FAMILY POWER IN SOUTHERN ITALY

The duchy of Gaeta and its neighbours, 850–1139

PATRICIA SKINNER
University of Birmingham

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INTRODUCTION

The history of southern Italy is often ignored prior to the coming of the Normans in the late eleventh century, except for the moments when the peninsula impinged on the consciousness of the medieval rulers of northern Europe, particularly the German emperors. Recently, though, historians have attempted to treat the South less as an appendage of the rest of Europe than as a valuable area of study in its own right.[1] For varying reasons, however, no recent study has shed much light on the pre-Norman period, and pre-eminence in histories of the whole area is still held by works well over fifty years old.[2]

It is very hard to package pre-Norman southern Italy neatly into one study because it was a disparate area made up of several different political jurisdictions. The Lombards who had penetrated furthest South during the invasion of the peninsula in the latter half of the sixth century had coalesced into three Germanic principalities, Benevento, Salerno and Capua. In the territories remaining under Byzantine rule, Naples had become autonomous in the

[1] For example, *Storia d'Italia*, III: *Il Mezzogiorno dai Bizantini a Federico II*, ed. G. Galasso, (Turin, 1983); B. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1991); J. Decarreaux, *Normands, Papes et Moines* (Paris, 1974); the early part of D. Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (Cambridge, 1992) and H. Takayama, *The Administration of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (Leiden, 1993). Recent local studies of quality include P. Toubert, *Les Structures du Latium Médiéval*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1973), G. Loud, *Church and Society in the Norman Principality of Capua* (Oxford, 1985). On Byzantine southern Italy, V. von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien vom 9 bis ins 11 Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1967), and A. Guillou, *Studies on Byzantine Italy* (London, 1970). In general histories of Italy, the South perhaps tends to be treated as an appendix to discussions of the main developments in the North, for example, C. J. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy*, (London, 1981), chapter on 'The South'; G. Tabacco, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, 1989) integrates southern Italy, but fails to come to grips with the area on its own terms.

[2] J. Gay, *L'Italie Méridionale et l'Empire Byzantin* (New York, 1904) is still the standard work of reference; R. Poupardin, *Les Institutions Politiques et Administratives des Principautés Lombardes de l'Italie Méridionale* (Paris, 1909); F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la Domination Normande en Italie et en Sicile*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1907); C. Cahen, *Le Regime Féodal de l'Italie Normande* (Paris 1940).

eighth century, and Amalfi and Gaeta would do so in the ninth. In addition to these, Byzantium still ruled the far South of the peninsula throughout our period, but lost control of Sicily to the Arabs in the ninth century.

Loyalties did not divide along these political lines, however, and even in areas of political control by Byzantium, the culture of the Lombards might still persist strongly, and *vice versa*.[3] In the area I propose to study here, Campania[4] and southern Lazio,[5] the interaction between Lombard and Byzantine can be seen quite clearly; and there was the added complication in this area of a persistent Arab presence.

Early in the ninth century, neither Gaeta nor Amalfi were states in their own right, both being subject to the dukes of Naples. However, in the middle of the ninth century both Gaeta and Amalfi broke away from Neapolitan rule. The expansionist Lombard princes of Salerno may have been responsible for Amalfi's move to independence, having briefly captured the city in 838/9. After this, Amalfi never returned to the Neapolitan fold, maintaining instead its existence as an independent entity with continuing close ties to its Lombard neighbour.

Gaeta's detachment seems to have been precipitated by Arab incursions on the Tyrrhenian coast, as the people of Formia across the bay took refuge on the easily defensible rocky peninsula. From 839 onwards we have documented rulers of the castle, later city, of Gaeta, known as *hypatoi*. The first, Constantine, and his son Marinus, visible in documents of 839 and 866, seem to have had links with Naples, and still seem to have been under the sovereignty of the larger city. In 867, however, a change of regime occurred, with the previously unknown Docibilis I taking power. His relationship with the Arab raiders, who were causing chaos throughout the Tyrrhenian littoral, earned Docibilis the censure of the pope. It may have been in recognition of Docibilis' break with the Arabs that he and his son John I were made *rectores* of the papal patrimonies of Fondi and Traetto, estates whose exploitation allowed the Docibilans to grow in power. The Amalfitans, too,

[3] For example, the case of Byzantine Apulia, strongly Lombard in its customs despite its Roman rulers.

[4] Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, has looked at some of the areas I shall be exploring. Her book, however, was somewhat limited in its coverage, tending to focus on particular aspects of Amalfitan and Salernitan history rather than synthesising the whole.

[5] Toubert, *Structures*, concentrated largely on the documents from Farfa for his work on southern Lazio. Gaeta featured very little in his study.

frequently collaborated with the infidel, and this seems to have been a foundation for that city's rise to a great trading power.

The tenth century was one of Docibilan domination over Gaeta. Naples, too, enjoyed continuous government by one ducal family. Amalfi's rulers were somewhat less stable, perhaps reflecting the intensity of internal competition in a state that could not support the ambitions of all the noble families there.

Ducal power ultimately relied on landed resources and family unity. The gradual diminution of the former and the deterioration of the latter in Gaeta led to individual branches breaking away and setting up their own, smaller power blocs in outlying castles in the duchy. Militarily, the duchy had always been relatively weak; this development served only to weaken it still further. Amalfi experienced a similar instability of rule. Both smaller cities succumbed to the expanding power of the Capuan prince Pandolf in the 1030s, and then to prince Guaimarius of Salerno early in the 1040s. Naples was also briefly taken over by the aggressive Capuan, but his rule there did not last long, and the ducal dynasty was able to resume its rule, continuing in power until the city fell to the Norman king, Roger, in the mid-twelfth century.

Both Gaeta and Amalfi were eventually able to rid themselves of Lombard rule, but the vacuum left by the Capuans and Salernitans only opened the way to a more dangerous power. The dukes of Naples had used a group of Norman mercenaries to enable them to regain control of their city. These soldiers seem to have rapidly become aware that the rulers for whom they were fighting were weaker than themselves. It took only the rise of a talented leader, Robert Guiscard, to begin to fulfil the potential of the Normans to take over from their masters. It is important to realise, however, that different groups of Normans were trying to carve out their own spheres of influence. When Richard of Aversa and his son Jordan captured Capua, they swiftly extended their dominions to take in Gaeta as well. Thereafter the history of that duchy is one of Norman domination via a nominated duke; Gaeta's history as an independent duchy was at an end. Meanwhile Robert Guiscard captured Amalfi, and set about extending his Tyrrhenian territory. The process was by no means easy, and the late eleventh century can be characterised as the point when the Byzantine empire realised the danger to its territories in the South and began actively to campaign to resist the Normans as a whole. The campaign was based at Naples, which successfully resisted Norman siege action.

The actions of the papacy can be said to have been decisive in sealing the fate of the Tyrrhenian cities. The popes were at best ambivalent in their attitude to the Normans, but in the wider political context of their contests with the German empire and the Byzantine church, they appear to have regarded the army of occupation to the south of papal territories as simultaneously a danger and a potential ally. The creation of the kingdom of Sicily in 1130 legitimised the rule of the Normans and led to the fall of the now isolated city of Naples.

This brief history, based on existing historiography, suggests that each duchy underwent a series of tumultuous changes during the three centuries under review. The following study examines these changes, and investigates the extent to which the internal structures of the Tyrrhenian states were able to withstand much of the upheaval. How stable was the political life in each duchy? How strong were the ruling families and what was the basis of their relationship with their noble subjects? Did those subjects in turn rely on their wealth, their birth or their place at the rulers' courts for their position in society?

In attempting to answer these questions, the study will examine and compare the three duchies of Gaeta, Naples and Amalfi. This is a departure from the established local historiographical norm. Many monographs on the three cities have been inspired more by civic pride than by a desire to place them in their medieval south Italian context.[6] After an initial group of studies on Gaeta which appeared when the primary source material was first published at the end of the nineteenth century, including excellent work by Fedele[7] and Merores,[8] Gaetan history writing languished somewhat. Apart from a thesis written in 1941 by Fedele's pupil

[6] For example, for Gaeta: D. Monetti, *Cenni Storici dell'Antica Città di Gaeta* (Gaeta, 1872); O. Gaetani d'Aragona, *Memorie Storiche della Città di Gaeta* (Caserta, 1885); S. Ferraro, *Memorie Religiose e Civili della Città di Gaeta* (Naples, 1903); G. Fiengo, *Gaeta: Monumenti e Storia Urbanistica* (Naples, 1971). The latter work reminds us that not only nineteenth-century writers felt such pride. However, one should not now overlook the more recent work of local historical centres at Amalfi and Gaeta. For example, the Centro di Cultura e Storia Amalfitana's *Fonti* series has been responsible for the publication of much primary source material used in the present study, and its new *Biblioteca Amalfitana* series has recently commenced publication with Giuseppe Gargano's *La Città davanti al Mare* (Amalfi, 1992).

[7] In particular, 'Il ducato di Gaeta all'inizio della conquista normanna', *ASPN*, 29 (1904), 50–99. This and Fedele's other major articles on the duchy have recently been reprinted in P. Fedele, *Scritti Storici sul Ducato di Gaeta* (Gaeta, 1988).

[8] M. Merores, *Gaeta im frühen Mittelalter (8. bis 12. Jahrhundert)* (Gotha, 1911).

Leccese,[9] little significant work has been done on the duchy. This is largely due to the fact that Margarethe Merores' history of Gaeta, published in 1911, has remained unassailably the first point of reference for all subsequent studies, and is still heavily relied upon today. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Merores used the documentary material intelligently to produce a detailed history of Gaeta from its origins to around AD 1200, and most of her arguments remain valid to this day. What Merores did not do, however, was examine the socio-economic structures of the duchy; her work concentrated exclusively on the rulers of the Gaetan territory and the ways in which they exercised their power. So influential has her work been on later historians that no one has questioned its purely political nature, nor made any real attempt to expand its picture of Gaetan history. A recent article by Jean-François Guiraud,[10] examining the population patterns of the duchy, promised much in its title, but unfortunately limited itself to listing the appearance of new placenames in the documents. No real attempt was made to address the problem of who actually lived in the new settlements. Guiraud concentrated on the rise of newly fortified places within the duchy to illustrate the failure of centralised ducal power. He thus returned to one of Merores' main themes.

In the present study, I hope to widen the focus of Gaetan historiography and use it to illuminate other parts of the Tyrrhenian coast. I shall be examining Gaeta to see the extent to which it provides a model of a small state, and comparing it with neighbouring Naples and Amalfi in order to determine the degree to which they were culturally similar. Comparisons of the type I shall make may have been discouraged hitherto by the disparity of evidence available from different areas, a problem which is discussed below. However, if we approach the material using a point of contact between the three states – the existence of traceable landowning or mercantile families – rather than trying to

[9] A. Leccese, *Le Origini del Ducato di Gaeta e le sue Relazioni coi Ducati di Napoli e di Roma* (Gubbio, 1941), tried to unravel the early links with both Rome and Naples before the ninth century, when much of southern Italy was under Byzantine domination. However, her work succeeded only in illustrating the ambiguity of Gaeta's position, and it is not my intention here to reopen a question which, because of the lack of evidence, cannot be satisfactorily resolved.

[10] J.-F. Guiraud, 'Le reseau de peuplement dans le duché de Gaeta du X^e^ au XIII^e^ siècle', *MEFRM*, 94 (1982), 482–511.

concentrate only on the ruling dukes and prominent churchmen, comparison becomes not only possible, but valuable.

It may be possible to use the documents of a duchy less than 50km by 25km in area to generalise about the social structures of southern Italy as a whole. Its very smallness makes Gaeta the perfect testing ground, for it epitomises the fragmentation of southern Italy and lack of institutionalised forms of power here during the tenth and eleventh centuries, the feature which strikes historians when writing about the South. If, therefore, we can analyse how one of these fragments worked from day to day, we may be able to make more sense of the whole. It must be noted that the study focuses on the formerly Byzantine enclaves on the Tyrrhenian coast. However, some of the methods used may be applicable to the Lombard areas of southern Italy as well, and could be tested, for example, on the copious archive material relating to the abbey of Cava near Salerno and its hinterland.[11] Huguette Taviani has recently published a monumental work on the latter city.[12]

The three states on which I concentrate did not live in a vacuum. They came into daily contact with their Lombard neighbours, and were in some instances influenced by Lombard practice. Gaeta was taken over by the Lombards of Capua in 1032, and the city's ambivalent relationship with its Lombard neighbours, and the parallels between this and the relationship between Amalfi and Salerno will be examined.

After an introductory survey of the source material available, the study is arranged in three parts. The first investigates ducal power and how it was expressed. It goes on to look at what happened when dukes lost power, and what structures emerged to replace the single ruler. We have a great deal of material available from Gaeta to assess how dukes ruled, what property they held and what functions they performed in their daily dealings with their subjects. Indeed, the dukes of Gaeta loom so exceptionally large in the documentation that it would be folly to attempt any study which did not include some analysis of their rule. I intend, however, to approach the problem from a different perspective.

[11] *Codex Diplomaticus Cavensis*, I–VIII ed. M. Morcaldi *et al.* (Milan, Naples, Pisa, 1873–93); IX and X, ed. S. Leone and G. Vitolo (Badia di Cava, 1984, 1991) (= *CodCav*) represent a new campaign of editing, although its future is in some doubt. The published documents go up to 1080; the remainder are still kept in the abbey of the Holy Trinity, Cava. Preliminary work on Apulia in the tenth and eleventh centuries seems to support the applicability of the methods used in this study.

[12] H. Taviani-Carozzi, *La Principauté Lombarde de Salerne*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1991).

Firstly, the origins of ducal power at Gaeta have never been examined in any great detail. Who were the dukes of Gaeta, and what were their origins? Was there any clear basis for ducal rule in place in this area in the late ninth century? We have rather less evidence from Amalfi and Naples to test them against the Gaetan picture, though both cities have been the subject of detailed studies[13] and both seem to have followed the same pattern of dynastic rule.

How then do we delve further into ducal relations with each other and with their people? This is the subject of the second strand of the study, looking at the great men (and women) of each duchy who lived near, served and married into the ducal families. I shall be looking at ways in which we can examine the hitherto unexplored way of life of the nobility and aristocracy in this area, and how they reacted to the events around them. In doing so, many of the internal structures of these states will come to light.

The noble families in all three duchies are well documented, yet have not been systematically studied before. My research has revealed the existence of a large number of wealthy landowning and merchant clans who, despite being politically active, have never featured in the political histories of the duchies simply because they did not achieve the position of ruler. How they created and fitted into political patterns, and how their economic influence may have affected the political balance, forms one of the main themes of the present study. Their relationships with each other, their property and their power, both political and economic (much the same thing, in this context) are examined in detail. There is interest too in looking at how the noble families viewed themselves, and how their identity changed with the passage of time. Such investigations have been carried out as a result of a new prosopographical analysis of the documents: much can be achieved if we know to whom people were related, with whom they did business and where they owned land. The genealogical methods I have used to build up family profiles have been profitably used on northern European evidence, but rarely applied to material from the South.[14]

Establishing landowning patterns has necessitated a reappraisal

[13] G. Cassandro, 'Il ducato Bizantino', in *Storia di Napoli* II, i (Naples, 1967); U. Schwarz, *Amalfi im frühen Mittelalter (9–11 Jahrhundert)* (Tübingen, 1978) (pp. 1–68 trans. G. Vitolo as *Amalfi nel Medioevo*, Amalfi, 1985); M. del Treppo and A. Leone, *Amalfi Medioevale* (Naples, 1977). [14] On the methods used, see below, chapter 4, section (a).

of the list of known place-names in the three areas. The third part of the study looks at the economic basis on which power was built up. Did monopolisation of land ownership affect the political make-up of any of the duchies? Figliuolo has argued convincingly that it did in part of Amalfi.[15] Was the political fragmentation of the area a cause or an effect of economic break-up? What part did the noble families play in the famed commercial activities[16] of the area in this period?

One issue which will be addressed is whether existing families, their property and their status were greatly affected by the coming of the Normans into the area in the eleventh century, or whether they remained undisturbed. Again, the experiences of the Tyrrhenian states could act as a microcosm of the whole of the South under Norman rule.

I hope to show from this examination of Gaeta and its neighbours that historians' attempts to package the South neatly into small, discrete states may be imposing an order on the area that never existed. Instead, the tendency of small states was to become even smaller, and even the Norman conquest may not have solved the 'problem' of this intense localisation. At the same time, even as political fission was occurring, the problems of daily life and property management faced by the documented population of each of these areas reveal notable parallels across political boundaries. This, I contend, is a far richer seam to mine if we are to understand southern Italy. We cling to dukes, counts and princes because there is little evidence of any other central power. Yet, if we juxtapose the histories of these leaders with the concerns of their leading subjects, we find more homogeneity and continuity of structures across political divides and beyond the Norman advance. By revealing these themes we could perhaps go some way

[15] B. Figliuolo, 'Gli Amalfitani a Cetara', *Annali, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici*, 6 (1979–80), 31–82.

[16] Amalfi's commerce has formed the subject of work by A. Citarella: 'Patterns in medieval trade: the commerce of Amalfi before the crusades', *Journal of Economic History*, 28 (1968), 531–55; 'Scambi commerciali fra l'Egitto e Amalfi in un documento inedito della Geniza di Cairo', *ASPN*, 3rd ser. 9 (1971), 141–9; 'Il declino del commercio marittimo di Amalfi', *ASPN*, 3rd ser. 13 (1975), 9–54; see also del Treppo and Leone, *Amalfi Medioevale*. A new line of inquiry has recently been proposed by David Abulafia, 'Southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia in the medieval Mediterranean economy', in *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean, 1100–1500* (London, 1993), essay 1, p. 17. He stresses the need for further research into other cities of the South in order to more accurately assess Amalfi's importance as a trading city.

towards explaining the political events which have already received attention and have led to the characterisation of the South in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries as an area of anarchy.[17]

[17] Tabacco, *Struggle for Power*, deals with the period currently under review, including the South in the tenth century, in a chapter entitled 'Political anarchy'.