1 Italy after Charlemagne
Scope and Aims of the Volume

Clemens Gantner and Walter Pohl

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

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

1 The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement No. 269591.
came from the main part of the kingdom in the Po Plain. We should mention the History of Andreas of Bergamo, a quite short text, and the rather obscure *Libellus de imperatoria potestate*. Both texts were written after the death of Louis II of Italy and did not have a broad impact. Italy thus remained somewhat detached from official Carolingian historiography. Carolingian rule introduced some momentous textual and administrative practices in Italy – capitularies, the Carolingian minuscule, counts, *placita*, to name just a few of the innovations. Nevertheless, in many respects, we may wonder how deep its impact on Italy really was. The position of Italian Carolingian rulers seems more precarious than in the core area of the empire. They were also depicted as quite weak kings or emperors, both by contemporaries and in modern research. The ninth-century kings did not become pivotal figures in ‘national histories’, much unlike the famous northern Carolingian kings Louis the German or Charles the Bald. In Italy, the only emperor of partly Carolingian descent to be counted as one of the early kings of Italy and thus as a ‘forefather’ of the Italian nation was Berengar I. Contemporary onlookers, too, like Archbishop Hincmar of Reims held the opinion that the rulers of Italy were no emperors, but rather petty kings.² Many north Alpine writers and commentators will have felt with Alcuin that real politics were made in the Carolingian places of power, far from Italy.³

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

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² For example, *AB*, a. 856, p. 73, and *AB*, a. 863, p. 96.
³ Costambeys, ‘Alcuin, Rome’.
⁴ Emperor Louis II, *Letter to Emperor Basil I*, ed. Henze, 388–9, writing about his uncles’ kingdoms: *In tota semper imperamus Francia, quia nos procul dubio retinemus, quod illi retinent, cum quibus una caro et sanguis sumus hac a unus per Dominum spiritus.*
Roman urban loyalist and imperialist. While his statement is thus true from a strictly legal point of view, it did not reflect the realities in the European political arena.

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

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

Drawing on these basic assertions, the second section is dedicated to the organization of the Frankish kingdom in the north. Stefano Gasparri looks at the easternmost regions of the realm, a territory that often seems peripheral to the interests of the rulers but was in fact very important to the Carolingians, who tried to get a closer grip on the duchy of Venice and Istria. To be effective, they had to build on strategies already employed by their Lombard predecessors, but had to refine and expand these to be successful in this region. Giuseppe Albertoni in his chapter then analyses the relations between rulers and high-ranking officers in Italy and their vassals. He detects different types of vassalage, which is reflected in the terminology used in the contemporary sources, and thereby provides important insight into the ways the kingdom of Italy was governed. Connecting with both texts, Igor Santos Salazar uses the two bishoprics of Parma and Arezzo as test cases and provides an in-depth analysis of their political fate during the latter part of the period in
question, when loyalties were often tested and the ‘right’ king to support was not always obvious.

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

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

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2 A Brief Introduction to Italian Political History until 875

Clemens Gantner

The Early Years

The years 773/774 brought profound change for the Italian peninsula. The Frankish king Charlemagne invaded the Lombard kingdom of Italy and succeeded in deposing the last Lombard king, Desiderius, who was taken into custody. Charlemagne, however, did not disband the kingdom – far from it. Instead, he had himself crowned king of the Lombards in Pavia.\(^1\) Pope Hadrian protested this move, as he saw chances to take over Italy well into the southern parts of the Po Valley – but to no avail. Quite to the contrary, Charlemagne managed easily to get the important Lombard duchy of Spoleto under his direct control – and he also established Frankish suzerainty in Ravenna and its environs, despite papal claims to the old exarchate.\(^2\)

There were many in Italy who were not content with this policy, and already in 776, the Franks had to put down a serious rebellion led by the Friulian dux Hrodgaud.\(^3\) While the insurrection could easily be overcome, it warned the Carolingians that they still had to establish their control over the peninsula more firmly. Accordingly, during his visit to Rome in 781, Charlemagne had his second-born son by his wife Hildegard (third-born overall it seems) re-baptized with the name Pippin and appointed the four-year-old as sub-king of Italy. This move brought two very interesting dynastical problems with it. First, the young boy had now received the same name as his oldest half-brother, later to be known as Pippin the Hunchback. This must have come as quite a shock to the older one, who still, surprisingly, remained at his father’s court for over a decade until he unsuccessfully rebelled in Bavaria in 792, and accordingly was removed from succession. Second, Pippin was given a kingdom, whereas his older brother, Charles the Younger, was not. The latter is more easily explained, as the

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\(^1\) Gasparri, 774. \(^2\) Noble, Republic, pp. 138–48. \(^3\) Krahwinkler, Friaul, pp. 119–43.
older brother was clearly to stay at the centre of the realm, close to the father. The information we have on Pippin’s rule is rather scarce and until recently he has received surprisingly little attention. Historians, however, have rehabilitated Pippin in recent years and shown that he, rather than being his father’s puppet, exhibited his own agency in his later years as king, starting from the time he came of age in the early 790s.

Pippin and his Frankish entourage were instrumental in the first years of Carolingian rule on the Italian peninsula. This can also be shown towards the end of his reign in communications with the papacy. It is crucial that Pope Leo III (796–817) felt the need to complain several times in 808 about Pippin to the latter’s father. The letter shows Pippin as not seeking the counsel or approval of the papacy for his actions and insinuates that his policy was also independent of his father’s. It likewise shows, however, that the pope expected Charlemagne to be able to make the young ruler show more respect for papal interests. These interests intersected with Carolingian ones, for example, in the principate of Benevento. The popes had been interested in establishing some kind of overlordship in that area since 774, maybe even earlier. The Franks, in turn, felt that they should be the rightful lords in the old southernmost Lombard duchy, whose rulers now styled themselves princes. Pippin tried energetically to establish the old northern suzerainty, but was ultimately repelled by Prince Grimoald III (788–806) – gaining quite a bad reputation for himself in the southern chronicles. Pippin likewise attacked Venice, a duchy nominally under Byzantine rule, but largely independent by the early ninth century. It was in the aftermath of his last campaign against the lagoon that he found his untimely death at about the age of 33 in 810 in Milan, dying of a fever he had contracted during the unsuccessful expedition. His death caused confusion on the Italian peninsula, as he had only left one son, Bernard, who even seems to have been illegitimate (see Chapter 9 in this volume for details on this transition). For the charters in Italy, Charlemagne resumed ruling the kingdom directly. He seems, however, to have accepted that his young grandson would succeed. Indeed, Bernard ruled as sub-king of Italy and continued to do so when his uncle, Louis the Pious, became emperor upon Charlemagne’s death in 814. When Louis, however, divided his realm among his sons in 817, allotting the lordship over Italy to his oldest son, Lothar, who also was promoted to co-emperor, Bernard must have

4 Nelson, ‘Charlemagne – Pater optimus?’. 6 Albertoni and Borri (eds.), Spes Italiæ.
seen his position as seriously threatened. He rebelled the following year, but was quickly forced to submit to his uncle unconditionally. He was ultimately sentenced to be blinded, but did not survive the procedure.  

The Reign of Lothar and the Establishment of a Frankish Italy

With Bernard gone and his minor son unable to rule, actual power in Italy quite soon fell to Lothar, who was in his early twenties at the time. At first, Italy saw a short period of interregnum, as the new ruler and the emperor himself were absent from the peninsula until 822. The official documents stemming from the 820s in general were issued in the name of his father, Louis the Pious. This has led to Lothar and his advisors being seen as largely instrumental to Louis’ policy. Indeed, in 822, Lothar was assigned his relative Wala of Corbie as his key advisor for Italy. In theory, Lothar was thus a mere sub-ruler in this very important region of the empire. The realities on the ground, however, were soon very different. We can for example see this in the relationship with papal Rome. In 817, the Pactum Ludovicianum still very much bore the mark of Louis himself and his inner circle. By the early 820s, the situation had changed. Despite the pact with Louis, Pope Paschalis I (817–824) had not allowed for much Frankish influence in the eternal city. In spring 823, however, Lothar was crowned as king of Italy and as co-emperor in Rome. On this occasion, he also heard a court case between the monastery of Farfa and the papacy – and decided in favour of the abbey. Once Lothar had left Rome, Paschalis had two high-ranking papal officials first blinded and then executed, which led to a veritable diplomatic crisis. Paschalis, according to Frankish sources, offered to clear himself of any participation in the ‘murders’, which was done accordingly. Interestingly, this event was held in the presence of imperial missi, but not of the young king. When Paschalis died shortly thereafter, the new Pope Eugenius had to accept Frankish terms: The Constitutio Romana was drawn up in 824 – and even if not all of its terms were implemented at this point, it gave the Carolingians and the emperor in particular far-reaching rights in the city of Rome. Most importantly, the election of a new pope could only be held in the presence of imperial envoys, and the emperor had to give his assent before the enthronization of a Roman pope.

The Constitutio was agreed upon and signed in the personal presence of Lothar. He was of course again carrying out his father’s orders and certainly not acting without advisors sent by Louis, but he proved to be a capable king during this crisis all the same. The Constitutio was also Lothar’s success. It expanded Frankish dominance in central Italy and in a way rounded off the Carolingian sphere of influence in Italy. Thus the 820s saw a decelerated, but steady expansion of Carolingian interests in Italy.

The big change was to come, however, in the 830s – and it was triggered by events largely happening north of the Alps. In 820, Louis the Pious, widowed in 818, had married his second wife, Judith, and a son was born of this marriage in 823, Charles the Bald. When it became abundantly clear that the youngest son would be allotted a sizeable share in the inheritance, the situation pitted the three older half-brothers – Lothar, Pippin of Aquitaine and Louis the German – against their father. The first rebellion in 830 had already alienated all the older sons, but especially Lothar, from the emperor. Lothar had been at odds with his father even earlier, when he was blamed for an unsuccessful campaign into the Spanish march in the late 820s. He then successfully rebelled again in 833. Louis the Pious was deposed and Lothar styled himself sole emperor – until his brothers deserted him and the counter-revolution brought Louis the Pious back on the throne in 834. Lothar was the only son who was permanently disgraced by the events. This caused his retreat, together with his closest supporters and advisors, to Italy – and it caused the subsequent concentration of all his efforts on this region, which he could rule directly.

This does not mean, however, that Italy was a kingdom in rebellion, as the differences never escalated to that extent: Louis the Pious did not attempt to deprive his firstborn of power in Italy, while Lothar recognized his father’s suzerainty in principle – for example, Italian mints still produced their coins in the name of Louis. There are several signs, however, that relations were very strained: Lothar continued using his full imperial title in his charters after 834 and he refused to obey summons to meetings due in Francia, of course always offering excuses as to why he was unable to get to the north. The reconciliation with his father had to wait until 839, when Lothar was also given back his place in Carolingian succession as heir to the imperial title.

The years between 834 and 839 then marked a period of intense Carolingization, if not Lotharization, of the kingdom of Italy. Lothar brought many of his close followers and their families with him to Italy. Despite an epidemic in 836 and 837 that swept away many of the leading figures, among them the aforementioned Wala, these families managed to hold on to power more or less directly, though some of them are at times hard to pinpoint.\textsuperscript{17} The invaluable work of tracking nearly all of them down has been done by Eduard Hlawitschka.\textsuperscript{18}

In his actions set in and for the kingdom of Italy (or the Lombards, as both names were still in use, see chapter 4), he was also aiming to allow as seamless as possible a transition to his son and main heir Louis II. Elina Screen analyses this driving force behind his deeds in chapter 10 in this volume. The young Louis, maybe fifteen years old at the time, was accordingly granted the role of sub-king of Italy by his grandfather Louis the Pious in 840.\textsuperscript{19}

Another great wave of influx of Lotharian partisans from the north followed in the years 842/843. This again had its causes in Carolingian politics: After the death of Louis the Pious, dissent about the hierarchy among the three remaining sons and the grandson Pippin II of Aquitaine had swiftly broken out. Military hostilities were unavoidable and saw Pippin II by Lothar’s side, fighting against Charles the Bald and Louis the German at the battle of Fontenoy. With heavy losses on both sides, Lothar lost this fierce civil war and once again had to retreat to Burgundy. In the aftermath of the battle, another group of Lothar’s supporters, who had already lost or were about to lose their lands in western or eastern Francia, respectively, moved to Italy. This situation was confirmed in the Treaty of Verdun in 843, that saw a partition of the empire into three realms (Pippin II losing everything in the process).\textsuperscript{20}

The example of one prominent family may help to illustrate the various phases of Frankish influx into the peninsula: the Guidoni, also Widones, named after Guy, who became dux of Spoleto in 842. Guy was the son of Lambert, count of Nantes. Both had been supporters of Lothar – and thus was among those who had to flee to Italy after 834. Lambert died in exile in 837, probably of the epidemic already mentioned. After 839, Guy had hopes of regaining or reclaiming his family’s holdings in Francia; indeed, he managed to get the monastery of Mettlach back into his possession. In the aftermath of Fontenoy, however, he was forced to relinquish his claims and was back in Italy, where he was obviously

\textsuperscript{17} Screen, ‘Lothar I in Italy’, esp. pp. 242–8.
\textsuperscript{18} Hlawitschka, Franken, Alemannen, Bayern.
\textsuperscript{19} Bougard, ‘Ludovico II’.
\textsuperscript{20} Schäpers, Lothar I., pp. 345–449.
compensated for his family’s heavy losses with the very rich and important duchy of Spoleto.21 He must also have proven reliable enough to be entrusted with this region, which had been notoriously led in a very independent fashion by the Lombard officeholders in the eighth century. Guy would still prove himself as a valuable asset of Frankish rule in the coming decades.22

It is important to note, however, that Lothar not only brought personnel to Italy and kept on appointing the first generation of supporters for his oldest son, Louis II – the Franks also imported parts of their legal system and their culture, as has been thoroughly analysed by François Bougard for this volume. Especially in the field of legal culture, Italy seems to have been an important hotspot in the Carolingian commonwealth, however separated.23

**Louis II and the Peak of Carolingian Italy**

Nominally, as already mentioned, Lothar had in 840 already asked his father, Louis the Pious, to install his oldest son, Louis, as king of Italy. For the earliest years, we do not see Louis acting at all in Italy, not even when his father was absent for a long time, fighting the civil war and negotiating the separation of the empire. An important event in 842 was certainly a Byzantine mission that reached Lothar in Trier. There at the latest, Louis was betrothed to a daughter of the late Byzantine emperor Theophilos (d. January 842), and Lothar may have concluded an alliance that eventually required Louis to intervene against Saracens in southern Italy and maybe Sicily.24 This alliance was probably concluded for the intermediate future, given that there was no Frankish army to speak of that could have fought in Italy at this point. Indeed, Louis’ first real act as king followed only in 844, when we encounter him at the head of a larger army of Italian magnates, sent to Rome in order to lend weight to Frankish claims of overlordship over the papacy, which had clearly been neglected in the swift election of the new pope Sergius II earlier in the year. This show of force made an impact insofar as the Romans swore a renewed oath of allegiance to Lothar. The pope also crowned Louis as

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21. di Carpegna Falconieri, ‘Guido di Spoleto’.
23. See, for example, the very interesting legal collection in the manuscript Wolfenbüttel, HAB Blankenburgensis 130, on which future publications by Stefan Esders should be expected. For the longevity, see Gobbitt, Lombard Law-Books.
24. See Gantner, ‘“Our common enemies shall be annihilated!”’, and Gantner, ‘Kaiser Ludwig II. von Italien und Byzanz’.