ipotesi su una transizione

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Stefano Gasparri

BREPOLS
Centro interuniversitario per la storia e l’archeologia dell’alto medievale
(Università di Padova, Siena e Venezia)

Caferro della Fortezza di Paggio Imperiale
via Francesco Medica 1
53056 Poggibonsi (SI)
email: info.sazine@unive.it

Direttore: Stefano Gasparri
Consiglio direttivo: Giovanni Bianchi, Gian Pietro Brogiolo, Sauro Gelichi, Maria Ausiliatrice Ginatempo, Maria Cristina La Rocca, Marco Valenti

Assemblea: Paul Arthur, Andrea Augenti, Claudio Azzaca, François Bougard, Alexandra Chevriez, Salvatore Cosentino, Flavia De Rubeis, Paolo Delogu, Nicoletta Giovè, Richard Hodges, John Moreland, Ghislaine Noyé, Lidia Paroli, Walter Pohl, Juan Antonio Quiros Castillo, Alessia Rovelli, Giuliano Volpe, Chris Wickham

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Introduction

One of the unanswered questions related to rural transformation in the late Merovingian and Carolingian landscapes of the north is how powerful people and religious institutions managed to control large parts of the countryside and organize the production in the context of estates characterized by some form of dependent labour. Of course, this is an image created by historians on the basis of written sources of mainly ecclesiastical origin. It is difficult to establish whether all productive areas in the countryside were organized in the context of villae. The nature of the estate, the form of reactions and the degree of the rural workforce's dependence differ from region to region and from time to time.

A lot of energy has been spent on analysing the development of the classic Carolingian estate, which comprised a maneri indominicatus and dependent maneri of different status, and its meaning to the development of Carolingian society and economy. One even debates the nature of the maneri: is it a farmstead — something that one could walk to — or is it an administrative or fiscal unit? Is

Translated by Elena Baldi

26) Lead-glazed ware found in Rome in a 7th century context.

market it is probably a kind of pottery — also found in other areas in the Mediterranean Sea — that will be resumed again in the well known production of glazed ware (the so-called Ceramiche a Vetrina Pesante/lead-glazed Forum Ware) which appears only since the first half of the 8th century: a luxury goods that will be produced in a much more industrial scale right after 774.

Also in this field, the Carolingian age (starting in our 774) does not mark, therefore, the introduction of new traditions, but only the consolidation of already existing trends. As seen from the issues discussed above, it is instead the 7th century that constitutes a significant moment during which, in a fluid and apparently contradictory manner, the political history and the material aspects connected to urban layout, house typologies and building techniques, production and trade, witness a slow process of transformation in which it becomes almost impossible to recognise real 'cuts' to be connected to single dates in the calendar.

I like to thank profs. Stefano Gasparri (Venice) and Riccardo Fracovich (Siena) for their kind invitation to the 774: Ipotesi su una Transizione' conference in Foggia.

1 An excellent overview is now provided by J. P. Devroey, Économie rurale et société dans l'Europe francese (VI-IX siècles). Études et documents, échanges et liens sociaux, Paris, 2003.

2 See e.g. the contributions in A. Vecht, Rural and urban aspects of Early Medieval Northeast Europe, Aldershot, 1992; J. P. Devroey, Études sur le grand domaine carolingien, Aldenbroeck, 1993; J. P. Devroey, Économie rurale et société, and Chr. Wickham, Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800, Oxford, 2005, p. 259-302.

3 For a short introduction to this problem, see F. Theuws, «Landed property and manorial organisation in Northern Austria: some considerations and a case study», in Images of the past. Studies on ancient societies in northwestern Europe, ed. N. Roymans & F. Theuws, Amsterdam, 1991, p. 312-318; also J. P. Devroey, Économie rurale et société, p. 250.

the social life organized by the estate or by the village and its farmsteads, each of which may belong to a different estate and a different owner? There will have been complex relations between estate, local group, co-resident group and household group, to name a few organizing principles that were active at the same time. Archaeology can contribute to this debate by showing what spatial organization of the population at different geographical levels was there, how rural dwellers organized their settlements and - on the basis of the exchange of material culture - what relations or connections existed between different groups. If we combine that with historical-geographical evidence (most of which, however, is of a later period) and evidence from written sources, interesting patterns emerge. Such an analysis is possible in a region in the southern Netherlands and northern Belgium, where abundant archaeological evidence exists, an interesting body of charters from the late seventh and eighth century is available and a lot of historical-geographical analyses have been carried out. The amount of archaeological evidence is overwhelming; however, this presentation is short and thus must generalize.

1 'Property' can be very fragmented in Carolingian times (M. Innes, State and society in the early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine valley, 400-1000, Cambridge, 2000, p. 77).

6 In this article, the co-resident group is the group inhabiting a single sand plateau (whether their settlement pattern consists of dispersed farmsteads, nucleated settlements of a combination of both; the local group is a group that identifies itself as such with, for instance, a name. It may coincide with the co-resident group or it may comprise several co-resident groups on different sand plateaus.

7 A first line of the developments there is given in E. Theuws, De archeologie van de periodenstudies naar de ontwikkeling van bouwvorm en samenleving in het Maas-Demer-Schelde gebied in de vroege middeleeuwen, Amsterdam, 1988, and E. Theuws, 'Landed property and manorial organisation'. Since then, a large body of new but as yet unpublished archaeological evidence has become available, as has an interpretation of the burial evidence (W. J. H. Verwers, «North-Brabant in Roman and Early Medieval times, IV: the Merovingian cemeteries», Berichten van het Rijksarchief voor het Oudheidkundig Bedrijf, 37 (1987), p. 173-222). I planned to write a new book (Frankrijk Transformations. Archeologie en Panaust in the pagus Texandrii) but soon found out that the analyses of the excavated settlements were of an insufficient level to add to the existing debate on, for instance, 'manorialization'.

Moreover, new settlement excavations by other institutions revealed important new evidence (e.g.: Breda-West, R. Berkvens/E. Taskeye, «Neolitisch sporen uit de Vroegere Middelaauwen (450-150 n. Chr.)», in Bredase akkers en wieren. 4000 jaar bouwslegende op de rand van zand en klei, ed. C. W. Koot/R. Berkvens, Breda, 2004, p. 397-453). I took up the task to publish the settlements of Geldrop and Doornenburg first and then write a series of articles dealing with successive periods of colonization and transformation of the Merovinian and Carolingian society in the pagus Texandrii. This article can be considered a very short introduction to this series.

Fig. 1: The location of the region discussed (no. 1) in relation to the Meuse valley and important centres in the early Middle Ages.

I shall first sketch the development of settlements and settlement patterns, and then provide a brief overview of relevant written evidence. I shall also provide some insight into the historical-geographical analyses. Finally, I shall discuss the possible nature of estates and the process of manorialization in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Colonization

The pagus Texandrii is the flat sandy area in northern Belgium and the southern Netherlands (fig. 1). It is a fragmented landscape split up into cells by numerous small streams. In between, there are small habitable sand plateaus, on which we find the medieval settlements and arable fields. Originally, these plateaus must have been covered with oak-beech and oak-birch forest. There is a great variation in size, and thus in agricultural potential, among these plateaus (fig. 10). While in some localities there is a single large plateau, in others the same area of potential arable fields is scattered over a number of small neighbouring plateaus, and in yet other localities, there is only a single small plateau. Naturally,
the size and the extent of fragmentation of the inhabitable sand plateaus greatly influences the settlement pattern and, possibly, the size and social organization of local groups.

After the middle of the third century, the region was almost totally abandoned. A short period of colonization occurred at the end of the fourth and in the first half of the fifth century, after which it was again almost completely abandoned. Cemeteries indicate that a new colonization phase occurred around the middle and in the second half of the sixth century. The cemeteries are small and colonization groups must have been limited to between three and five households. A lot of questions can be asked about the social composition of these groups, their region of origin, whether individual colonizing households were already related and/or developed a new group identity in this region, and whether already in this early phase the foundations were laid for a concentration of property that was visible in the late Merovingian and Carolingian periods.

The related settlement pattern is difficult to establish. Hardly any colonization settlements have been found. In 1988 and 1991, I had the impression that no nuclear settlements were involved, and that the colonists had settled in scattered locations in the forests on the relatively fertile sand plateaus. I also hypothesized that they constantly moved the farmsteads so that individual settlement sites consist of only a few traces and a few sherds, and thus are hard to discover. Such a pattern of wandering settlements looks rather prehistoric.

Recently, a confirmation for this supposition was found near the town of Breda, where traces of early medieval habitation were found in a large excavation area. Although the remains of buildings were not very well preserved – traces of only a few houses and outbuildings were found – the lower parts of the wells were. Sixteen wells were found, twelve with a square construction of planks, two with a hollowed-out tree trunk and, surpris-ingly, two with shafts of one or more barrels. Often, we can date these dendrochronologically. In Breda, a series of eight dendrochronological dates are available (fig. 2). They range from AD 471 ± 6 to AD 610 ± 6 years. The habitation, however, seems to continue into the seventh century. Eight wells are not dated. They may date from the seventh century or be contemporary to the dated wells. It is interesting to see that in the sample of dated wells hardly any contemporary wells are present. Is this a coincidence?

The average time distance between the wells after 528 is 23 years. If we continue the series into the seventh century with this interval, wells were also built around 633, 656, 679 and possibly 702. This means that another four wells must be contemporary to the ones in the whole series from the end of the fifth to the end of the seventh century. They might either be reutilizations of collapsed wells on the same farmstead (which occurs in the settlement of Geldrop) or indicate the presence of two coeval farmsteads. This is based on the knowledge that in this region usually each farmstead had its own well.

In the westernmost part of the area (north-west of Antwerp), colonization started somewhat earlier, that is, end of fifth/early sixth century.


R. Berkvens/E. Tuycke, “Nederzettingssporren uit de Vroege Middeleeuwen.” My interpretation of the settlement pattern differs from that of the excavators. In a future contribution (F. Theuws, in prep “The colonization of the pagus Texandri (c. 500-625)”), I will deal in more detail with the elements of the argumentation.


Neither of the hollowed-out tree trunks has been dated. These are very common in the seventh century.

“Farmstead” is used here in a very loose way to indicate a spatially identifiable agrarian unit.
In this model, each well has been replaced after c. 23 years. This might correspond to the life cycle of a single family or household that came into existence when the conjugal couple were aged c. 20, and continued to exist for a further 20-25 years. If wells existed for more than 25 years (e.g. 30-40 years) – which seems to be the case in Geldrop – then another model for the settlement pattern exists in which a new well (and a new farmstead) is created while the old one still exists. In figure 2, I have added a grey line of 30 years to the right of each dendrochronological date to illustrate this situation. To me this seems to be the situation to expect concerning the succession of farms. I have visualized this succession of farmsteads on the settlement plan in figure 3 by adding arrows from the earliest well (no. 1) to the youngest well (no. 6) in the dendrochronological scheme.

What we see in figure 3 is a settlement pattern in which one or, at times, two farmsteads are constantly on the move in a restricted area around a low-lying wet part of the landscape. Breda-West may provide us with a model of the early Merovingian settlement pattern of wandering farmsteads in the *pagus Tescandrius* (fig. 4). The model is a basic one (geared to the situation in which a larger cover sand plateau exists), in the sense that variations are possible according to local variability. It operates at two levels: the level of the individual farmstead and that of the co-resident group on a single sand plateau (two to five farmsteads).
This group creates a cemetery of its own, stressing its new identity on a local or co-resident level. However, they may have buried some of their dead in the cemeteries of the group(s) of origin (in the Meuse and Schelde valleys) and in the case of a highly fragmented landscape (such as in the environs of Breda) several co-resident groups inhabiting different identifiable coversand plateaus may have buried their dead in a single cemetery. This may be considered an indication that they considered themselves as a single local group. The fragmentation and size of coversand plateaus may not be a clear indicator of local group organization for the simple reason that groups inhabiting a single coversand plateau are too small to survive on their own. Marriage partners had to be found elsewhere. Kinship relations thus soon overlapped with the relations of co-resident habitation and descent, which must have been important in the first phase of colonization.

The emergence of nucleated settlements around the middle of the seventh century

The settlement pattern (and the associated social structures) changes to a high degree in the middle of the seventh century, when new nucleated settlements begin to dominate the settlement pattern at the local level. The best example is at Geldrop, although others have been excavated. The site had been occupied at least since AD 600, but around the middle of the seventh century a new settlement developed. This can be concluded on the basis of dendrochronological dates (fig. 5). A number of farmsteads are present, each comprising a house, a well, usually one or more outbuildings and, in five cases, also burials. All in all it seems that a new settlement is created consisting of several farm-

steads around an open space that is defined by the graves (fig. 6). They are probably situated at the border between the farmstead and the open space. The individual grave groups may define individual households; all together they define the open space and thus the co-resident group. A similar example is to be found in Dommelen (fig. 7).

A number of questions remain unanswered. What is the relation with the previous wandering settlements? Did the old inhabitants start to live in a single settlement or are there still ‘wandering’ farmhouses? The evidence uncovered at Breda seems to suggest this. The objects in the graves in the nucleated settlements suggest that newcomers were involved as well. Both in Dommelen and Geldrop many objects in graves have their best parallels in the middle Rhine area and in southern Germany, such as belts with multiple fittings, specimens of which

...
Dommelen Kerkakkers

Fig. 7. Dommelen-Kerkakkers. Plan with Merovingian and Carolingian structures (light grey: Merovingian structures c. 650-750; dark grey: Carolingian structures c. 750-850).

were found in two men’s graves in Geldrop. Moreover, in a third grave a sword with parallels in southern Germany was found. The ornamentation of the accompanying sword belt has parallels in the middle Rhine valley.

If we create a graphic model of the settlement pattern at the local level of

the relatively large sand plateau, it might look like the one in figure 8: a nucleated settlement the inhabitants of which bury their dead on the farmstead as well as in other places, possibly in the old cemetery, possibly at a place further away. Perhaps an isolated farmstead of the previous period still exists. Perhaps the inhabitants of neighbouring smaller sand plateaus formed part of this local community and buried their dead in the communal cemetery. Variations on the basic model are thus possible depending on, for instance, the topography and size of local sand plateaus.17


18 Again: the sand plateaus as such need not determine the size and composition of local groups.
Settlement research and the process of manorialization

Carolingian settlements

The layout of the nucleated settlements changes after AD 700/725. The open space is occupied in the course of the eighth century. What is significant is that the Carolingian farmsteads are less complex: they usually consist of a house and a well, and occasionally an outbuilding. Moreover, there are fewer farmsteads in the nucleated settlements – up to the point that 'nucleation' is no longer an adequate description – and the construction of the houses changes. No more burials are present in the settlement. And from this period on, although it might have started a bit earlier, new isolated farmsteads are again created, sometimes in areas where no Merovingian farmhouses are found; examples have been found in Geldrop, Weert and Breda-West (Huifacker)9. They seem to be scattered over a larger part of the landscape than the previous settlements, as the excavations in Weert show.

All these elements indicate that an important transformation in the organization of the economy and social structure of the local and the co-resident group took place in the first half of the eighth century. Written sources indicate that at the same time the first Christian cult places (basilicae) appear in the region. Arable fields are probably enlarged (fig. 9). What we cannot see, but what we expect on the basis of written evidence, is a greater differentiation in settlement types. We have not been able to excavate local centres with churches that might have a function as centres of estates. Moreover, we have not yet found any Carolingian cemeteries. Most of the oldest burials found at church sites seem to date after the middle of the tenth century, when a major shift from the as yet undiscovered Carolingian cemeteries to these new locations must have taken place. Thus, there are possibly two cemetery shifts: one around AD 700, and one around AD 950.

What we have established now is that after the colonization of the region, two important transformations in the settlement pattern took place, one

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around the middle of the seventh century, the other in the first half of the eighth century. This resulted in new settlement patterns around the middle of the eighth century; however, we know little about these patterns.

Written evidence

It is exactly from this last period that we have a number of charters in which aristocrats donate landed property to Willibrord, the bishop of the Frisians and abbot of Echternach. The aristocrats are probably at home in regions further south10. The property they hand over is characterized as

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10 This opinion is contrary to my opinion (F. Theuws, „Landed property and manorial organisations“) and that of Costembey (M. Costembey, „An aristocratic community on the northern Frankish Frontier, 690-726“, Early Medieval Europe, 3 (1995), p. 33-62). New research indicates that they are aristocrats from outside the region, and that they belong to the network of Plectrudis rather than to that of Pippin II (F. Theuws, in prep „The aristocrats of the pagus Texandrië and their networks“).
Further details are found in a line describing the appurtenances. Neither the brief descriptions nor the appurtenance lists are fully standardized. The property thus seems to consist of a number of agricultural units described as castrae, usually the number of mancipia matches the number of castrae. The owner of the property owns a sala cum curticule. This does not seem to be comparable to a manus indominicatus of the Carolingian age. It might not even be a farm, but rather a house and its yard where the owner could reside when he was present. The estate thus seems to consist of a number of loosely structured farmsteads in a loci (the word used to describe the place).

It is my guess that the mancipia are dependent in some way, although they are still relatively independent and run their farmsteads mostly on their own. One could say that the estate and the relations of dependence are activated when the owner or his/her representative is present and expects the dependent farmers to pay a tribute, which of course they had to produce beforehand (and keep in stock?). The functioning of the estate thus may depend to a large extent on the (occasional?) presence of the owner. The estate itself, as a physical unit, may to a large extent have been given form by the dependent farmers, and may not be recognizable as such in a topographical sense.

The estate may thus have been perceived in totally different ways by aristocrats and by peasants: the former may have perceived it as a taxation unit, while the latter may not have perceived the estate as a physical unit but as a set of obligations – which makes the early estate invisible to archaeologists. This may change in the course of the eighth century. Now the agricultural unit is the manus and from the years around 800 manus indominicati appear in the landscape. These are certainly large agricultur-

al units (not necessarily a single farmstead) in contrast to the sala et curticule of the late Merovingian period. The manus indominicati are run on the basis of dependent labour by mancipia, who are present at this manus and/or provided by the occupants of the manus. The manus indominicati have probably been reclaimed initially on the basis of the dependent labour of the occupants of the manus or are singled out of the existing arable land.

This means that a major change took place.

In late Merovingian times, the reclamations by mancipia probably enlarged their own castrae, while now they might enlarge the manus they occupy, but also a manus indominicatus on which, in the course of time, mancipia were housed as well. The manus indominicatus – being a new and probably a rather fixed element in the landscape (with church) – may thus have been an extremely important element in ‘naturalizing’ the growing social inequalities in the countryside in a way the more modest sala et curticule would never have done. But we have to be careful. The manus indominicatus may have come into existence as a result of, for instance, the choices the peasants made as well. Many of them could have chosen to do reclamation work and provide work instead of paying a tribute and providing goods or money. Moreover, in a situation of (possible?) population growth, working on the manus indominicatus could have been a way to escape the hardships of too large a household on the farmstead or an alternative for those who were not able to create a farm of their own or had no chance of inheriting one.

This would mean that in the transformation of the estates in the course of the eighth and the early ninth century, decision-making for the land was more centralized.

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34 The lands of this manus indominicatus need not form a closed block of fields, but may be intermingled in the landscape between those of the mancipia. However, in view of the scattered nature of the Carolingian settlement pattern it does not seem to me very likely that large arable fields (open fields) divided into many parcels, such as we know them from the late Middle Ages, existed in the eighth and ninth centuries in this region. Excavations of the settlement of Kootwijk in the central part of the Netherlands provided evidence for the existence of such open fields (H. A. Heidings, Maximal Settlement and Economy North of the Lower Rhine. Archaeology and History of Kootwijk and the Veluwe (the Netherlands), Assen/Maastricht, 1987, p. 75-100).

35 Because of methodological problems, it is very difficult to establish on the basis of settlement patterns of successive periods whether there is ‘population growth’ or even ‘agrarian expansion’. In a landscape with a mobility of settlements such as the one under consideration, it is difficult to establish whether a new settlement is a new creation or an existing farmstead coming from another location. This mobility, however, is not a feature specific to only this region.
sions by peasants could have been as important as aristocratic force. It could also mean that when work rather than goods had to be provided, they were able to bring a small surplus of the *mansus* they occupy to the market. However, the evidence is too scarce to analyse the *great* variety of obligations the occupants of *mansi* may have had and the choices they were able to make. Finally, it is important to realize that these transformations in the structure of the estate took place in a period (the eighth century) in which an enormous amount of land in the region changed hands from aristocrats to religious institutions, some of which were hundreds of kilometres away. This means that there was also a reversal in the movement of persons and goods. Probably the aristocrats came to their estate and the tribute they exacted was consumed on the spot, in short: the owner moved, the goods stayed. The religious institutions did not move; instead, the tribute had to be brought to the monastery. In short: the owner stayed, the goods moved. This reversal of movements of people and goods must have had great influence on the development of the Carolingian exchange system.

*The structure of estates*

Can we have any idea of the topographical structure of these estates? Yes and no. The description of the elements of the estates in the early charters is insufficient to reconstruct the estates. We tried to get some insight into their geography by using later evidence, which is a dangerous endeavour. Moreover, it provides us with only very static images: we know, on the basis of archaeological evidence, that settlements were constantly transforming and that the estate was developing and transforming as well. We used all kinds of evidence — parish structures, indications of landed property of early medieval landowners in the high and late Middle Ages, census registers of late medieval and early modern date of many religious institutions, place name evidence, etc. In some parishes, evidence of property (for instance, of the abbey of Echternach) is present up until the early nineteenth century. We know from the charters that they obtained it early in the eighth century. It took quite some time to identify all the place names mentioned in the early charters. We also used the pedological situation, assuming that the early estates were concentrated on the inhabited plateaus between the small rivers.

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24 F. Theuws, «Landed property and mortarial organisation».

25 This does not mean that the identified fields were the same as those in use around AD 700. There is continuity and change at the same time.

26 In contrast to other regions, the estates seem to have been split up only slightly before c. AD 1000, when they rapidly became fragmented. However, this may be a result not only of legal divisions but also of a phase of renewed reclamation after a crisis in the first half of the tenth century, resulting in different local property relations.

location to the north of the present parish church. The chapels were built near or in those nucleated settlements that were created in the middle of the seventh century, so we can locate them fairly accurately. What we cannot locate is the estate centre and primary church. A good example is Dommel. The reason why the chapels were built near these settlements is that they probably function as local but secondary centres (whatever their exact size) in a larger whole. That larger whole is probably the estate. We have excavated several of these secondary centres in estates, but — as said — we have never managed to excavate an estate centre.

If we try to make a graphic model of this situation, we get the image of a composite estate (see fig. 12), using the model of the settlement structure at a local level shown before and adding a basilica, which we know from the written evidence were there. One of the most intriguing questions is how, in the case of composite estates, the various local and co-resident groups were combined in a single estate. Was it a new creation or is the composite estate a transformation of an older situation? Were the estates given by the aristocrats around AD 700 already composite estates? Were they created in one go or were the various groups added in the course of time? Had the relations between these groups existed since the time of the colonization? The development of the estate is rather a merging of existing groups. The model also indicates that developments at the local level in the secondary centres may have no longer been determined exclusively on that level itself, which was probably the case until c. 725. However, our knowledge of the Carolingian settlement patterns is still too meagre to elaborate on this theme.

**Manorialization**

What can we say about the process of manorialization in the seventh and eighth centuries in this area? What we can show is the development of settlement structures in some detail. However, it seems impossible to equate the excavated settlements with units in the texts — such as the locus, the casata, the sala et curticle, the manus, the haka and the manus indominicus. What is a settlement such as Gekrop or Dommel, what are the identified farmsteads? What are the isolated farmsteads of the Carolingian period? Are they manus or is a settlement as a whole — such as Gekrop with only two or three Carolingian farmsteads — a manus?

First of all, the estates of the late seventh century are not indicated as such by the donors. They indicate what is given as inherited property consisting of casatae inhabited by municipia and their wives and children, and a sala et curticle.
Another problem is that the settlement structure as revealed by the archaeological evidence seems to become less organized in the course of the eighth century; nucleated settlements become smaller, and farmsteads become simpler and are again dispersed over the landscape. All this takes place in a period in which the written evidence suggests that the bipartite classical Carolingian estates came into being. I find it difficult to correlate developments in the Carolingian period as represented in the archaeological record with those represented in the historical record. We could be tricked by the written record in which only a very limited vocabulary is used to indicate a multitude of forms of estates and dependent labour. The *mansus* and *mansus indominitus* of this region could be something quite different from that in northern France or the Rhineland. What is surprising is that a number of important monasteries – including some royal monasteries – are interested in having estates in the region. At first sight, there is nothing interesting in this relatively unfertile sandy area where in the early Middle Ages no monasteries or central places developed. Grain harvests will have been small, and there is no wine. Perhaps they were interested in the other parts of the landscape, the vast white areas on the map in figure 10 outside the sand plateaus, which are suitable for animal husbandry, and perhaps even excellent for breeding horses. To breed horses one needs vast stretches of flat land. Perhaps the reorganization of settlement in the first half of the eighth century was brought about by religious institutions in order to adapt their newly won property to the needs of animal husbandry or even horse breeding. We do not know. We have to realize that the *mansus indominitus* was introduced long after the estates fell into the hands of the religious institutions.

So, two different transformations may have occurred, one after the donation of the lands to religious institutions, the other with the introduction of the *mansus indominitus*. The latter we cannot observe clearly as archaeologists. This could be a break with the agricultural system of the Merovingian period. We have to ask in what way an estate specializing in animal husbandry is organized differently from one specializing in arable farming, and we have to ask how movements of surpluses, producers and consumers change. We do not know yet. What we do know is that the archaeological evidence warns us against creating simple models of manorialization for a period in which local dwellers, aristocrats, religious institutions, local groups, co-resident groups, descent groups, kin groups, religious communities and age groups compete and negotiate in creating rural society in the context of changing property relations and changing agricultural systems.
Epilogue: words and house plans

The different perceptions of the landscape held by aristocrats and by peasants may be one of the main reasons why it is difficult to relate words in charters to settlement and house plans. Different landscapes may be present in a single environment. The wording of the charters will be related to the aristocrats' focus on tribute extraction and on maintaining and reproducing the social relations of dependency. They might not be interested in the exact size of the *cavae*, new reclamations by dwellers or other local activities as long as those dwellers pay the tribute due. The local landscape may be created by the dwellers without much reference to what the estate was (rather a set of obligations that a specifically organized spatial whole). However, the *sala con cortile* (which the *municipio* were probably to keep up) made the owner symbolically present. As said, this changes with the introduction of the *mansus indominicus* in the late eighth century. With it, the owner (whether a lay person or a religious institution) was ever present not only symbolically but also economically. With the introduction of the *mansus indominicus*, the owner’s involvement in the spatial organization of the landscape will have increased (through his/her representative). Thus, the aristocrat’s and the dwellers’ landscapes came to overlap more than they did in the seventh and the early eighth century. Devroey expects that a ‘ruralization’ of the elite took place in this period (eighth and ninth centuries). I would say that at the same time, an elitization of the rural landscape and world took place. The *mansus indominicus* was the tangible and symbolic element of this process par excellence. Its permanent presence also helped to ‘naturalize’ the resulting growing social inequalities in the countryside. However strange this may sound, the local dwellers may have (happily) cooperated in creating them because of perceived opportunities or perceived surplus opportunities in relation to the own farmstead. One of the opinions in the debate on the problem mentioned in the first line of this article is that the transformation of the rural world in Carolingian times may thus not have been a one-way, top-down elite operation.

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MARCO VALENTI

La Toscana prima e dopo il 774.
I segni delle aristocrazie in ambito urbano e rurale.

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La Toscana prima del 774: i quadri istituzionali e politici

L’occupazione longobarda, focalizzata da subito sulle città, per la maggior parte in crisi dall’età tardoantica, dette luogo ad una ridefinizione degli assetti e delle gerarchie urbane italiane; lasciò decadere i centri resi marginali dalla disarticolazione dei sistemi di confine e privilegiò quelli con importanza strategico-militare. La città, con il territorio ad essa legato, divenne per lo più l’unità circoscrizzionale di un modello amministrativo suddiviso in distretti (civitates, indicorias, territoria o fines), che ebbe un’applicazione più organica solo nel corso dell’VIII secolo.

Alla vigilia della guerra contro i Franchi, la Toscana risultava articolata in civitates con a capo un duca (Lucca e Chiusi, quest’ultima in decadenza dalla fine del VII secolo) e più spesso un gastaldo (Pisa, Pistoia, Firenze con Fiesole, Volterra, Siena con Arezzo, Roselle e Sovana). Conosciamo poi una serie di indicorias minori appoggiate su centri di difesa e controllo territoriale come i castelli di Surianum-Filettria in Lunigiana, Castrum Versiliana-Pietrasanta, Castellum Aginelsi-Montagnoso e Castellum Uffi-Valdiciastello in Versilia, Castrum Nocum-Castelnuovo in Garfagnana, castellum Pullicesini-Montepulciano in Val di Chiana.

La corona, nella progressiva ricerca di un’affermazione definitiva e nel tentativo di costituire, non sempre con successo, dei territori istituzionalmente ed amministrativamente solidi, elevò a funzionali pubblici, o indice del...