultivations, such as olive trees on the Garda and Como lakes, or hemp and cheese in the Apennines, as well as – beyond the agricultural and pastoral sphere – salt mines in Emilia, and the extraction and processing of iron in northern Lombardy (PASQUALI 1979, pp. 72-73, p. 92; CASTAGNETTI 1979, p. 128). This focus on specialised production, moreover, is confirmed by other, more specific sources, which are especially valuable when it comes to the royal fisc.

In describing the monastic *curtis* of Cannobio, on the northern shore of Lake Maggiore, the *Chronicon* of Novalesa – a source from early 11th-century Piedmont – records the wide-scale felling of trees in the great forests in the mountains surrounding the lake, along with the production of coal, and the gathering of bundles of resinous firewood (ALESSIO 1982, p. 284). Even more interestingly, the author mentions the fact that the ancient *mos* (custom) of aulic serfs (i.e. serfs of the royal fisc) still survived. Indeed, this centre had belonged to the *fiscus* up until the mid-10th century, when it had passed

under the control of the monastery through the mediation of palatine count Samson³. According to the author of the *Chronicon*, what distinguishes the local *mos* is precisely the specialised, non-agricultural production ensured by the local workforce. This is an important detail that has not yet been fully appreciated by historians: what I have just described is a site of production that survived in what had become a different context, cut off from the network in relation to which it had originally been conceived; a genuine fossil that strikes the chronicler as noteworthy precisely on account of its peculiarity. A charter issued to the monastery of San Pietro in Ciel d’Oro, in Pavia, by king Hugh in 929 also mentions wide-scale logging, this time in the Valle d’Intelvi, near Como. In this case too we are dealing with originally royal sites that had fallen under the control of a monastery (SCHIAPARELLI 1923, n. 20).

Another form of specialised production is the smelting of iron. Here I will focus on a major smelting centre, the royal *curtis* of Darfo, in Valcamonica, which was still active in the mid-11th century (MENANT 1987). As we know from a charter by Henry III, workmen at Darfo used to process iron ore from the nearby Val di Scalve, whose inhabitants were free to trade the iron they extracted in exchange for

³ See also the link between the status of *servi* and another specialized production (olive trees) in a former royal estate (Limonta), on the shores of Lake Como, in the late ninth century; on this BALZARETTI 1994.

an annual payment of 1,000 pounds of iron to the royal *curtis* in Valcamonica. This is a considerable quantity of iron, which would have been enough to manufacture around 400 swords a year. Furthermore, Darfo must have received even more iron ore, given that various other mines were active in the area during this period (MENANT 1987; CUCINI TIZZONI 1999)⁴.

Finally, we know that in Vachiavenna (especially at Chiavenna and Piuro) there were major soapstone quarries (presumably the stone was extracted and then exported throughout northern Italy). Pier Damiani mentions this as a traditional activity in the area in a 1064 letter. We do not know who owned the quarries, although it is reasonable to assume that up until the late 10th century they were the king's property (REINDEL 1988, n. 106). What we do know is that already by the late 10th century this activity had contributed to ensuring a significant degree of prosperity in the local economy, attested by the relatively dynamic character of the local market, by the high cost of real estate compared to minor Lombard centres in the same period, and by the monetary resources of the inhabitants of Chiavenna (*CDL*, nos. 743; 863, 888, 899). And this is not to mention the numerous other quarrying and/or craftsmanship sites whose existence (or specialisation) is only known through archaeological data that further broaden and refine the picture provided by the written sources (BIANCHI 2020).

All in all, the available data undoubtedly suggest that the countryside was dominated by cereal cultivation (and wine-growing), particularly in flat areas and in the foothills, although several important sites specialised in the extraction of raw materials and niche crops such as olives, as well as logging, carpentry, and specialised forms of craftsmanship such as the manufacture of soapstone objects or silverware. Moreover, the few texts just discussed already reveal two significant elements: first of all, the close connection between the royal fisc and specialised production sites and, secondly, the fact that from the mid-11th century onwards only some of these sites were still in the sovereign's hands, while many others had been acquired by other social actors. It is plausible, therefore, that in the mid-10th century the degree of royal control over specialised sites was particularly significant and that these production hubs were part of a well-structured network. Indeed, one notes a tendency towards the diversification of production, the mutual integration of different specialised sites and, finally, the redistribution of production across the various nodes in the network. This no doubt reflects that tendency towards self-sufficiency which constitutes one of the defining features of the elite of this period, in particular as regards the crown: in addition to being by far the greatest landowner, the central power pursued self-sufficiency in the most explicit way, for both material and ideological reasons, as clearly illustrated by well-known texts such as Charlemagne's capitular *De villis* or Hincmar of Reims' *De ordine palatii* (RÖSENER 2003).

3. URBAN CONTEXTS

While I have focused on the countryside so far, it is necessary now to change our vantage point and consider the urban context. It is necessary to understand the structural role played by cities, in our specific context, from an economic perspective. Clearly, this is a very different role from that recorded from the 12th century onwards: in our period urban centres were important nodes in the network, yet not essential ones, as was to become the case at a later stage. As we have seen, some circuits completely bypassed cities, as in the case of those centred on great royal monasteries such as Nonantola, Novalesa, and Bobbio, which were at the top of major patrimonial and productive nets, and – plausibly – the analogous ones connected to the rural 'central places' of great aristocratic families such as the Aleramics, Anscarids or Guidi, even though these remain in the shadows (TOUBERT 1983)⁵.

Cities were the seats of fiscal *curtes* controlled by royal representatives (counts or margraves) and received produce and other goods from the countryside, as in the cases of Pisa and Lucca in Tuscany, or Turin and Vercelli in Piedmont. But cities also hosted important monasteries, which constituted points of reference for major rural patrimonies, as in the case of Santa Giulia in Brescia, San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia, and, at a lower level, San Tommaso in Reggio (TOMEI 2018). Moreover, cities also tended to be episcopal sees and the local bishops were often prominent landowners in their dioceses, particularly in those cases where they replaced public officials as public power holders, also inheriting their economic functions, as in Vercelli and Cremona. Cities were thus the final destination for goods produced elsewhere, as sites of consumption as well as of accumulation and redistribution.

Still, it should be said that the tendency of cities to serve as linchpins of the economic system is revealed not just by the presence of weekly markets, with a strictly local appeal, but also by the presence of annual fairs – each running for several days – in certain centres in the Po Valley, such as Vercelli and Piacenza, especially from the late 9th century onwards (SETTIA 1993). Evidently, these fairs were designed not just to facilitate trade between the city and the surrounding countryside, as in the case of weekly markets, but also to enable trade between different cities (or between cities and more distant rural areas). Therefore, they must be interpreted as further evidence of the complexity of the economic system.

If we instead shift our attention to the role of cities and sites of production, we find that the written sources (as well as the archaeological record) offer scant information about productive activities in this period. We are thus forced to make the most of the little data available, not least through a cautious use of the regressive method.

I will start from Pavia, which served as the capital of the kingdom throughout the 10th century. A major centre from a demographic perspective, it was also a place that the authorities had to visit periodically for political reasons, thereby increasing local demand, and hence the trading

⁴ The weight of each sword has been estimated to be 1.2 kg on the basis of coeval artefacts from Viking graves in northern Europe: see PEIRCE 2002.

⁵ On the Anscarids, the rural burial site of Settimo Vittone, in north-western Piedmont, awaits a better investigation; see BERTOLOTTO, SCALVA 2001.

and production networks. With regard to craftsmanship – as well as other economic activities – in cities in the 10th century, one is bound to refer to the *Honorantie Civitatis Paviae*. This text, drafted in the early 11th century for ‘vindicatory’ and memorial purposes, probably describes a particular context in the 940s and 950s (BRÜHL, VIOLANTE 1982). What clearly emerges is the existence of certain specialised professions and productions: some professions are characterised by the presence of local *magistri*, and pay (often hefty) taxes to the *camera regis* (royal treasury). The list doesn’t seem to be a celebrative one but rather a real one, characterized as it is by striking absences such as smiths and, to a lesser extent, weavers, and can therefore be used as a reliable guide to the economy of Pavia. It is evident that the groups listed were large enough and/or made a significant enough impact on the local economic fabric to be specifically mentioned in the text. Two of these groups are of the sort one would expect to find: moneyers – as the capital of the kingdom, Pavia, had a major mint, just like Milan, which is also mentioned in the same text – and merchants. The latter were of course very active at the local level, as they strove to meet demands in what must have been the main centre for the consumption of luxury goods within the kingdom of Italy, owing to the city’s role as capital. Besides, precisely for this reason, Pavia was also the centre where wealthy transalpine travellers making their way down into Italy would stop to purchase luxury goods, as attested by the Frankish chronicler Notker the Stammerer (McCORMICK 2001, p. 633). What is more surprising, instead, is the presence of fishermen and tanners – the latter with at least twelve workshops – and, apparently just below these, *saponarii* (i.e. soap-makers) and ferrymen. Soap-making and tanning might seem connected (both require animal fat and hides). This is hardly surprising within a context where the consumption of animal protein must have been particularly high owing to the concentration of lay and ecclesiastical aristocrats, ensuring a steady flow of the kind of meat by-products suited to such industries. Much the same can probably be said with regard to the fishermen, who obviously needed to cater to the aristocrats’ needs during the extensive periods of the year in which the consumption of meat (and dairy) was forbidden for religious reasons. The presence of ferrymen must instead be connected to the merchants’ activities. Naturally, there must also have been other artisans (such as bakers), but their impact must have been more limited, as they are not mentioned in the text. Also notable is the lack of smiths, a prominent group in nearby Milan and in other Lombard cities.

From the 10th century onwards, the smiths recorded in Milan (and in nearby areas, especially Brianza) were wealthy individuals who purchased arable land, housing plots, and houses, proving that they had considerable money to invest. What we have here are the first traces of the centrality of iron-working that was to be a hallmark of Milan (and of nearby Brescia) throughout the Middle Ages, owing to the presence of iron ore in nearby Alpine mines (VIOLANTE 1953, pp. 58-61). The first evidence of the specialised production of weapons that was to characterise Milan in the later Middle Ages can be traced back to the 11th century, whereas the most

visible artisans at the local level after smiths are minters, who are also mentioned in the *Honorantiae*.

In Ravenna too, as in Pavia, fishermen would appear to have played a prominent role in our period – something that can be easily explained on the basis of the ecological context. This is evident from a document from 943 recording the existence of a fishermen’s *schola* (association) in Ravenna (SPRETI 1820, p. 7). Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that the presence of cheap salt in the area made it possible to salt fish and export it a considerable distance away along the Po river. This would explain why fishermen appear to be so important at the local level already in the 10th century: in all likelihood, this fishing activity was not designed to meet local demands, but rather catered to a much wider consumer base.

I will now move beyond the context of northern Italy in order to discuss the case of Florence, albeit in connection with the Po Valley. An important document from 895 attests to the fact that the urban nunnery of San Michele Arcangelo – a Tuscan dependency of the abbey of Nonantola in Emilia – which had six nuns along with a priest to serve mass and fulfil other liturgical duties, was supported by four small farming *curtes* and their appurtenances in the environs of the city. In addition, physically annexed to the monastery was a workshop in which no less than twelve female slaves (*ancillae*) wove linen and wool from Nonantolan estates in Emilia, to produce cloths (TIRABOSCHI 1785, n. 54). This is a significant text, not least because it is the first to clearly describe a centre for textile production in Florence. However, one also wonders why the abbot of Nonantola may have wished to send the nunnery twelve slaves, along with annual consignments of linen and wool for them to weave, all the way from across the Apennines. The only possible answer is that the nuns in Florence had a particular expertise as regards the weaving of textiles: what – on the basis of later developments – might be described as Florentine ‘knowhow’⁶. Likewise, Paolo Tomei has traced the beginnings of silk production in Lucca back to the 10th century, two centuries before the conventional date (TOMEI forthcoming). While prudence is advisable, it is significant that already in the years between the late 9th and the early 10th century the two Tuscan cities are known to have been centres for the manufacture of the kind of textiles that are only clearly evidenced in the 13th century. What we appear to be dealing with is a long-term specialised production that stands as a counterpart to Milanese iron-smithing. Indeed, on the basis of these examples it seems plausible that some of the specialised urban productions we find in the high and Late Middle Ages might actually be of much earlier origin.

The way in which northern Italy operated perhaps best emerges by contrast to Rome, which Chris Wickham has recently been able to investigate in considerable detail thanks to the remarkable density of the local sources (WICKHAM 2014, pp. 111-180). Rome appears to offer an alternative model, where artisan activities were concentrated within the city walls and the vast majority of landowners were urban ones. We find here a very close integration between city and

⁶ An additional, if weaker, piece of evidence is the fact that, again in Florence, each year the small nunnery of Sant’Andrea donated a woollen garb to the royal *palatium*, as attested by a document from 852; see MANARINI 2016, pp. 43-44.

countryside, and a distinction between the two at a functional level that is absent in northern Italy in this period. Except as regards a limited range of luxury goods, Rome was essentially self-sufficient in terms of production and craftsmanship, and entertained a largely exclusive relationship with its rural hinterland, obtaining agricultural produce from it while in turn supplying it with artisanal goods. Northern Italian cities functioned in a different way: they were specialised centres – although sometimes specialising in more than one sector – and plausibly interacted with one another, developing relations of interdependence or competition. They operated within a context in which the countryside continued to play an important role in terms of economic demand as well as production, including artisanal production.

4. TOWARDS AN ECONOMIC MODEL

The question to be addressed, therefore, is what to make of the heterogeneous data pertaining to the countryside and cities, so as to reconstruct their overall meaning. What we find are specialised productions (both in cities and in the countryside) and chiefly rural networks; we also find close economic links between cities and the countryside, albeit not in the form typical of later centuries. The Florentine textile workshop did not merely process raw material from the countryside, but was owned by a rural institution towards which it channelled off at least part of its textile production and, no doubt, the profit accrued from this activity: an example that illustrates the complexity of the context in this period. We do not yet find, then, the kind of focus on urban centres that was to become a hallmark of Italy, but rather a picture at once more balanced and more complicated.

Productive specialisation clearly indicates that goods (iron objects from northern Lombardy, soap and leather from Pavia, fish from Ravenna, soapstone from Valchiavenna, Emilian linen and salt, and Florentine textiles) were circulating within the context of northern Italy. This is further confirmed by some archaeological data, given that specialisation in itself reveals a complex and interconnected system, albeit on a much smaller scale than in the 13th century. To argue that the economic system of 10th century northern Italy was inert compared to that of the 13th century is correct, yet somewhat reductive; the problem is not primarily quantitative but qualitative (WICKHAM 2017). It is a matter of understanding what kind of economic model this is: what logic governed the production and circulation of goods in this specific society? An attempt to answer this question implies the construction of a genuine model, something that falls beyond the scope of this short essay. However, it is possible to outline the problem by identifying some paths of enquiry in this direction; and this is precisely the aim of the next pages.

In order to try and develop an effective model, it is essential in my view to understand how men in the 10th century perceived economic processes – and they apparently had very little interest in such processes, unlike ourselves. One important exception to this (apparent) disinterest is a passage from the Novalesa chronicle, a Piedmontese source from the mid-11th century which I have already mentioned. Aldo Settia

drew upon it a few years ago, but I believe its potential has not yet fully been tapped into (SETTIA 1993).

The text dates from roughly 1040, but describes a far earlier situation. The author, no longer a young man, states that he has no direct memory of this situation, but knows about it from the most elderly monks – even though they too may not have direct memory of it (ALESSIO 1982, pp. 100-101). While the author seeks to project the system he is describing into a remote Lombard past, for the sake of legitimacy, the situation can plausibly be traced back to the mid-10th century, i.e. to a society that still operated according to largely ‘Carolingian’ parameters, economically but also in other respects, and which indeed embodies (at any rate for the specific context of northern Italy) the stage of highest development of that particular economic model (TOUBERT 1990). What the chronicle is describing, then, is a system that was no longer in place at the time in which the author was writing. It shows how men in the 11th century perceived the Carolingian/Ottonian past, which is what makes this document such a valuable source: for it is close to the facts it is describing, yet no longer immersed in that context, which had changed; hence, the author no longer perceives it as something that has been ‘naturalised’, but rather views it critically, precisely by virtue of his distance from the object he is describing.

As the text is very short, it is worth providing an English translation of it, before highlighting certain elements:

It is said that back then, as was customary at the time, there was a cart of carved wood, wonderful to behold, on which nothing was ever put except a tall pole [...]. At the top of it – as reported by people who saw it or heard it described by those who had seen it – hung a small bell that made a shrill sound. In the *curtes* and villages in Italy that belonged to the monastery [of Novalesa] and were closest to it, the *ministri* of the monks would store wheat and wine at the right season. And when the time came to transfer these goods to the monastery, this cart with the above-mentioned pole, and the *skilla* [i.e. bell], would be despatched to those villages, where many other carts would be gathered, usually a hundred or so but at times even 150 – for this is how many were required to transport the wheat and wine to the monastery. This *dominicalis* cart was only despatched to let the powerful know that these were carts from the monastery [of Novalesa]. Thus no duke, margrave, count, lord, viscount, or *villicus* would dare forcibly seize anything from those carts. Not only that, but it is said that at the annual fairs that used to be held in Italy [*foros Italiae*] at the time, no one dared to start bargaining until the merchants saw the cart with the *skilla* arrive (ALESSIO 1982, pp. 100-103).

What this text illustrates, then, is the flow of produce from local production sites (in the countryside) to a rural centre of accumulation, the monastery of Novalesa, located quite a distance away. The produce in question consists of common goods like wheat and grain, which makes the text even more interesting, precisely because it does not describe specialities but basic products.

This circulation of goods was not commercial in nature, but rather consisted in a process of redistribution within an extensive property that was fragmented and scattered

geographically and spatially. However, at the same time, the accumulation/redistribution of these goods also gave rise (in an apparently secondary yet still significant way) to purely commercial, market transactions, presumably in urban (or suburban) contexts such as fairs (SETTIA 1993). In addition, the price of commodities in such contexts was determined precisely by the number of monastic carts: their number (and the amount of goods they carried) had a significant impact on prices at the fairs. The non-commercial circulation of goods among rural sites also implies commercial transactions, in relation to which urban centres would have played a significant role, as obviously they represented the main market for agricultural surplus at the time. In this respect, the *skilla* text provides a window through which to catch a glimpse – however hazy – of how the economy worked in the 10th century.

From a more general standpoint, this source, when duly integrated with the other data we have, promises to disclose new research trajectories, or to enable us to approach more traditional paths of enquiry from a fresh perspective. Here I will only outline some of the most promising trajectories, which ought to be developed and mutually integrated in view of the creation of an effective model for the economic system under discussion.

First of all, the text illustrates a circulation of goods that occurred in a primarily non-commercial way at different, interconnected levels: from a *curtis* to a primary collection centre (such as a palace or monastery); from one *curtis* to another; and, at a lower level, from an isolated *mansus* to a *curtis*. This economy was systematically based on the integration of sites of production that were scattered (at the micro as well as macro level, in a fractal way) but brought together under the same property. However, at the same time, merely through its occurrence, this internal circulation of goods activated and promoted purely commercial transactions. The fragmented system of large estates thus engendered (redistributive and commercial) trade, thereby ensuring a degree of dynamism – the general inertness of the system notwithstanding. This ensured the development and reproduction of niches of specialisation. Self-sufficiency was a major aspiration, which contributed to lending structure to the economy (particularly as regards the kingdom). It actually gave rise to trade within each network of properties (be it a royal one or not), as well as between the various networks, in an effort to supply goods that could not be produced locally. No doubt, this system involved not just aristocratic and ecclesiastical authorities, but also royal power, which was the largest landowner, and the one with the highest drive towards self-sufficiency.

The text from Novalesa also alludes to the role played by cities, and especially their fairs, confirming the role traditionally played by urban centres as trading hubs and especially as privileged venues for commercial transactions, which made it possible to integrate specialised forms of production, including rural ones⁷. While ‘out-of-scale’ sites were created and functioned for the most part according to principles other

than market logic, their surplus would appear to have been put on the market (as in the case of any amount of wheat or wine exceeding the monks’ consumption in the *skilla* text). This would explain the discovery of a considerable number of coins on ‘out-of-scale’ sites. People needed purely commercial trade in order to have the money to purchase goods produced outside their own *domus* and/or reciprocity circuits, as well as to sell off any surplus. It also helps explain why in certain areas, such as northern Italy, very little coinage is found in the archaeological record: this was essentially a redistributive economy (ROVELLI 2009). By contrast, the presence of coins on both public and aristocratic ‘out-of-scale’ sites might be seen to reflect ‘market’ transactions that played a subsidiary role with respect to the kind of production/trade chiefly conceived and managed according to the logic of reciprocity. Indeed, it may be hypothesised that envoys from a ‘central place’ (e.g. a large rural *palatium*) would periodically visit production centres in order to collect products on behalf of the fisc (or of a major landowner), as must have been the case with ironware in Vetricella or salt in the area of the Val Trebbia, which was controlled by the Nonantola monastery. Plausibly, the same intermediaries would have taken the opportunity to purchase – either privately or on behalf of other commercial actors – supplementary objects (in addition to those collected for the census), to be sold at fairs or urban and rural markets, so as to reap a profit.

Moreover, it would be worth reflecting on the seasonality/punctuality of such models, meaning the fact that the market fully manifested at specific moments and in specific places (although the same applies to redistribution and reciprocity), whereas in other contexts it played a secondary (or practically non-existent) role. For instance, fairs were dominated by the market, whereas aristocratic assemblies were marked by the reciprocal exchange of gifts among the participants. Likewise, upon their return from military expeditions, victorious leaders would redistribute the booty among the participants, and their clients and supporters (REUTER 1985). Of course, these are only three among many other possible examples, designed to account for a problem that still needs to be addressed and brought into focus through the appropriate intellectual tools. The society of the Carolingian and Ottonian ages was far more fluid than our own. Consequently, specific organisational contexts significantly influenced the social structure, shaping it in each context, along with the peculiar kind of economy connected to it. This problem has chiefly been investigated by anthropologists and historians of prehistory, but still needs to be systematically explored in relation to our specific context (GRAEBER, WENGROW 2015)⁸.

One last crucial point is the role played by the central authorities within this system. As already noted, the kingdom, compared to other actors, was in much greater need of self-sufficiency, from both a material and ideological standpoint. By virtue of its very mode of functioning, the kingdom could not depend on anyone (ideally, at least) if it was to fully exercise its role, without any limitations. The central authorities thus strove to exercise direct control over agri-

⁷ What also suggests a context of this sort is the imposition of *corveés*, consisting in the transportation of agricultural produce in the Exarchate of Ravenna: see MANCASSOLA 2008.

⁸ I am currently working on an article on this topic entitled *Shifting Frameworks*.

cultural production, mining activities, and artisanal centres, as illustrated by the available written and material sources.

What this means is that the kingdom promoted the circulation of goods essentially in view of their redistribution: it had them conveyed from minor production centres to large fiscal ones, and then often from the latter to the palace, where the king and his court resided – and this also applies, on a smaller scale, to great officials. Alternatively, the goods would be circulated through those places where aristocratic assemblies were periodically held. In such contexts, the king would receive gifts from the assembled noblemen, and in turn bestow some gifts on them, thereby establishing or consolidating social relations (INNES 2009). In the Late Roman world, the linchpin of the whole trading system had been the State, which had created and maintained the great networks for the production and circulation of goods (WILSON, BOWMAN 2017). In the Carolingian/Ottonian world, the ‘State’ appears to have played a different and ultimately far more limited role: the State was important, but it was not the crucial element on which the whole system hinged. While the State was certainly the greatest of the great (aristocratic and ecclesiastical) landowners, ultimately it did not act with a different logic, but only on a wider scale, owing to the greater possibilities it enjoyed.

This element might explain why the crisis of central power in the *regnum Italiae* over the course of the 11th century did not entail a systemic economic crisis comparable – taking differences of scale into account – to the late antique crisis explored in Chris Wickham’s *Framing the Early Middle Ages*. Rather, it entailed a period of less intense difficulty that could more easily be absorbed (with the right adjustments) by a generally more flexible and resilient system (WICKHAM 2005). What would appear to have deteriorated and broken down is only *one* form of productive relations and trade; no doubt the main one, yet not one on which the whole system depended. The other forms would appear to have survived and restructured themselves, with cities gaining an increasingly prominent role in parallel to this process. In the early 11th century, large estates (especially fiscal ones) in northern Italy started losing their coherence, not least because of the civil wars triggered by Arduin’s attempt to seize the throne and, more generally, because of a tendency to establish more local power structures (leading great landowners to lose control over more outlying areas of production). Within this scenario, with the likely exception of Friuli (as well as Tuscany), the system of production and trade was restructured on the basis of cities, especially ones that had already emerged as important economic centres in the past⁹. This new context, marked by a significant degree of political breakdown, would seem to have released productive forces that were already present in our period, when to some extent they were constricted by the weight of the very structure of great landed estates, including both royal and non-royal ones. The transformation of the context instead had a negative impact on the structural influence of Pavia, whose leading economic role was connected to its political

centrality within the royal system and which – for reasons that still remain unclear – never succeeded in restructuring itself quickly enough to take advantage of the new economic flows. The period between the late 9th and early 10th century in northern Italy was marked by a general inertness of the economic system, at any rate compared to the high Middle Ages. However, it preserved a certain degree of complexity, which made it possible to effectively integrate different spaces and contexts by promoting forms of specialised production at the local level, and – to some extent – laying the foundations for subsequent developments.

As already anticipated, these are only some possible research trajectories, which ought to be fully pursued and mutually integrated in order to develop a new model capable of making sense of a historical picture that has radically changed compared to only a few decades ago – not to mention the period in which great interpretative economic models were last developed. The growing amount of new archaeological data has not only increased the overall quantity of available information, but has also redefined a number of assumptions, thereby allowing us to reinterpret conventional written sources. In this respect, written documents still have much to offer historians, not least in view of the development of an overall interpretation, for which the time now seems ripe.

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⁹ On the political aspects of this transformation, see CAMMAROSANO 2001, pp. 226-270.

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I NODI E LE RETI: FISCO, PROPRIETÀ RURALI E CITTÀ NELLE FONTI SCRITTE (NORD ITALIA, IX-X SECOLO)

Capire come un sistema economico del passato funziona è quindi in primo luogo un'opera di de-presentizzazione, in modo da comprendere le specifiche peculiarità di quel sistema di produzione e scambio. Se la costruzione di un vero e proprio modello complessivo di funzionamento dell'economia altomedievale è un obiettivo ancora molto distante, in questa sede proverò a esporre alcuni primi spunti in tale direzione, indicando alcune possibili piste di indagine basate sul caso specifico delle strutture produttive e di scambio in Italia settentrionale tra il IX e X secolo, sulla base dei dati forniti dalle ricerche sulle fonti materiali e, soprattutto, su quelle scritte, cercando in particolare di valorizzarne alcune, ancora poco note.

Un primo dato preliminare da sottolineare è che ormai da decenni per la ricerca sull'economia altomedievale la grande proprietà (fiscale e non) costituisce tra VIII e X secolo il cuore pulsante del sistema e il suo settore più dinamico e sviluppato. Se vogliamo indagare la specifica fase carolingia-ottoniana è dunque proprio alla grande proprietà (aristocratica, ecclesiastica e regia) a cui dobbiamo in primo luogo guardare, per capire come la grande proprietà aristocratica/ecclesiastica e i beni fiscali funzionino sotto il profilo strutturale.

I politici del IX-X secolo mostrano che le chiese italiane, nonostante la massiccia preponderanza della produzione cerealicola (e in seconda battuta vinicola), tendono comunque a curare alcune attività produttive più di nicchia, come gli olivi sulle rive dei laghi di Garda o di Como, la canapa, o i formaggi dell'Appennino, il taglio di alberi su larga scala e la produzione di carbone vegetale nelle grandi foreste sulle montagne intorno al lago Maggiore. Alcuni di questi siti sono ricordati come un tempo di pertinenza regia, successivamente passati a un ente monastico. Un'altra grande specializzazione produttiva è tuttavia quella legata all'estrazione e lavorazione del ferro, come il grande sito di lavorazione, attivo ancora alla metà dell'XI secolo, nella corte regia di Darfo, in Valcamonica. Infine in Vachavenna sappiamo dell'esistenza di importanti giacimenti di pietra ollare (plausibilmente lavorata in loco e poi esportata in tutta l'Italia settentrionale), il cui sfruttamento è ricordato come un'attività tradizionale del luogo in una lettera di Pier Damiani del 1064, e che plausibilmente fino alla fine del X secolo erano di proprietà regia.

Nel complesso i dati a nostra disposizione ci permettono di ricostruire l'immagine di uno spazio rurale indubbiamente dominato dalla produzione cerealicola (e vinicola), in particolare nelle aree di pianura e bassa collina, ma con diversi importanti siti legati in modo specializzato ad attività estrattive, a coltivazioni di nicchia come l'ulivo, al taglio di legname, alla carpenteria, a produzioni artigianali specializzate come gli oggetti di steatite o l'argenteria.

Emerge una forte connessione tra fisco regio e siti produttivi specializzati, anche se alla metà dell'XI secolo solo alcuni di questi erano ancora nelle mani dei sovrani. Osserviamo comunque una tendenza alla diversificazione produttiva, all'integrazione di siti specializzati diversi tra loro, e infine alla redistribuzione della produzione all'interno dei nodi della rete.

Per capire la complessità del sistema occorre tuttavia considerare anche il ruolo delle città. Queste sono sedi di *curtes* fiscali controllate dai rappresentanti del potere regio (conti, o marchesi) dove confluiscono prodotti (agricoli e non) del territorio rurale; ma sono anche sedi di importanti monasteri e dei locali vescovi. Questo fa sì che esse siano i terminali di beni prodotti altrove, sia in qualità di luoghi di consumo, sia di accumulo e redistribuzione. Inoltre la vocazione delle città come perni sistemici è enfatizzata non solo dall'esistenza di mercati settimanali, dal significato eminentemente locale, ma anche dalla presenza di fiere annuali. Se invece spostiamo l'attenzione al ruolo delle città come luoghi di produzione, siamo costretti a rilevare che le fonti scritte (come quelle archeologiche) risultino molto avare sull'attività produttiva in città in questa fase costringendoci a valorizzare le poche menzioni

Pavia che per tutto il X secolo è la capitale del regno, un centro di prima importanza dal punto di vista demografico e anche il luogo in cui i potenti del regno dovevano periodicamente recarsi per ragioni politiche, alimentando la domanda in loco, e quindi i circuiti di scambio e la produzione. Dalle *Honorantie Civitatis Papiæ* emergono in modo molto chiaro alcune specializzazioni professionali e produttive. Oltre a monetieri e mercanti colpisce la presenza dei pescatori e dei conciatori di pelli e, a un livello un poco più basso *saponarii* e battellieri. Spicca inoltre l'assenza di fabbri, un gruppo invece assai visibile nella non lontana Milano e in altre città lombarde. A Milano infatti dal X secolo i fabbri attestati in città (e nei territori vicini) sono personaggi ricchi, comprano terre coltivabili, sedimi e case, mostrando una forte disponibilità di liquidità da investire; sono le prime tracce di quella centralità nella lavorazione del ferro che caratterizzerà Milano (come la vicina Brescia) per tutto il medioevo grazie al ferro delle vicine miniere alpine, mentre il gruppo di artigiani più visibili a livello locale dopo i fabbri è quello dei monetieri. Anche a Ravenna, come del resto a Pavia i pescatori paiono avere nel nostro periodo un notevole peso locale, forse connesso anche con la locale disponibilità di sale a basso costo per la salatura

Uscirò infine dal contesto settentrionale per parlare di Firenze, anche se in connessione con la pianura padana. Un importante documento dell'895, attesta che a un monastero urbano femminile dipendente da Nonantola era annesso un laboratorio, in cui erano attive ben 12 schiave che tessevano lino e lana inviati dai possedimenti nonantolani in Emilia,

producendo dei panni. È una notevole anticipazione rispetto agli altri documenti relativi alla lavorazione di panni a Firenze, ma coerente con la recente anticipazione della lavorazione serica a Lucca al X secolo. Se la prudenza è d'obbligo è comunque significativo che già tra tardo IX e X secolo le due città toscane siano attestate come luoghi di produzione di quei tessuti per cui solo nel Duecento abbiamo dati significativi. Sulla base dei casi mostrati plausibile affermare che almeno alcune delle specializzazioni produttive urbane osservabili nel pieno e tardo medioevo potrebbero in realtà avere radici ben più antiche.

Le città del Nord sono quindi centri specializzati (anche se a volte in più settori produttivi) che interagiscono tra loro, sviluppando relazioni di interdipendenza o concorrenza, e agiscono in un contesto in cui anche lo spazio rurale ha ancora un ruolo importante sia sotto il profilo della domanda, sia sotto quello della produzione artigianale.

Per restituire un senso complessivo a questi dati è prezioso un passo della cronaca di Novalesa, una fonte piemontese di metà XI secolo, che descrive tuttavia una realtà di pieno X secolo. Questo testo ci mostra beni agricoli che fluiscono dai siti di produzione locale (rurali) a un centro di accumulo anch'esso rurale, come il monastero di Novalesa/Breme, situato comunque a una certa distanza. È una circolazione a carattere strutturalmente non commerciale, ma di redistri-

buzione interna a una grande proprietà frammentata e dislocata a livello geografico e spaziale, e tuttavia il movimento accumulativo/redistributivo di questi beni attiva e alimenta anche transazioni di carattere puramente commerciale e di mercato, in contesti plausibilmente urbani (o suburbani) come le fiere. Una circolazione di beni a carattere non commerciale tra siti rurali attiva transazioni commerciali con un ruolo significativo dei centri urbani.

In senso più generale questa fonte, opportunamente integrata con gli altri dati di cui disponiamo ci aiuta a delineare una economia basata a livello sistemico sull'integrazione di contesti produttivi sparsi (sia a livello micro, sia a livello macro, in modo frattale) uniti sotto l'ombrello di una medesima proprietà. Tuttavia questo movimento interno di beni attiva e stimola al tempo stesso, per il solo fatto di esistere, scambi di natura prettamente commerciale, con un ruolo specifico delle città nelle transazioni.

Il periodo tra IX e X secolo si caratterizzerebbe dunque in Italia settentrionale per una generale atonia del sistema economico, almeno rispetto agli standard del pieno medioevo, che però coesisterebbe con una certa complessità di funzionamento, che consente di integrare efficacemente spazi e contesti diversi, valorizzando e stimolando le specificità produttive locali, e in qualche misura ponendo le basi per i successivi sviluppi.

The nEU-Med project is part of the Horizon 2020 programme, in the ERC Advanced project category. It began in October 2015 and the University of Siena is the host institution of the project.

The project is focussed upon two Tuscan riverine corridors leading from the Gulf of Follonica in the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Colline Metallifere. It aims to document and analyze the form and timeframe of economic growth in this part of the Mediterranean, which took place between the 7th and the 12thc. Central to this is an understanding of the processes of change in human settlements, in the natural and farming landscapes in relation to the exploitation of resources, and in the implementation of differing political strategies.

This volume presents the multi-disciplinary research focussed upon the key site of the project, Vettricella, and its territory. Vettricella is thought to be the site of Valli, a royal property in the Tuscan march. It is the only Early Medieval property to be extensively studied in Italy. Located on Italy's Tyrrhenian coast, the archaeology and history of this site provide new insights on estate management, metal production and wider Mediterranean relations in the later first millennium. Apart from reports on the archaeology, the finds from excavations and environmental studies, three essays consider the wider European historical and archaeological context of Vettricella. Future monographs will feature studies by members of the project team on aspects of Vettricella, its finds and territory.

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