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Identities, Strategies, Mobility

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Identities

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Elites in the Early Middle Ages

Identities, Strategies, Mobility*

François Bougard, Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, and Régine Le Jan

The concept of social elites, which today is often defined in political-sociological terms, was not foreign to ancient authors, even though the word itself was not part of their vocabulary. In Soissons in 920, the major figures of West Francia distanced themselves from Charles the Simple, with whom they had sided in 898, on the pretext—according to Flodoard, a canon at Reims—that Charles refused to give up

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* This paper presents some of the conclusions reached during a collective program of research on "Elites in the Early Middle Ages" (2003-2009), which gave rise to the following publications: Régine Le Jan and Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, eds., *L'historiographie des élites du haut Moyen Âge* (2004), http://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article438; François Bougard, Laurent Feller, and Régine Le Jan, eds., *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Geneviève Bührer-Thierry and Thomas Lienhard, eds., *Les élites aux frontières. Mobilité et hiérarchie dans le cadre de la mission* (2006), http://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/spip.php?article197; Philippe Depreux, François Bougard, and Régine Le Jan, eds., *Les élites et leurs espaces. Mobilité, rayonnement, domination du VIe au XIe siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); François Bougard, Dominique Iogna-Prat, and Régine Le Jan, eds., *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400-1100)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); François Bougard, Régine Le Jan, and Rosamond McKitterick, eds., *La culture du haut Moyen Âge, une question d'élites?* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Jean-Pierre Devroey, Laurent Feller, and Régine Le Jan, eds., *Les élites et la richesse au Haut Moyen Âge* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); François Bougard, Hans-Werner Goetz, and Régine Le Jan, eds., *Théorie et pratiques des élites au haut Moyen Âge. Conception, perception et réalisation sociale / Theorie und Praxis frühmittelalterlichen Eliten. Konzepte, Wahrnemung und soziale Umsetzung* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

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his favorite, Hagano, a man of "middling" origins whom he had made powerful (*quem de mediocribus potentem fecerat*), in other words, equal to princes.[1] Another author from Reims, the monk Richer, states that during the election of a successor to the Carolingian Louis V in 987, the archbishop Adalberon made a speech supporting the Duke Hugh Capet against the Duke Charles, uncle of the deceased, on the grounds that he had lost his legitimacy by lowering himself to marry a wife "from the military order," *de militari ordine*.[2]

These kinds of classifications have prompted lengthy expositions attempting to draw out a socio-juridical stratification, but they have always led to dead ends. The arguments brought against Hagano do not necessarily imply the existence of an established category of *mediocres*, situated between the *liberi* and the *potentes* or *nobilissimi*, since Hagano certainly belonged to the nobility.[3] More simply, they suggest the existence of "middle classes" between the most powerful and the richest on the one hand, and the peasants on the other. As for the *ordo militaris*, Richer, a keen reader of classical texts, was probably referring to the Roman equestrian order rather than to the *ordo* of *belligerantes* dear to theoreticians of the three orders. Medieval historians have long been prisoners of overly rigid and often anachronistic classifications. For instance, since the laws of the Franks and the Lombards made no distinction between nobles and free men, the existence of a nobility in the early Middle Ages has been discussed at length. However other sources, whether normative or not, mention *nobiles*, *nobilissimi*, *primores natu*, as well as *illustri*, *illustrissimi*, *proceres*, or *principes regni*, terms which apparently refer more to function or to notability than to birth, but which in the end often prove to have been synonymous. In Germany, historians considered that members of a governing group did indeed form a "nobility" (*Adel*) founded upon birth and service to the king, and they focused on the origins and evolution of this nobility.[4] In France, in contrast, where the model of the ancien régime and the society of orders was so pervasive that the idea of a nobility existing without a juridical basis or privileges set down in law was unthinkable, scholars held fast to the idea of an "aristocracy."[5]

Today, historians of the early Middle Ages have come to agree on the existence of a nobility that gave prominence to its ancestors. In societies in which the state was structurally weak, this nobility resembled neither the Roman version,[6] nor

1. *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 919-966*, trans. and ed. Steven Fanning and Bernard S. Bachrach (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), 2A, p. 3.
2. Richer of Saint-Rémi, *Histories*, trans. and ed. Justin Lake (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), bk. 4.11, 2:221-22.
3. Philippe Depreux, "Le comte Haganon, favori de Charles le Simple, et l'aristocratie d'entre Loire et Rhin," in *De la mer du Nord à la Méditerranée. Francia Media, une région au cœur de l'Europe (c. 840-c. 1050)*, ed. Michèle Gaillard et al. (Luxembourg: CLUDEM, 2011), 381-93.
4. For a clarification, see Steffen Patzold, "'Adel' oder 'Eliten'? Zu den Chancen und Problemen des Elitenbegriffs für eine Typologie frühmittelalterlichen Führungsgruppen," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théorie et pratiques des élites*, 127-46.
5. See the remarks by Philippe Depreux, "Historiographie des élites politiques," in Le Jan and Bührer-Thierry, *L'historiographie des élites*, lamop.univ-paris1.fr/IMG/pdf/depreux.pdf.
6. See Christophe Badel, *La noblesse de l'Empire romain. Les masques et la vertu* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2005).

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that of the early modern period. Flodoard and Richer certainly echoed arguments presented against Hagano by the princes, for the distinction between *principes-maiores* and *mediocres* was useful to the former in their efforts to distinguish themselves from the latter.[7] Above all, the episode reported by Flodoard reveals the profound changes then taking place in the relationship between the sovereign and the princes: functioning as a kind of "coterie of equals,"[8] this group took upon themselves the right to decide who could or could not be part of the king's council, thus challenging his right to choose counselors from outside of their circle. From that point on, he was transformed into a mere *primus inter pares*. As for Adalberon's support for Hugh Capet, this can be explained in part by the archbishop's hatred of the duke's allies, the counts of Louvain and of Namur, who had defeated and imprisoned his brother Godfrey (known as "the Captive") in Verdun in 985.[9] Evidently, the "military" origins of Duke Charles's wife were a mere pretext, and did not prevent the Emperor Otto II from making Charles a duke, nor Otto III from choosing the couple's son to be Duke of Lower Lotharingia in 1001, nor their daughters from making extremely advantageous marriages.

The only classification recognized in law was that opposing freemen to the unfree; yet even this distinction was often vague, especially when one wanted to quibble about the personal status of peasants in order to make charges brought against them seem more serious. This does not mean that contemporaries did not play on the terminology, but they did so in ways that did not necessarily seek to reflect the social reality of the period. While the notion of *ordo* was indeed present in the writings of the Church Fathers, who used it to distinguish clerics, keepers of the holy ministry and successors to the apostles, from laymen, the closeness of the ties between them meant that the separation of the two orders was not a social fact—at least until the Carolingian period. Composed of three different terms (monks, clerics, and laymen) the ideology of the orders took into account the development of a special category, that of the monks, who were distinguished from clerics and laymen by their chaste way of life and their specific responsibilities related to the ministry of prayer. This "bipartite-tripartite" division was based on a hierarchy of statuses that in no way guaranteed the preeminence of the elites: at the top were the chaste and the continent, beneath them married laymen. As for the division into three "functional" orders, which emerged in written discourse during the third quarter of the ninth century, this had more to do with an ideal and was above all grounded on a system of reciprocal services during the wait for

7. On the *mediocres* and the middle classes, see Giles Constable, "Was There a Medieval Middle Class? *Mediocres (Mediani, Medii)* in the Middle Ages," in *Portraits of Medieval and Renaissance Living: Essays in Memory of David Herlihy*, ed. Samuel K. Cohn Jr. and Steven A. Epstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 301-23.
8. In the terms of Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 136.
9. Régine Le Jan, "Compétition et affect. La haine est-elle un ressort politique dans la Lotharingie de l'an Mil?," in *Évêque et prince. Notger et la Basse-Lotharingie autour de l'an mil*, ed. Alexis Wilkin and Jean-Louis Kupper (Liège: Presses de l'Université de Liège, 2013), 159-80.

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the Parousia: the clergy guided and prayed, the warriors protected, and the people worked. The development of this new configuration in no way superseded other kinds of bipartite classification, no doubt more significant, such as clerics/laymen, powerful/weak, and rich/poor.[10]

The distinctive vocabulary of the early Middle Ages was thus linked to notability and did not have an absolute meaning. The words were used in the superlative, and combined with comparatives such as *meliores*, *maiores*, *mediocres*, *minores*, and so on. Though it is foreign to this vocabulary, the notion of elites is nevertheless useful in this context to grasp the different levels and social groups. However, it is necessary to specify what is understood by this term, lest we quickly come to regret "the vagueness of these phenomena, which is not only due to the inadequacy of the historian's tool set but also to the more or less vague historical realities to which the term 'elites' refers."[11] The definition that has guided our thinking is drawn from political sociology. Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1951) argued that every society produces a ruling minority that concentrates wealth and prestige, thus forming an elite that is by its very essence linked to power. Pareto was mainly referring to a ruling elite, and in the long run his definition has proved too simplistic for modern societies. Further reflection has led to a wider and more varied definition of elites, incorporating all those who enjoyed a high social position within their community through their fortune, their power, and their culture.[12] As in other periods and in other societies, this position could be inherited and reflected from birth in one's name; it could also be acquired by marriage or alliance, through the possession of property (or more generally of wealth), through learning, through the holding of office, or through the favor of the prince. None of these criteria was exclusive of the others, and they were most valuable when they were combined. Elite status was never definitively acquired and depended on recognition from those who were not part of the elite as well as one's "equals" or peers, but also by the authority granting legitimacy, when such an institution existed.[13] The elites thus had their own hierarchy, determined by their social status and dominant position. Within this structure, a series of gradations formed dividing lines that were not always easy to distinguish, separating, for example, innate notability and notability obtained from an inferior status, or

10. Hans-Werner Goetz, "Les *ordines* dans la théorie médiévale de la société: un modèle hiérarchique?," in Bougard, Iogna-Prat, and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale*, 221-36.
11. Jacques Le Goff, "Tentative de conclusions," in *Les élites urbaines au Moyen Âge. XXVIIe Congrès de la SHMESP (Rome, mai 1996)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997), 443-56, here p. 443.
12. Régine Le Jan, introduction to Le Jan and Bührer-Thierry, *L'historiographie des élites*, http://lamop.univ-paris1.fr/IMG/pdf/introduction.pdf; Laurent Feller, "Crises et renouvellements des élites au haut Moyen Âge: mutations ou ajustements des structures?," introduction to Bougard, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge*, 5-21.
13. François Bougard and Régine Le Jan, "Hiérarchie. Le concept et son champ d'application dans les sociétés du haut Moyen Âge," in Bougard, Iogna-Prat, and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale*, 5-19.

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notability that took center stage and notability that remained discreet. The richness of this concept would therefore be greatly reduced if it were used only to describe the most easily perceptible ordered hierarchy of public positions, as this would mean underestimating the interpenetration of the public and private domains that is so characteristic of power in the early Middle Ages. It would also entail neglecting the lower, local levels of the elite hierarchy, which although the least well-known are those that ensured dominion over the people.

The notion of mediation as a criterion for elite status is very useful when it comes to grasping the entire hierarchy of the elites as a single entity and in a single movement, since it transcends the other parameters. Indeed, one of the main characteristics (or perhaps functions) of the elites was to make communication between different social levels and different communities possible, thus enabling various interactions between the legitimizing superior authority and the groups it dominated. At the local level, for example, the inclusion of "village" societies into society as a whole called for the help of go-betweens, mediators specializing in communication between peasants (who constituted the vast majority of the population) and the dominant elites, and this was true for every sector: religious, administrative, legal, and so on.[14] With the reinforcement of elite domination over peasants from the Carolingian period onwards, these mediators became more and more numerous, ensuring domination, ideological control, and tax collection.[15] The mediator's social importance from the point of view of the hierarchy can be interpreted by making a distinction, as sociologists do, between "in-group" and "out-group" mediators: "in-group" relates to a given group's practices and values, and also corresponds to the space it occupies; "out-group" designates everything that does not refer to the space, practices, and values of the group under consideration.

The intellectual tools developed by sociology since the end of the nineteenth century, and then revisited by social and cultural anthropology, have provided historians with new ways of understanding the strategies developed by the elites of ancient societies to shore up their positions.[16] Studies on ethnogenesis and the construction of identities have enriched knowledge of the mechanisms of social reproduction.[17] Dialogue with archaeologists, who work on a large scale but over a very long period, has provided tools for evaluating the material aspects of domination in concrete terms and for explaining the diversity of hierarchies over time and through space. This has meant that scholars have had to take into account the

14. François Menant and Jean-Pierre Jessenne, eds., *Les élites rurales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2007).
15. On the reinforcement of aristocratic domination, see Chris J. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 168-203; on the role of mediators in the rural economy, see Jean-Pierre Devroey, *Puissants et misérables. Système social et monde paysan dans l'Europe des Francs (VIe-IXe siècles)* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 2006), 485-503.
16. Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VIIe-Xe siècle). Essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1995); Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*.
17. Walter Pohl and Helmuth Reimitz, eds., *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

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sometimes irreconcilable differences between results gathered from analysis of written and material sources.[18] Despite their difficulties, however, these interdisciplinary approaches have made it possible to revisit the sources in order to better grasp processes of distinction and social recognition. Some of these processes changed very little over the period and our discussion of them could easily be applied to other contexts on the basis of other examples. However, within the long early Middle Ages (the sixth to eleventh centuries), the Carolingian period shows signs of an increasing hierarchical organization that allows scholars to go into greater depth in their examination of the strategies that individuals and groups developed to strengthen their positions. Finally, studying the processes of social mobility can give shape to a chronological and regional perspective on the material, avoiding the static effect produced by the repeated expression "societies of the early Middle Ages." This resolutely pragmatic approach also aims to vary the different levels of elites studied, at least as far as the sources will allow—it is well known that the "upper crust" occupies a disproportional place in the documents.

Distinction and Social Recognition: Forms and Indicators

As in other periods, belonging to the elite in the early Middle Ages appears to have been less a question of definition than of perception, that is to say, of social recognition, and this means that the relationship between individuals' behaviors and their social status needs to be taken into consideration. In this context, practices proper to the elites were not a passive reflection of the position they occupied in the social hierarchy but, on the contrary, contributed to defining their rank in society. In order not to lose this rank, elites had to work at building up and reinforcing a social image, notably through an array of practices generating prestige and constituting a variety of modes of social recognition. This concept of a "mode of social recognition" incorporates a double dimension, both passive and active, in which social position is both demonstrated and constructed, and effectively leads to a behavioral definition of elites, as illustrated by Alain Duplouy in his work on the aristocracy of the archaic Greek world.[19] Social recognition was in the first place achieved through strategies of distinction, which are the foundations of a common consciousness of identity: individuals were required to share the same habitus as the other members of the group, the same significant behaviors that led to them being accepted as "better" by the rest of the community and as an "equal" by peers. These elements of distinction were not necessarily common to all individuals who made up the elite, as several distinct elite circles were superimposed on one another

18. Christopher Loveluck, "Problems of the Definition and Conceptualization of Early Medieval Elites, AD 450-900: The Dynamics of the Archaeological Evidence," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théorie et pratiques des élites*, 22-67, especially pp. 22-24.
19. Alain Duplouy, *Le prestige des élites. Recherches sur les modes de reconnaissance sociale en Grèce entre les X*[e] *et V*[e] *siècles avant J.-C.* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2006).

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without always intersecting (and, as we shall see further on, could behave differently), but they nonetheless enable them to be studied together.[20] It is likely that, at every level, the elites were conscious of themselves, had a genuine identity, and strove to be recognized as such by others. Beyond these general considerations, which as we have said before are not specific to societies in the early Middle Ages, it is necessary to examine the criteria that led to this distinction and this recognition, both on the part of their peers and of their subordinates. It is also necessary to ask whether there were elements or strategies that were common to all the elites, whatever their level, from the governing elites at the top of the hierarchy to the demesnial elites at the bottom.

Distinction was first a question of physical appearance, for the body, as the locus where different kinds of domination were applied and reproduced, displayed membership of a social group.[21] A useful example can be found in the story of Imma, as recounted by Bede. At the end of the seventh century this young aristocrat from Northumbria, left for dead on the battlefield and captured by the enemy, attempted to save his life by passing himself off as a peasant, but betrayed the fact that he belonged to the elite by "his appearance, his bearing, and his speech."[22] In this sense, physical integrity was probably a necessary condition for being perceived as a member of the elite. Jean-Pierre Devroey has remarked that "the peasant's back—that is, the back of someone who is unfree—is an introduction to the history of social institutions." The donkey, the pig, and the churl were all endowed with the kind of "backbone" that was good for working, for bending, and for receiving blows,[23] all of which were unimaginable for someone considered as belonging to an elite, whatever its nature. When in 675 King Childeric II ordered, in violation of the law, that the Frankish noble Bodilo be attached to a post and savagely beaten, he ended up inspiring such hatred that he was put to death by a faction of his opponents, along with his pregnant wife.[24] Not respecting the bodily integrity of members of the aristocracy, notably by inflicting punishments involving

20. Chris J. Wickham, "The Changing Composition of Early Elites," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théorie et pratique des élites*, 5-18.
21. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 190-218; Bourdieu, "The Peasant and his Body," trans. Richard Nice and Loïc Wacquant, *Ethnography* 5, no. 4 (2004): 579-99; Bourdieu, "Remarques provisoires sur la perception sociale du corps," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 14 (1977): 51-54. For a summary of studies on the importance of the body in Bourdieu's work, see Christine Détrez, "Corps," in *Abécédaire de Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Jean-Philippe Cazier (Paris: J. Vrin, 2006), 31-33.
22. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969; repr. 1991), 403. See: Wickham, "The Changing Composition"; Stéphane Lebecq, "Imma, Yeavering, Beowulf. Remarques sur la formation d'une culture aulique dans l'Angleterre du VIIe siècle," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 239-56.
23. Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, 303.
24. *The Fourth Book of Fredegar with its Continuations*, trans. and ed. J. M. Wallace Hadrill, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), 81-82.

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blinding or mutilation,[25] was long considered by these elites as an act of tyranny on the part of Carolingian kings and probably touched on the essence of what it meant to belong to this category.

Beyond the body itself, the rich apparel of the great—and even of the not so great, as can be seen in the Passion of Maxellenda, a hagiographical text from the ninth century—served as indicators of their social status. The lamentations of certain authors about the aristocratic way of life followed by important ecclesiastical figures leaves little doubt as to the luxury with which they surrounded themselves.[26] The use of silk in churchmen's clothing (aside from liturgical vestments) was condemned on the basis that the greatest treasures should be reserved for God's service: silk was the preferred material for wrapping relics, and was thus virtually part of the divine kingdom, just like the precious stones which served as the foundation of the heavenly city. Only the highest elite was allowed to own such material and to flaunt this ownership. However, it may be noted that in the West there was no sumptuary ban of the kind found in Byzantium, where there was an imperial monopoly on crimson silk, or further abroad in China, where yellow silk with gold filaments was reserved for the emperor, just as there was no explicit ban forbidding the use of the kinds of writing employed in the royal chancery. Here there was no code or established nomenclature, but rather a conception of what was lawful for each person according to his or her social status, specifically sanctioned by group recognition: when social distance diminished within the elite itself, it became necessary to invent new signs of distinction to maintain one's superiority.

However, the display of social status was also realized in the domain of culture, whether written or oral: culture is always a matter for the elites, as it functions as a tool for group identification, solidification, and even self-representation.[27] From the fourth to the sixth century, Roman elites defined themselves through two fundamental notions: their *libertas*, considered both as a religious and political category, and their literary culture, or *litterae*. While Sidonius Apollinaris distinguished the new Barbarian elite by their warlike characteristics, Cassiodorus attempted to include the Gothic elite within these Roman values.[28] Any discourse by the elite about the elite is based on models, and the ultimate model remained Roman, even though this was redefined and adapted to new circumstances. The mastery of mannered Latin writing demonstrated a will to form an elite group alone in its ability to

25. Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "'Just Anger' or 'Vengeful Anger'? The Punishment of Blinding in the Early Medieval West," in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 75-81.
26. Alban Gautier, "Quelques pratiques de distinction des clercs anglo-saxons. Condamnations et accommodements avec le siècle," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théorie et pratiques des élites*, 291-308.
27. Flavia De Rubeis, "Conclusioni: la cultura per le élites o la cultura delle élites, forme e funzioni," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 461-81.
28. Verena Postel, "*Libertas* und *litterae*. Leitbegriffe der Selbstdarstellung geistlicher und weltlicher Eliten im frühmittelalterlichen Gallien und Italien," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théorie et pratiques des élites*, 169-86.

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use this "royal-crimson language," and generated a real cultural and social elitism which benefitted the Gallo-Roman elites as late as the sixth century. However, the evolution of rhetoric in the Barbarian kingdoms also shows an ability to maintain the foundations of ancient eloquence while at the same time developing a greater flexibility in communication, thus progressively incorporating the Barbarian elites into this cultural sphere.[29] In this vast process of the Latinization of Europe, which extended even to its Slavonic, Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon fringes, the ability to gain access to written culture remained a distinctive sign of the elite and above all an instrument of political power. But this written culture was not exclusively Latin, it also promoted the construction of a written Germanic language that gave rise to the first literary works specifically composed for these elites,[30] even though on the margins of the Frankish world (most notably in Hungary), some of them had to abandon the marks of distinction belonging to their own culture in order to maintain their position within a new hierarchy linked to the adoption of a Romano-Frankish framework.[31] Through a set of varied tools, both individual and collective, culture can either unite or exclude: having access to the codes and knowing the references allows members of the group to define themselves as elites by distinguishing themselves from others. However, this process is not limited to written or scholarly culture, it also affects material culture and, more broadly, ways of life.

Indeed, it is important to take into account everything that relates to the elite way of life, which is better known since the development of systematic excavations of seats of political power, both on the continent and in the British Isles.[32] The emergence of an elite lifestyle in both secular and ecclesiastical contexts is particularly evident from the eighth century on in northern Gaul and in England, notably in the construction of "central places," monasteries or royal palaces, which attest to ostentatious consumption and the presence of exotic objects, but also to the exploitation of natural resources, to an abundance of beverages, and to pig-farming, pork being the preferred food of aristocrats.[33] Yet archaeology also shows that ways of life were not identical across aristocratic sites during a given period, nor did they all evolve according to a succession of models based on behavioral norms and leading from "tribes" to "chiefdoms," and ultimately to the state. Distinctions

29. Stéphane Gioanni, "La langue de 'pourpre' et la rhétorique administrative dans les royaumes ostrogothique, burgonde et franc (VIe-VIIIe siècles)," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 13-38.
30. Michel Banniard, "Niveaux de compétence langagière chez les élites carolingiennes. Du latin quotidien au latin d'apparat," ibid., 39-61; more widely, Dieter Hägermann, Wolfgang Haubrichs, and Jörg Jarnut, eds., *Akkulturation. Probleme einer germanisch-romanischen Kultursynthese in Spätantike und frühen Mittelalter* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2004).
31. Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Adopter une autre culture pour s'agréger à l'élite. Acculturation et mobilité sociale aux marges du monde franc," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 257-76.
32. Loveluck, "Problems of the Definition."
33. Alban Gautier, "Manger de la viande, signe extérieur de richesse?," in Devroey, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse*, 285-303.

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can be made between these different elites not only according to the quality of material found, but also in terms of their capacity to control space. Indeed, one can find imported goods, which were indicators of a certain degree of prestige, in small coastal establishments in the south of England, where the local elites were well placed to serve as intermediaries. Were these small commercial establishments elite sites? The question has not been settled.[34] Their inhabitants were of rather average status if one compares their limited ability to control space to the extended dominion of the elites of Flixborough during the same period.[35] The scale at which supplies were gathered, that is the control of space—whether wild or cultivated—must be considered a fundamental indicator of elite membership and an essential basis for privileged social status in the early Middle Ages.

This relationship to space was one of the elements on which domination was founded, but it depended on forms of spatial control that evolved over time: even though the implantation of certain groups can appear very ancient, the spatial inscription of elites did not necessarily produce a territory with well-defined limits. Moreover, these spaces of power did not correspond to political divisions and allowed the elites to distinguish themselves by their ability to master a "delocalized" sphere of action: the geographical dispersal of landholdings, which was a good indicator of the position one occupied in a hierarchy, produced a mobility that increased as one became closer to royal power and possessed an extended network.[36] It is all the more important to take this criterion of distinction into account since—contrary to the model in which a dispersed demesnial settlement with a high degree of mobility, characteristic of the early Middle Ages, shifted towards a local territorial implantation with a low degree of elite mobility from the ninth century on—it can in fact be demonstrated that even mid-level elites continued to distinguish themselves by using their mastery of distance to confirm their local domination, in France as well as in Germania, even though the construction of castral poles deeply modified the nature of this domination.[37]

The spatialization of elite power has always required a material basis, most often inherited, which provided not only the means of domination but also ways of legitimizing that power, notably through the control of the sacred. The ability to found a family church or monastery was obviously an important indicator of elite

34. Lucie Malbos, "Les emporia et leurs hinterlands en Europe du Nord-Ouest (VIIe-Xe siècle)" (PhD. diss. in progress, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne).
35. Christopher Loveluck, "The Dynamic of Elite Lifestyles in the Rural World, AD 600-1150: Archaeological Perspectives From Northwest Europe," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 139-70. More widely, on the site of Flixborough, see Christopher Loveluck, *Rural Settlement, Lifestyles and Social Change in the Later First Millennium AD: Anglo-Saxon Flixborough in its Wider Context* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007).
36. Régine Le Jan, "Conclusions," in Depreux, Bougard, and Le Jan, *Les élites et leurs espaces*, 399-406.
37. Florian Mazel, "Des familles de l'aristocratie locale en leurs territoires. France de l'Ouest, du IXe au XIe siècle," ibid., 361-68; Thomas Zotz, "Itinerare und Orte des Herrschaft adliger Eliten im deutschen Südwesten vom 9. bis zum 11. Jahrhundert," ibid., 173-88.

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status and the fundamental role played by women in this process is well known, from the daughters of the Frankish aristocracy in seventh-century northern Gaul to the abbesses of the great families of tenth-century Ottonian Saxony, via the lower and middling ranks of the Tuscan aristocracy in the eighth and ninth centuries.[38] Moreover, such activity was common, as illustrated by the example of the "Totone" family of Campione, representatives of a local elite.[39]

For all that, the heritage of elites was not limited to land, but must be defined as an ensemble of diverse possessions, sufficiently long-lasting to be passed down from generation to generation. These notably included all sorts of objects considered precious, that is to say, rare and referring to a superior sphere beyond any economic value. Gold, silk, gemstones, but also certain kinds of dishes, amber, ivory from walruses, and fur from the far north, were all no doubt among the criteria upon which a scale of values—whether real or symbolic—could be built, reflecting the hierarchy of the elites within the whole of society. These objects were not only hoarded, they also circulated through exchanges at all levels of the elite and helped demonstrate the social status of the person who put them into circulation, allowing him to be recognized both by his peers and his inferiors as belonging to an elite. The use that the elites made of precious objects also offers a remarkable illustration of the evolution of early medieval societies toward inclusion in an ever-growing whole, which characterized a Carolingian society identified with the notion of *ecclesia*. The destruction of a part of the wealth of a group or an individual in funerary ceremonies, a practice current at the beginning of the period, was a one-time investment, no doubt meant to impress contemporaries and to consolidate a fragile social position in a context of social tension.[40] Yet while the effect of such an act was immediate, it was also short-lived, limited in time to the survival of the oral tradition—even if this could itself occasionally be durable, notably through epic poems such as *Beowulf*.[41] Treasures buried in graves, however, were deprived of any visible existence and were therefore destined to be forgotten quickly. On the other hand, giving precious objects and part of one's wealth to the church ensured that one's position as donor would last for all eternity, through integration into the *memoria*. At the same time, it was important to enlarge the circle of those invited

38. Régine Le Jan, "Monastères de femmes, violence et compétition pour le pouvoir dans la Francie du VIIe siècle," in *Femmes, pouvoir et société dans le haut Moyen Âge* (Paris: Picard, 2001), 89-106; Gerd Althoff, "Gandersheim und Quedlinburg. Ottonische Frauenklöster als Herrschaft- und Überlieferungszentren," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 25 (1991): 123-44; Karl J. Leyser, "Die Frauen des sächsischen Adels," in *Herrschaft und Konflikt. König und Adel im ottonischen Sachsen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1984), 82-123; Marco Stoffella, "Donne e famiglia nella Toscana occidentale (VIII e IX secolo)," in "Donne in famiglia nell'alto medioevo," ed. Cristina La Rocca and Adelisa Malena, special issue, *Genesis* 9, no. 1 (2010): 85-106.

39. Cristina La Rocca and Stefano Gasparri, eds., *Carte di famiglia. Strategie, rappresentazione e memoria del gruppo familiare di Totone di Campione (721-877)* (Rome: Viella, 2005).

40. Régine Le Jan, "Prendre, accumuler, détruire les richesses dans les sociétés du haut Moyen Âge," in Devroey, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse*, 365-82.

41. Dieter Rolle, "Beowulf-Sagenheld im Feindesland," in *Ruhm und Unsterblichkeit. Heldenepik im Kulturvergleich*, ed. Konrad Meisig (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 2010), 63-74.

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to this social demonstration. By integrating themselves into prayer confraternities, which were multipolar and supraregional commemorative structures, individuals pursuing this strategy ensured that their social status would thenceforth be recognized by a larger and more lasting community—one that corresponded ideally to all of the baptized, both living and dead, but which at the same time allowed the boundaries of the groups competing for recognition to be defined.

There was, however, general competition between the elites for the control of space and of territories, and notably, in the Frankish world, for spaces set aside and measured out by the king, such as the *forestes* he later reintroduced in the form of *honores*, but also for donations and grants of immunity. The possibility of having such spaces at one's disposition contributed to one's ability to establish oneself in the elite hierarchy and consolidate one's social status. For that reason, while the elites mastered long-distance communication, an important medium for their network, they did not control space, which was instead an object of competition, negotiation, and exchange in a society articulated around multiple centers of political power.

Moreover, the elite was always characterized by its practice of generosity or "largesse," the ability to give without counting the cost in order to create social ties and to ensure a minimal amount of redistribution of wealth, which simultaneously helped to maintain social cohesion and the domination of the powerful.[42] We can observe a similar attitude in all of these processes, relating to "this practice of converting wealth into a legitimate right to command and to dominate, which is one of the ends pursued tirelessly."[43] Being part of the elite meant above all being able to convert wealth into power—in other words, the ability to achieve the social validation of one's property and, more widely, of all of one's actions. In return, it also meant using power to gain greater wealth by squeezing and oppressing the *pauperes*, by competing with equals, and by usurping others' property, including that of the king.

For one of the most striking signs of distinction among the elites in the early Middle Ages, and perhaps the one that best characterizes the period, was their privileged relationship with public power. In principle, the elites were first and foremost at the service of the king and/or God, and this held true at all levels. Even if local power was in the hands of an elite that was also local, in other words that had its own authority, all of them were theoretically in contact with the sphere of public power, which in one way or another lent them their legitimacy.[44] In the early Carolingian period at least, these local elites formed part of the cement that held the whole regime together via the symbolic connection with the court that was part of the administrative organization of Charlemagne's kingdom—for instance

42. Régine Le Jan, "Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Approche sociologique et anthropologique," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théories et pratiques des élites*, 69-100; Steffen Patzold, "Noblesse oblige? Se distinguer par l'emploi des richesses au haut Moyen Âge," in Devroey, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse*, 139-54.
43. Laurent Feller, "Formes et fonctions de la richesse des élites au haut Moyen Âge," introduction to ibid., 5-30, here p. 8.
44. Wickham, "The Changing Composition," 10.

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through the "collection" of wolf skins in royal forests.[45] However, communication became more and more difficult over the course of the ninth century, and this was certainly a contributing factor in the failure of the Carolingian political system.[46] These aspects are essential for understanding a society in which the elites distinguished themselves from the community while at the same time remaining part of it. There was, on the one hand, a model exalting the elites above the people, whom they were to lead and guide in order to fulfill the mission assigned to them by God (from the Carolingian period on, at least, the high-ranking elites had no doubts about this mission). On the other hand, there was a model of inclusion in the community. From this point of view, the society of the early Middle Ages corresponds to an anthropological model in which no greatness or honor exists outside of action in favor of other people, whether in the form of distribution of wealth or in that of service, in contrast to despotic societies where the entire community is at the service of the master.[47] Furthermore, this model also concerned church elites, who did not function as separate entities within society since the direction of the Christian people by the clergy implied that this institution was included in, not excluded from, the people and their practices. The bishop was a member of his community, differentiated by his behavior and rendered superior by his preaching; all of the clergy, at all levels of the church, had to show their affiliation to this status not only by rejecting certain practices, but also by participating in social activities, according to a subtle dialectic which led them to develop forms of sociability and consumption inspired by lay practices while at the same time distancing themselves from these very practices.[48] Until at least the Gregorian Reform, lay and church elites did not form separate worlds; they belonged to the same circles and often to the same families, shared the same values, and jointly ensured the service of the king and the service of God, collaborating towards the common good and the salvation of the Christian people.[49] This service in itself was one of the foundations of their social superiority and thus of their membership in the elite.

Hierarchies

On the whole, the various hierarchies, whether of prestige, wealth, or power, tended to merge together to form a single one, as anthropologists have observed in traditional societies where the economic is deeply embedded in the social.[50]

45. Janet L. Nelson, "Elites in the Reign of Charlemagne," in Bougard, Goetz, and Le Jan, *Théories et pratiques des élites*, 309-24.
46. Martin Gravel, *Distances, rencontres, communications. Réaliser l'Empire sous Charlemagne et Louis le Pieux* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).
47. Alain Testart, "Deux politiques funéraires. Dépôt et distribution," in *Archéologie des pratiques funéraires. Approches critiques*, ed. Luc Barray (Glux-en-Glenne: Bibracte, 2004), 303-16.
48. Gautier, "Quelques pratiques de distinction."
49. Le Jan, "Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Approche," 70.
50. Karl Polanyi, *The Livelihood of Man*, ed. Harry Pearson (New York: Academic Press, 1977); Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944; repr. 2001).

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Thus, under most Barbarian legal systems, the monetary evaluation of a man's honor according to his status was the juridical application of this logic: it was possible to compare the social distance separating the nobleman from the free peasant and the slave between one Anglo-Saxon kingdom and another based on the amount of *wergeld* attributed to them.[51] The texts promulgated to recruit armies operated in the same vein, ensuring that the availability of men and materials not only moved at the same rhythm as the power that wielded them but also introduced a distinction within the group of leaders: at the battle of the Trebbia, where Wido of Spoleto confronted Berengar I in 889, the young Alberic—"hope of Camerino" and future margrave of Spoleto—appeared, with his "cohort" of one hundred *milites*, as a *pauper* compared to others who could marshal several hundred or even several thousand men.[52] Whenever an aristocrat became richer than his king, he was suspected of setting his sights on the throne, as demonstrated during the famous visit of Louis of Provence to Adalbert "the Rich," *potentissimus marchio* of Tuscany in 910: "This fellow could more appropriately be called king than margrave; he is not inferior to me in anything, except in his title alone."[53]

At lower levels of the social pyramid however, where the elites and the people came into contact, distinctions were blurred. Using the Capitulary *de Villis* (ca. 800) to apply the criterion of in-group and out-group mediation to the large royal estates of the Carolingians, Devroey has observed the boundary line separating judges (out-group mediators) from the mayors (in-group mediators) who were their subordinates in the villages. This boundary was primarily spatial. The judge, who exerted a *potestas* directly delegated by the king, was at the head of a small territory made up of several *villae*. The mayor, for his part, was confined within the microregion around his village: "he must not have more land under his office than he can travel through in one day," stated the Capitulary, thus expressing the idea that his interaction with others was relative to his function.[54]

Distinctions related to space also intersected with social hierarchies, as can be seen in the differentiation of punishments: a mayor could be beaten if he failed to properly discharge his duties, while a judge merely had to pay a fine. The mayor, however, was distinguished from other tenants through his role, his wealth, and a

51. Walter G. Runciman, "Accelerating Social Mobility: The Case of Anglo-Saxon England," *Past and Present* 104, no. 1 (1984): 3-30, here p. 7.
52. "Gesta Berengarii imperatoris," 2.25-30, in *Poetae latini aevi carolini*, ed. Paul von Winterfeld (Berolini: Weidmann, 1899), 4:372.
53. Liudprand of Cremona, "Antapodosis," 2.39, in *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*, trans. Paulo Squatriti (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 92; see also 68 (1.39) for the explanation of Adalbert's nickname, with a neat equivalence between power and wealth: "Tantae quippe Adelbertus erat potentiae, ut inter omnes Italiae principes solus ipse cognomento diceretur Dives." (Indeed, so great was the power of Adalbert that he alone among all the magnates of Italy was surnamed "the Rich.")
54. Capitulare de villis. *Cod. Guelf. 254 Helmst. Der Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel*, ed. Carlrichard Brühl (Stuttgart: Müller und Schindler, 1971), cap. 26; Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, 495.

certain amount of prestige: he had others fulfill the obligations inherent to his status and he held a much larger amount of land. He was also in direct contact with lords and as such was involved in public rituals of interaction that were generally of a behavioral nature and which clearly demonstrated his position. Some of these rituals were part of the social routine, but others, such as those related to hospitality (providing room and board for the lord and his men, pasturing their animals, horses, and dogs), expressed forms of exchange that brought social capital into play, according to codes strictly controlled by the lord. We can thus consider that the mayor belonged to the lower strata of the rural elites. Since he was familiar with the rules of the game—which were unknown to other dominated actors—he could play on conflicts, rivalries, and competition occurring within his "small world," and, if he managed to expand his wealth through non-agricultural activities, he or his descendants could eventually develop strategies of elite distinction.[55]

Local agents of power such as judges, or at an even lower level, the Breton *machtierns* studied by Wendy Davies, were definitely out-group local notables, belonging to the overarching society while linking it to the peasant communities.[56] They embodied the ideal-type of the notable as defined by Henri Mendras[57]: they fulfilled a function that was at once social, political, and economic; they had personalized relationships over a given geographical area; and they made up a territorial elite with sufficient economic power and social influence to enable them to fill positions in the justice system and monopolize the role of go-betweens, arbiters, and guarantors in the life of their communities. They were well represented among midsized landowners, they supplied the bulk of military contingents, and both participants and assessors in the local assemblies were drawn from their ranks. These are the individuals that the sources refer to as *nobiles*, *optimi pagenses*, *boni homines*, and so on, depending on the period and above all the region. All these denominations reflected the same basic notion of notability and mediating power at the level of a community or even a small territory, and all the actors that they designated had direct connections to royal or ecclesiastical agents of a higher status. But the category they belonged to had blurred boundaries, since at this level the concentration of prestige, wealth, and power was nowhere near as clear as it was at the top of the elite pyramid. Some rural notables distinguished themselves from the rest of the population by their wealth, primarily accumulated through non-agricultural activities such as trade or moneylending. They might have acquired their prestige from their links to the past or maintain relations with higher social networks, even without exerting any official role delegated from on high.[58] Such

55. Ibid., 485-99.
56. Wendy Davies, *Small Worlds: The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London: Duckworth, 1988).
57. Henri Mendras, *Sociétés paysannes. Éléments pour une théorie de la paysannerie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976; repr. 1995).
58. Laurent Feller, "Les hiérarchies dans le monde rural du haut Moyen Âge. Statuts, fortunes et fonctions," in Bougard, Iogna-Prat, and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale*, 257-76, here pp. 267-69.

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was the case with Toto of Campione, for instance, who had become wealthy by producing and selling oil on the banks of Lake Lugano in the eighth century.[59]

Among the local elites, it is important to mention rural priests, who have been the object of several recent studies.[60] For a long time, their image was filtered through the accusations of Agobard, archbishop of Lyon, who in the ninth century denounced lords who freed their slaves merely to entrust them with the ministry of their manorial church, thereby gaining priests who were completely at their service but entirely ignorant of their duties.[61] The credibility of the archbishop's declaration has now been called into question, both through the contextualization of Agobard's position and through new research on the sociology of the rural priesthood in the Carolingian era. Like the Bavarian priest Atto at the beginning of the ninth century, rural priests often came from families that belonged to the local elite and held rural churches; they were only rarely drawn from their master's domestic staff. They received some training, enough for Atto to be able to write to the emperor to defend his rights, for instance,[62] and they shared a common culture with the local elites, bearing arms and hunting with dogs and other animals trained for that purpose, in defiance of canonical regulations.[63] They belonged to the same category of out-group mediators as the judges.

The ruling elites—the count and his immediate subordinates, the bishop and his archdeacon—also fulfilled a crucial mediating role, but they cannot be identified with the local elites we have just described. This is partly due to the social distance separating them from the vast mass of freemen, whom they never directly encountered and upon whom they could act only through intermediaries. It is also due to the nature of their power, which not only derived from a capacity recognized by the whole community as a result of their wealth, their birth, their prestige, or their local roots, but was also based on the delegation of power from "on high," and could potentially be exerted within any given geographical subdivision of the empire. These were therefore not local elites, even though they did tend to take root locally. Nonetheless, they played a crucial mediating role, since they formed the link between local networks and networks closer to the center of power and were the only group who participated in both kinds of hierarchies.

One level up, among the Carolingian *Reichsaristokratie*, for instance, one entered a different political plane, extending above the world of local and regional elites. Its inhabitants were tasked, through an enforced mobility, with maintaining

59. La Rocca and Gasparri, *Carte di famiglia*.

60. Robert Godding, *Prêtres en Gaule mérovingienne* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 2001); Charles Mériaux, "Ordre et hiérarchie au sein du clergé rural pendant le haut Moyen Âge," in Bougard, Iogna-Prat, and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale*, 117-36; Steffen Patzold, "Bildung und Wissen einer lokalen Elite des Frühmittelalters: das Beispiel der Landpfarrer im Frankenreich des 9. Jahrhundert," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 377-91; Carine Van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord: Priests and Episcopal Statutes in the Carolingian Period* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

61. Agobard, *De privilegio et iure sacerdotii* 11, ed. Lievan Van Acker (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 62.

62. Patzold, "Bildung und Wissen," 378-79.

63. Mériaux, "Ordre et hiérarchie," 120-22.

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communication channels between the center and the "sedentary elites." There was a dual threat here: first, for the higher elites that risked becoming disconnected from their local networks, thus becoming more dependent on the prince and therefore more vulnerable; second, for the prince, who ran the risk of failing to prevent these nobles from cutting off his lines of communication and acting as a barrier between him and the regional elites—a powerplay that the Carolingians eventually lost.[64] Here we can clearly see the value of analyzing the various levels of the elites, particularly those that continued to fulfill a mediating role and act as an interface, that is, those who remained connected to the "grassroots" level, or reconnected to it through the move toward locally rooted powers that characterized the period between the ninth and eleventh centuries.

The issue of tithes, currently the focus of major research, opens up interesting avenues of inquiry in this respect.[65] From the beginning of the ninth century until the Gregorian Reform, lay actors were closely involved in the levying and redistribution of tithes, thus helping to consolidate the domination of the elites over local communities. Participants acted as mediators at various levels, and the change in the scale of power structures during the tenth and eleventh centuries merely led to an increasingly local management of tithes and to a major growth in the number of actor-mediators, whether laymen or churchmen.

Consolidating Strategies and Group Dynamics

Maintaining one's status, not slipping down the hierarchy but, if possible, improving one's position within it, required the constant mobilization of resources in a competition that varied in intensity according to time and place. A prosopographical approach (to Merovingian or Lombard royal agents, to the entourage of Louis the Pious, to Carolingian counts in Italy or Bavaria, etc.[66]) can provide some idea of the strategies which developed, but the application of this technique to the early Middle Ages can prove risky, for the available information is often very fragmentary. Individual trajectories have to be replaced within their historical and documentary context, and are only significant as part of an effort to reconstruct group rationales that were largely rooted in kinship systems, which cannot be accounted for here.

64. Gravel, *Distance, rencontres, communications*.
65. See Michel Lauwers, ed., *La dîme, l'Église et la société féodale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), especially his introduction "Pour une histoire de la dîme et du *dominium* ecclésial," 11-64.
66. Horst Ebling, *Prosopographie der Amtsträger des Merowingerreiches von Chlotar II. (613) bis Karl Martell (741)* (Munich: W. Fink, 1974); Stefano Gasparri, *I duchi longobardi* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1978); Philippe Depreux, *Prosopographie de l'entourage de Louis le Pieux (781-840)* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1997); Eduard Hlawitschka, *Franken, Alemannen, Bayern und Burgunder in Oberitalien (774-962). Zum Verständnis der fränkischen Königsherrschaft in Italien* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau: E. Albert Verlag, 1960); Michael Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens in merowingischer und karolingischer Zeit. Eine prosopographie* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1986).

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In such societies, where power gave access to wealth and vice versa, land was crucial, since it provided the material basis for domination. The management of landed properties has been studied from several angles. While we have little information on lay lords, research on Carolingian monastic estates has disproved the notion that their administration was irrational and unable to generate growth.[67] They reveal a "value-oriented rationality" in the Weberian sense, which did not aim at generating profit but instead answered to moral and economic principles that constituted a real Christian economy. While greed and avarice were condemned, this economy was conceived in terms of a link established between Earth and Heaven, and provided both a basis for the administrative rationale of the monks and a legitimization of the power of church, both secular and regular, over property and men.[68] Abbots and bishops thus managed their wealth to the best of their abilities, trying to fulfill the needs of the community, to ensure redistribution for the benefit of the poor, and to enforce Christian modes of exchange. In the process, they participated directly in the elite competition, for the dynamics of landholding that were brought into play involved multiple actors, both churchmen and laymen, and also tended to mobilize land through inheritances, endowments, donations, or even exchanges or sales, all of which contributed to concentrating land ownership in the hands of the most powerful.[69]

The diverging devolution of property and the systematic division of inheritances meant that landed property was constantly under threat of disintegration throughout the early Middle Ages. Such practices were nonetheless suited to cognatic family groups, without roots in the land, whose main preoccupation was to ensure their own perpetuation as a social group with a memory spanning a few generations at most.[70] The presence of "female" property, used to provide dowries from generation to generation or transferred from women to the clerics of the family via diagonal channels of transmission from aunt to nephew, is one example of the strategies deployed to control and diversify the use of family property.[71] Generally speaking, the dowry given to a wife by her husband was only a danger if the husband died while the couple was childless, and only at the lower level of the pyramid.[72]

67. Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, 547-80.

68. Valentina Toneatto, "Élites et rationalité économique. Les lexiques de l'administration monastique du haut Moyen Âge," in Devroey, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse*, 71-96; Toneatto, *Les banquiers du Seigneur. Évêques et moines face à la richesse (IVe-début IXe siècle)* (Rennes: PUR, 2012).

69. François Bougard, Cristina La Rocca, and Régine Le Jan, eds., "Les transferts patrimoniaux en Europe occidentale (VIIIe-Xe siècle)," archival issue, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 111, no. 2 (1999): 487-972.

70. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*.

71. Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Des évêques, des clercs et leur famille dans la Bavière des VIIIe-IXe siècles," in François Bougard, Régine Le Jan, and Cristina La Rocca, eds., *Sauver son âme et se perpétuer. Transmission du patrimoine et mémoire au haut Moyen Âge* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2005), 239-64.

72. Laurent Feller, "'Morgengabe', dot, *tertia*. Rapport introductif," in François Bougard, Laurent Feller, and Régine Le Jan, eds., *Dots et douaires dans le haut Moyen Âge* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2002), 2-25.

Franks, moreover, tended to be miserly with their wives, granting only meager dowries at the point of marriage, though they could increase them later on once children were born. Lombard families did give more generous dowries to their spouses, but they were also willing and able to develop systems of redundant alliances over several generations in order to recover what had been given, with marriages between close kin more frequent than in Gaul or Germania.[73] As for the higher elites, whose dispersed family holdings were sustained by a flow of royal donations, the exercise of lucrative charges, and the oppression of the weakest members of society, they tended to use dowries to reinforce already existing affinities, granting wives holdings situated near or within their region of origin. This was the case for Galswintha, the unfortunate wife of King Chilperic I, in the sixth century, or for Ermengarde, wife of Lothar I, in the ninth century.

Inherited lands, which were treasured possessions in the anthropological sense of the term, were invested with the identity and memory of their former owners. Their symbolic added value was even greater if they had a fiscal origin, or were connected in any way with the sphere of the sacred. To maintain the identity and unity of a group of heirs, they thus had to be divided. As discussed above, Christianization provided the elites with a way of reinforcing their identity: they could mobilize their family properties in order to found churches and monasteries, which in turn became reference points for the founding group as long as it maintained its control over them. The family-held churches founded in the Rhineland or Thuringia at the beginning of the eighth century were divided with each passing generation, but their various owners still had to agree collectively on the choice of ministers, the material upkeep of the church, and its future fate. When it was given to the monastery of Lorsch around 800, the church of Saint Lambert in Mainz belonged to seventeen different owners, all bound through relations of kinship but without a common line of descent. The church of Milz, founded in Thuringia in the 720s, belonged to six owners when it became a monastery in 784. All six were related, but the divisions had been organized so that there was only one owner per group of siblings, thus limiting the number of coheirs while maintaining the common identity of all the right-holders.[74] Elites facing difficult times also used donations to churches as a way to put their properties beyond the reach of their enemies. After the fall of their duchy in 744, the surviving members of the ducal family of Alamannia gave their holdings en masse to the monastery of Saint Gall, where they still held some influence and from where they later recovered them. Donations of *precaria*, which increased substantially during the Carolingian era, were another tool that allowed less prestigious elites to withdraw part of their family property from the sharing-out process while still being able to use these

73. Laurent Feller, *Les Abruzzes médiévales. Territoire, économie et société en Italie centrale du IXe au XIIe siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1998), 459-502.
74. Régine Le Jan, "Emhilt de Milz et la charte de fondation de son monastère (784)," in *Retour aux sources. Textes, études et documents d'histoire médiévale offerts à Michel Parisse*, ed. Sylvain Gougenheim et al. (Paris: Picard, 2004), 525-36.

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safeguarded holdings over one, two, or even three generations; this system was on the whole quite similar to the one used for royal benefices.[75]

This mode of managing family possessions generated major transfers of property, involving all kinds of lands.[76] Some came from the king, but the idea that the donation of fiscal landholdings to the elites impoverished the royal fisc and caused the weakening of power in the tenth century needs to be reconsidered. The fisc had always been a flexible and negotiated tool, which was continuously transformed as confiscations, concessions, donations, and usurpations took place. What ultimately changed, sometimes very quickly depending on circumstances, was the king's ability to exercise long-lasting control over how it was used by local agents of power, and to reserve a significant part of its proceeds for his own use. A powerful king controlled the fisc, while a weak king lost the ability to use it.[77] Similarly, the vast movement of donations to churches, which continuously increased the share of properties in sacred hands, must be considered alongside *precaria*, concessions of benefices (often coming from the king), usurpations, and compromises, through which the churches lost the use of parts of these properties. Admittedly, from the Carolingian era on, bishops tried to control access to these particular lands more strictly, turning them into sacred holdings.[78] The conflicts that this generated should remind us that the Christian mode of exchange did not always operate smoothly, leading us to reconsider the excessively irenic view, presented in Anglo-American functionalist analyses, that conflicts over land were a source of social ties.[79] For the elites were constantly obliged to work towards obtaining new sources of wealth to the detriment of their competitors. From this global perspective, the Christian mode of exchange can be seen as a tool created by the elites in order to direct the transfers of holdings for their own benefit.

Moreover, research has brought to light all kinds of strategies for the accumulation of wealth. These strategies increased the power of the propertied group not only through the acquisition of lands but also through lending operations in which rural elites set themselves up as creditors, thus increasing the finances or property available to them and gaining even more influence,[80] or through the development

75. Laurent Morelle, "Les 'actes de précaire', instruments de transferts patrimoniaux (France du Nord et de l'Est, VIIIe-XIe siècle)," in Bougard, La Rocca, and Le Jan, "Les transferts patrimoniaux," 607-47; Philippe Depreux, "L'apparition de la précaire à Saint-Gall," ibid., 649-73; Laurent Feller, "Précaires et livelli. Les transferts patrimoniaux *ad tempus* en Italie," ibid., 725-46.

76. Geneviève Bührer-Thierry, "Formes des donations aux églises et stratégies des familles en Bavière du VIIIe au Xe siècle," ibid., 675-99.

77. Charles West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation Between Marne and Moselle, c. 800-c.1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62-63.

78. Gaëlle Calvet, "Les clercs carolingiens et la défense des terres d'Église (Francie du Nord, IXe siècle)" (PhD diss., Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2012).

79. Bruno Lemesle, *Conflits et justice au Moyen Âge. Normes, loi et résolution des conflits en Anjou aux XIe et XIIe siècle* (Paris: Puf, 2008).

80. François Bougard, "Le crédit dans l'Occident du haut Moyen Âge: documentation et pratique," in Devroey, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse*, 439-78.

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of specialized trades, as demonstrated by the evidence of glass manufacturing and metalworking excavated in the area around Montpellier.[81] At the bottom of the pyramid, however, where family property was most vulnerable to division and most fragile, the threat of losing ground was very real. At this level, one could not rely on the delegated roles from which wealth, prestige, and power could be so readily drawn further up in the hierarchy.

Indeed, one's position in the hierarchy rose in accordance with the power one wielded, since power begat wealth. Delegated offices were not directly passed down from father to son before the tenth century at the earliest, but these functions—and the resulting right to exercise power—were nonetheless part of the symbolic holdings that were jealously guarded by elite groups, and for which they competed in order to limit their peers' access and ensure the reproduction of their group. This should be qualified, however, depending on the kind of function and the period, since not all offices were equally attractive. In fifth- and sixth-century Italy and Gaul, bishoprics were monopolized over the long term by members of the senatorial class, and a considerable stir could be generated by a personal success story such as that of Egidius, who became a prelate in Reims despite not originally belonging to this class.[82] This was not the case in Lombard Italy, however, where the upper aristocracy linked to the king did not gain control of these offices in the three main centers of the church hierarchy (Pavia, Aquileia, and Milan) until the eighth century, a period when the Lombard rulers were progressively involving the bishops in the process of government.[83]

Sociological determinants played an important role, however, and holding an office was rarely enough for someone originating from the lower ranks of society to climb very high. In the ninth century, local functions did allow their occupants to accrue wealth and improve their social status, to create their own clientele and potentially develop the strategies of alliance that would allow a second generation to climb higher in the social hierarchy. Stumbling blocks quickly developed, however. Folcwin of Rankweil and Peter of Niviano were both *sculdassii* (lower-level local officials), in the Rhetian Alps during the 810s and the county of Piacenza during the 880s, respectively. They both exercised a certain influence well beyond the reach of their institutional responsibilities, but their prestige did not have lasting effects. At most, Peter of Niviano succeeded in marrying his daughter to a Frank, and even then it is unclear whether it was not the Frank who had taken

81. Laurent Schneider, "De la fouille des villages abandonnés à l'archéologie des territoires locaux. L'étude des systèmes d'habitat du haut Moyen Âge en France méridionale (V^e^-Xe siècle): nouveaux matériaux, nouvelles interrogations," in *Trente ans d'archéologie médiévale en France. Un bilan pour un avenir*, ed. Jean Chapelot (Caen: Publications du CRAHM, 2010), 133-61, especially 138-40, with the example of Roc de Pampelune.
82. On this figure, see Marie-Céline Isaïa, "Egidius de Reims, le traître trahi? En relisant Grégoire de Tours," in *La trahison au Moyen Âge. De la monstruosité au crime politique, V^e^-XVe siècle*, ed. Maïté Billoré and Myriam Soria (Rennes: PUR, 2009), 89-101.
83. Stefano Gasparri, "Recrutement social et rôle politique des évêques en Italie du VIe au VIIIe siècle," in Bougard, Iogna-Prat, and Le Jan, *Hiérarchie et stratification sociale*, 137-59.

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advantage of this union to escape his own economic mediocrity. Being a *sculdassius* was not a stepping stone towards new offices for oneself or social advancement for one's children.[84] The same could not be said, however, for the office of *gastald* (a higher-level officer, equivalent to a viscount) in Italy, a position that did provide the starting point for some impressive family trajectories—as in the case of the margrave Gandolf (930), count of Piacenza, whose father and uncle were *gastalds*.[85]

Some functions were probably more accessible than others, particularly those linked to the church, where individuals who did not have the necessary personal background could be incorporated into the elite if they were sufficiently cultured. However, this depended in turn on the power of the king or the prince to influence the nomination of bishops. With a stronger royal power, the prospects for advancement available through clerical offices and culture were better than those offered by public functions, as was the case in Germania at the beginning of the seventh century, throughout the first half of the ninth century, and during the eleventh century. As Charles the Bald reminded Pope Nicholas I, it was thanks to "the capacities of his knowledge" that Ebo, a former freedman, was able to obtain the episcopal see of Reims.[86] These kinds of opportunities were more restricted when the aristocracy took center stage, as was the case in the tenth and eleventh centuries in France: it was thus that the promotion of Hagano cost Charles the Simple his throne. But the question of whether culture could serve as a channel for social mobility can also be raised at the level of local elites. Priests ministering to rural churches certainly derived numerous social advantages from their cultural training, without, however, climbing very high on the social ladder.[87] In comparison, Italian notaries and judges seem to have been much more dynamic, if only because their group was by and large created ex nihilo, and its "invention" created a social vacuum that needed to be filled.[88]

It is thus possible to observe collective dynamics by reconstituting those of particular families and groups. This project should not be limited to the ruling elite, since it is possible to trace family trajectories over two, three, even four or more generations in middling social circles, as has been shown in various studies focusing on the region of the Garfagnana and the Casentino, on the Lucca plain, on the

84. François Bougard, "Pierre de Niviano, dit le Spolétin, *sculdassius*, et le gouvernement du comté de Plaisance à l'époque carolingienne," *Journal des savants* 2 (1996): 291-337, here 300-304; Katherine Bullimore, "Folcwin of Rankweil: The World of a Carolingian Local Official," *Early Medieval Europe* 13, no. 1 (2005): 43-77.

85. François Bougard, "Entre Gandolfingi et Obertenghi. Les comtes de Plaisance aux Xe et XIe siècles," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen Âge* 101, no. 1 (1989): 11-66, especially pp. 20-21 and 39.

86. Caroli Calvi, *Epistula 5*, Patrologia latina 124, col. 871C.

87. Wendy Davies, "Priests and Rural Communities in East Brittany in the Ninth Century," *Études celtiques* 20 (1983): 177-97, here pp. 191-92; Patzold, "Bildung und Wissen."

88. François Bougard, *La justice dans le royaume d'Italie de la fin du VIIIe siècle au début du XIe siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1995), 288; Bougard, "Notaires d'élite, notaires de l'élite dans le royaume d'Italie," in Bougard, Le Jan, and McKitterick, *La culture du haut Moyen Âge*, 439-60.

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duchies of Spoleto and Benevento, on the "Totone" family of Campione along the banks of Lake Lugano,[89] on Flanders, on the Central Rhine valley,[90] and on Brittany.[91] We can observe that perpetuating or advancing one's social position involved possessing wealth, exercising power, and mastering the cultural codes determining recognition, but that individually none of these conditions were either sufficient or necessary. Even personal impoverishment, particularly as a result of confiscations or debt, was only really crippling if one could not count on the backing of a strong circle of allies. The case of Rusticiana, daughter of the prefect Symmachus and wife of Boethius, seems to suggest that women, whose relational capital was limited by and large to their own family, were more vulnerable than men when confronted with difficulties. After Theodoric, the king of the Goths, had ordered the execution of her father and her husband in 524 or 525, Rusticiana succeeded for a time in maintaining her standard of living, even taking part in charitable activities in Rome. By 546 however, when the city was taken by king Totila, she was living as a pauper and begging bread from the Goths.[92] It was precisely this kind of downward social evolution that Paul the Deacon claimed to fear when, in 782, he begged Charlemagne to free his brother, who was being held hostage. Describing the pitiable condition of his sister-in-law, reduced to shameful begging in order to feed her four children, he evoked the decline into servile frugality that led her from *nobilitas* to *aegestas*, making a significant slippage from the social to the economic register.[93] Did he really believe in such a possibility? Even assuming that his brother never returned, Paul the Deacon was himself sufficiently well-connected to provide for his kin, as Hincmar of Reims did when he took his admittedly noble but "not very well-off" nephew (also named Hincmar) under his wing and eventually succeeded in making another bishop out of him.[94]

89. Chris J. Wickham, *The Mountains and the City: The Tuscan Appennines in the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Marco Stoffella, "Crisi e trasformazione delle *élites* nella Toscana nord-occidentale nel secolo VIII. Esempi a confronto," *Reti medievali Rivista* 8 (2007), http://www.retimedievali.it; Stoffella, "Aristocracy and Rural Churches in the Territory of Lucca between Lombards and Carolingians: A Case Study," in *774, ipotesi su una transizione*, ed. Stefano Gasparri (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 289-311; Simone Collavini, "Duchi e società locale nei ducati di Spoleto e Benevento nel secolo VIII," in *I longobardi dei ducati di Spoleto e Benevento* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2003), 1:125-66; La Rocca and Gasparri, *Carte di famiglia*.
90. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*; Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400-1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
91. Davies, *Small Worlds*, 176-78.
92. Hélène Lagarrigue, "Genres et pouvoirs dans les correspondances aristocratiques, du Ve siècle au début du VIe siècle" (Master 2 diss., Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2013), 191-92.
93. "Versus Pauli ad regem precando," in *Poetae latini aevi carolini*, ed. Ernst Dümmler (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), 1:47-48: "Illius in patria coniunx miseranda per omnes / Mendicat plateas ore tremente cibos. / Quattuor hac turpi natos sustentat ab arte ... / Iamque sumus servis rusticitate pares, / Nobilitas periit miseris, accessit aegestas."
94. "Patre nobis ignoto, nobilibus at non copiosis parentibus." Cited in Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*, 71.

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The permanence of one's status and potential for individual advancement depended on parameters to be found elsewhere, in the interdependence between the political, economic, and cultural spheres—that is, in each individual's social relationships, at the point at which horizontal forces (i.e., networks) and vertical forces (i.e., authority) intersected. It was not really possible to climb the social ladder alone, a point illustrated in the sixth century by the case of Andarchius. The slave of a senator from Marseilles, Andarchius read so much—Virgil, the *Codex Theodosianus*, and arithmetic—that he came to despise the patron who had educated him; at the first opportunity he joined the entourage of a royal officer, a move which in turn propelled him into the court thanks to recommendations and allowed him to obtain a public office. To strengthen his position, he needed to find a wife, and he attempted to pry one out of a powerful individual in Clermont. But the latter refused to give his daughter away to an upstart whose personal origins and financial background were unknown to him.[95] The story ends badly for Andarchius, hardly surprising considering that the author of this account, Gregory of Tours, was eager to denounce an upward trajectory that he found deeply offensive. All the elements had been in place: culture, a timely push from a well-chosen patron, royal service, and a marital alliance. Nevertheless, as soon as one component was missing, particularly the alliance, the machine ground to a halt.

Whatever tactics were used by the elites, the competition that developed horizontally between individuals and groups was regulated from on high by a superior and legitimizing authority. Up to the tenth century in Francia—and much later in the empire—proximity to the king was the key factor in promotion at the highest levels of the hierarchy of power and prestige. Such proximity guaranteed an increase in power and wealth. This was particularly true for the groups that provided wives to the Carolingian lineage, such as the family of Gerold or its Italian equivalent, that of Suppo.[96] Similarly, certain key positions in court allowed one to attract royal favor, with the expected windfalls for family groups and personal networks (Gogo in the sixth century, Gondulf under Childebert II, Matfrid in the ninth century).[97] Proximity to a count had similar results at the local level (Heccard of Autun and his vassals),[98] while even proximity to a mere local lord allowed those serving him some hope of transcending their legal inferiority through manumission.

95. Gregory of Tours, "Decem libri historiarum," 4.46, in *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover: Hahn, 1951), 1:180.
96. Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*; Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*, 212-13, 294 and 315; Innes, *State and Society*, 266; François Bougard, "Les Supponides: échec à la reine," in Bougard, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge*, 381-401.
97. See, respectively, Bruno Dumézil, "Gogo et ses amis. Écriture, échanges et ambitions dans un réseau aristocratique de la fin du VIe siècle," *Revue historique* 643, no. 3 (2007): 553-93; Gregory of Tours, "Decem libri historiarum," 6.11, in Krusch, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, 281; Philippe Depreux, "Le comte Matfrid d'Orléans (av. 815-836)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 152, no. 2 (1994): 331-74.
98. Olivier Bruand, "La gestion du patrimoine des élites en Autunois. Le prieuré de Perrecy et ses obligés (fin IXe-Xe siècle)," in Devroey, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites et la richesse*, 233-50.

At the same time, the room for maneuver available and the extent to which the hierarchy could be manipulated by a superior authority varied, depending on the period and whether the authority in question had abandoned its role as arbiter and was a direct actor in the competition. After the sixth century, the sources show that the king only rarely granted promotion to individuals from the lower ranks of society. This rigidity can be explained in part by the weakness of state structures, including during the Carolingian period. Indeed, both the case of Ebo, who was born unfree and became archbishop of Reims because he was the milk-brother of Louis the Pious, and the story of Hagano lead one to wonder to what extent Carolingian kings were able to pick their own advisers and to play on the roles and status of those around them. Admittedly, the king chose and invested the holders of *honores*, but the implicit rules of the game forced him to favor the elite groups, following the broad structures of inheritance, in order to gain their loyalty, while respecting the balance of power between them both at the court and in the provinces.[99] Up until the eleventh century at least, social prominence relied on connections that were primarily horizontal in nature, so that the weight of existing networks prevented any excessively rapid upward mobility, and at the same time limited the consequences of falling out of favor with the king.

Moments of crisis thus allow us to grasp the strength of the resistance developed by these networks when confronted with manipulations that were seen as unfair and tyrannical. In February 830, the counts Hugh of Tours and Matfrid of Orleans conspired with Pepin of Aquitaine and a few other notable clerical and lay figures (who were soon joined by Lothar) against the emperor, Empress Judith, and Bernard of Septimania. Even though two of Hugh's daughters had married members of the imperial family, he and his brother-in-law Matfrid had been divested of their honors, and both were threatened with the loss of their family holdings. Their fall was as remarkable as their rise, and concluded a period of intense competition both within the imperial palace and in the provinces. But they resisted nevertheless by mobilizing their networks against the emperor, and ended their careers in the entourage of Lothar in Italy.[100] Even without a leader and cut off from the center, groups could maintain their elite positions provided they had sufficiently strengthened their local base and built strong links with regional elites.[101] All this means that we must refrain from overemphasizing the consequences of the disintegration of central powers in the tenth and eleventh centuries for social mobility, even if the growing number of seats of power probably did increase the potential for upward mobility at the middle levels of the hierarchy.

99. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*; Le Jan, "Les élites carolingiennes et le roi au milieu du IXe siècle. Statut et fidélité," in *Völker, Reiche und Namen im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. Matthias Becher and Stefanie Dick (Paderborn: Fink, 2010), 335-46.
100. Régine Le Jan, "Aux frontières de l'idéel, le modèle familial en question?," in *Hludowicus, la productivité d'une crise*, ed. Philippe Depreux, (forthcoming).
101. As one can see from the examples of the Alaholfings in Alamannia in the eighth century (Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*) or the Williamites in the Midi region in the tenth century. On this last group, see Laurent Macé, ed., *Entre histoire et épopée. Les Guillaume d'Orange, IXe-XIIIe siècles* (Toulouse: CNRS, 2005).

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Social Mobility in Times of "Crisis"

The elites were permanently engaged in a process of redefinition and repositioning, which was essential for their survival. However, specific moments proved to be particularly important for certain individuals and groups because of the intensity and speed of the changes that characterized them. The best opportunities to join the elite, as well as the highest risk of being suddenly thrown from its ranks, occurred during these structural "crises,"[102] which varied in intensity and length. They therefore provide a good vantage point from which to observe mobility.[103]

Throughout almost all of the early Middle Ages, the analysis of mobility seems to fit with the sociological model that stresses the crucial role played by the process of differentiation—a characteristic feature in the development of Roman-Barbarian kingdoms which results in a greater distance between social extremes and therefore a higher rate of mobility, whether upward or downward, individual or collective. Above all, it foregrounds the broad demographic criterion that can be expressed in terms of a theory of "vacant space"—or, in more banal terms, of supply and demand. In his analysis of Anglo-Saxon England,[104] Walter Runciman showed how a number of factors came together to create a context where the overall supply of vacant spaces at higher levels could not be met exclusively by people from an equivalent social background: slow population growth, always at risk from famine, epidemics, invasion, external war or internal violence, or even specific reproductive behaviors[105]; economic growth providing opportunities for accumulating wealth through increases in agricultural production, in trade, or in craft production; and increasingly self-assertive royal, clerical, or seigniorial powers, promoting the development of new positions and roles. This is contrasted with a stable society that, settled within uncontested boundaries, sufficiently endowed with wealthy property owners and their dependents, with a fully-formed merchant class and well-developed administrative networks of all kinds, tended to evolve toward self-recruitment, restricting mobility to similar status groups. Chris Wickham makes fundamentally the same argument in his discussion of the criteria defining an "aristocrat": depending on the prevailing context, the importance placed on birth or on the memory of one's ancestors (the "genealogical" dimension) could either be paramount or, on the contrary, fade into the background, becoming less important than one's position in the official hierarchy or recognition by other political leaders.[106]

102. For this concept, see Feller, "Crises et renouvellements."
103. The analysis which follows draws to a large extent on François Bougard and Régine Le Jan, "Quelle mobilité sociale dans l'Occident du haut Moyen Âge?," in *La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo*, ed. Sandro Carocci (Rome: École française de Rome, 2010), 41-68, here pp. 61ff.
104. Runciman, "Accelerating Social Mobility."
105. See also the "stationary" model proposed for Italy by Irene Barbiera and Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, "Le dinamiche della popolazione nell'Italia medievale. Nuovi riscontri su documenti e reperti archeologici," *Archeologia medievale* 34 (2007): 19-42.
106. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 154.

This interpretive scheme could be relatively easily applied to the Carolingian Empire during the period of its expansion, in which the overall available wealth increased, or to border societies such as the area that would become Catalonia, which benefited from two successive boosts: the availability of land and the *aprision* (allocating of arable land to peasants), followed by the increase in metallic currency with the influx of gold at the end of the tenth century.[107] However, it is possible to present a more detailed picture through the careful examination of various crisis situations. The easiest to analyze are those whose roots lay in the political sphere. Wars, conquests, and coups, particularly those that entailed the replacement of the ruling elite, were clearly factors that accelerated social mobility, though their impact always remains difficult to quantify.

Periods of war provided fertile ground for threats to the stability of the elite. During the Greek-Gothic wars, Totila thus put pressure on southern Italy's rich and powerful by enticing the *agroikoi* with prospects of upward social mobility, promising that those who turned against their masters would be given their holdings; a proclamation that, while spectacular, did not have any major consequence.[108] However, whenever a conquest took place, established elites were always replaced at least in part. When the Carolingians took over Lombard Italy in 774, and throughout the following decades, they brought with them Frankish and Alaman officers who progressively replaced Lombard leaders, starting with those to the north of the kingdom. The extent of this change can be debated, since it only concerned the highest stratum of the leadership, at most a few dozen individuals. But the replacement of a Lombard duke by a Frankish count was not merely a matter of individuals trading places, it also implicated the groups linked to the given officeholder. Emigration from Francia or Alamannia may have provided an opening for whole families, or for their younger sons, offering them the prospect of more numerous, or even higher, positions. What of the vanquished? When they disappeared from the public hierarchy, did they also suffer from social demotion? This is far from certain. They did take a step back, perhaps into other careers (at least some of them became clerics), and they certainly became less visible, but did they really lose much economic and social ground? Their loss of fiscal holdings, held in connection with an office, and their political marginalization may have been compensated through a system of *precaria* contracted with churches, as seems to have been the case in the duchy of Spoleto.[109]

107. Archibald R. Lewis, "Land and Social Mobility in Catalonia, 778-1213," in *Geschichte in der Gesellschaft. Festschrift für Karl Bosl zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Friedrich Prinz, Franz-Josef Schmale, and Ferdinand Seibt (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1974), 312-23; Pierre Bonnassie, "Du Rhône à la Galice. Genèse et modalités du régime féodal," in *Les sociétés de l'an mil. Un monde entre deux âges* (Brussels: De Boeck université, 2001), 361-88.

108. Ghislaine Noyé, "Anéantissement et renaissance des élites dans le sud de l'Italie, V^e^-IXe siècles," in Bougard, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge*, 167-205, especially pp. 196-99.

109. Collavini, "Duchi e società locale."

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The situation in Lombardy may be compared to that in Bavaria and Saxony.[110] Even within Frankish territory, favoring some aristocratic groups rather than others, especially those from Austrasia, could generate imbalances within regional elites, as was the case in Aquitaine. Adrevald of Fleury's observation that the best part of the palace's manpower had had to be pressed into service in order to provide leaders for the Kingdom of Italy was valid in other cases as well.[111] However, the most emblematic case of elite intermixing was the Norman conquest of England, during which landholders were quickly demoted (the "tenurial revolution") and the Anglo-Saxon elite was evicted from the church hierarchy in order to make space for young Normans, often of obscure origin.[112]

Let us consider the consequences of the crisis that took place at the end of the ninth century in Italy and Western Francia. In Italy, the political and military unrest that accompanied the collapse of the Carolingian Empire generated significant movement within the elite, which lasted until around the middle of the tenth century. Several bloody battles (at the Trebbia in 889, pitting Wido of Spoleto against Berengar; at the Brenta in 899, where Italian forces faced the Magyars; and at Fiorenzuola d'Arda, where Berengar fought Rudolph II of Burgundy in 923) resulted in losses that are impossible to quantify precisely but must have been significant: beyond the few individuals that we know to have been slaughtered, Liudprand of Cremona blamed the events at Fiorenzuola for the fact that there were so few *milites* in the kingdom a generation later—all the leaders had to be replaced.[113] The long periods during which the territory was split between Berengar and his competitors also multiplied the number of entourages, creating practical needs in terms of political personnel that could not be met exclusively with counts or vassals arriving from Burgundy or Provence; Hugh of Provence faced similar problems, despite the protests that were raised against the influx of his followers into Italy. The acceleration of mobility at the top of the social scale became clearly

110. Philippe Depreux, "L'intégration des élites aristocratiques de Bavière et de Saxe au royaume des Francs—crise ou opportunité?," in Bougard, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge*, 225-52.
111. Adrevald of Fleury, "Miracula sancti Benedicti," 18, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, in *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* (Leipzig: Karl W. Hiersemann, 1925), 15:486: "Ampliata denique regia potestate, necesse erat duces regno subiugataeque genti praeficere, qui et legum moderamina et morem Francis assuetum servare compellerent. Qua de re primatibus populi ducibusque contigit palacium vacuari, eo quod multos ex Francorum nobili genere filio contulerit, qui cum eo regnum noviter susceptum tuerentur et regerent."
112. Runciman, "Accelerating Social Mobility," 25ff; John Gillingham, "Some Observations on Social Mobility in England Between the Norman Conquest and the Early Thirteenth Century," in *England and Germany in the High Middle Ages: In Honour of Karl J. Leyser*, ed. Alfred Havercamp and Hanna Vollrath (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 333-55, here pp. 338-39.
113. Liudprand of Cremona, "Antapodosis," 2.66, *The Complete Works of Liudprand*, 104: "Tanta quippe tunc interfectorum strages facta est, ut militum usque hodie permagna raritas habeatur."

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visible in many ways. Promotions from vassal to count, which up to that point had generally taken place over generations, became a feature of an unusually high number of individual trajectories.[114]

Individuals chosen to join the ranks of royal vassals no longer came exclusively from aristocratic groups. Major families of the ninth century disappeared, displaced by new ones that would hold center stage for several centuries thereafter. Indeed, while they appeared out of the blue, these families became the first to benefit from a biological depth that previous groups, mostly made up of immigrants with uncertain roots in the country and deeply unsettled by the political crisis, had never been able to achieve. All this meant that a great many doors were forced open, through which newcomers could pour in. Consequently, there is nothing surprising in the fact that Flambertus, a mere *sculdassius* holding a very lowly function, was able to successfully insinuate himself into Berengar I's entourage, becoming his spiritual guide and eventually taking part in the plot which brought about the death of the emperor in 924.[115] And it is equally unsurprising to see that, during the same period, the rising group of judges in Pavia entered the political arena and began to weave the system of alliances that would later enable their children to become counts or bishops. They succeeded in taking full advantage of this period of greater fluidity, which lasted until the end of the tenth century, before they were once again confined to a technical role, remaining admittedly indispensable and prestigious because of their knowledge, their relational skills, and their wealth, but without access to the most noble functions.

In this context, the reflection provided by Ratherius of Verona was particularly pertinent. This famous passage, written to remind the powerful of the vanity of all things, is one of the few literary productions of the early Middle Ages to directly address the issue of social mobility in general. Ratherius laid out the following trajectory, listing generations of possible ancestors backwards from the *praefectus* or count: *judex* (judge), *tribunus vel scoldascius* (tribune or *sculdassius*), *miles* (man-at-arms), *ariolator* (fortune teller), followed by a selection of lowlier trades taken from Juvenal, and finally *servus*/*liber* (slave/freeman).[116] The numerous commentaries on this passage have often focused on the presence of the *miles* (here considered as a hired man-at-arms, the socially lowest sense of the term) as the first significant step toward climbing the social hierarchy.[117] But the beginning of the list is just

114. François Bougard, "Laien als Amtsträger: über die Grafen des regnum Italiae," in *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat—Europäische Perspektiven*, ed. Walter Pohl and Veronika Wieser (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 201-15, here p. 210.

115. Liudprand of Cremona, "Antapodosis," 2.68-70, *The Complete Works of Liudprand*, 104-5; François Bougard, "Flamberto," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1997), 48:274-76.

116. Ratherius Veronensis, *Praeloquia*, ed. Peter L. D. Reid (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), 24, line 741-45. For *sculdassius* see above, note 84.

117. Giacomo Vignodelli, "*Milites regni*. Aristocrazie e società tripartita in Raterio da Verona," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo* 109, no. 1 (2007): 97-150.

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as important. Ratherius was writing in the 930s, when changes to the leadership were in full swing and judges were fully exploiting their opportunities for upward social mobility. Beyond the generalizations contained in a work whose main purpose was moral, the familial trajectory that the author describes (and that he carefully refrained from censoring) was very probably similar to real ones, and in keeping with a period in which the elite was particularly open. Such a family history could unfold against a background of more permanent and ordinary social mobility, slowly taking place at the lower levels of the social scale. The end of the Carolingian Empire was a purely political crisis and only accelerated the social mobility of the lower classes in its second phase, when it became necessary to develop armed clienteles.

On the other side of the Alps, Francia also underwent a serious political crisis at the end of the ninth century. In 887, the Robertian Eudes was elected king over his opponents, Wido of Spoleto and the Carolingian Arnulf of Carinthia, solely because of his military valor and his affiliation to a powerful group. Charles the Simple, last surviving son of Louis the Stammerer, was too young to govern, but as soon as he reached the legal age of adulthood in 893 he claimed the throne of his forebears for himself, aided by his kin. He obtained it in 898, but was finally deposed by the noblemen, who elected Robert, nephew of King Eudes. The Norman invasions—the social consequences of which are now better known[118]—contributed to weakening royal power and to the rise of princes who gathered powers formerly belonging to the king within newly-established principalities while rationing their loyalty to him. However, even as the "Caroline peace" receded into an already mythologized past, and even though political instability generated aggressive and bloody competition—such as the murders of Fulk, archbishop of Reims, in 900, and of William Longsword, the count of Rouen, in 942—Western Francia never experienced the kind of savage battle that decimated the Italian elites during roughly the same period, nor the multiplication of public offices beholden to competing kings. Runciman's theory cannot therefore be applied in exactly the same way here. It is true that the tenth century was a period that favored the rise of lineages, whose members could accede to the function of viscount or count in one or two generations, as was the case with the counts of Blois and Angers. But the "founders" of these lineages were not "new men"; they belonged to the existing elite and were linked to aristocratic groups that can be traced back to the eighth century and even beyond. Their rise in the tenth century, though very real, was thus the sign of a redistribution of power at the local level, rather than of a rapid influx that led to a sudden turnover of ruling elites. As for the armed entourages that emerged during a second phase to police the populace and guard castles, they may have provided some upward mobility for local and rural elites, but it is far from certain that the intake they generated was sufficient to bring about a significant transformation of mid-level elites.

118. Pierre Bauduin, *Le monde franc et les Vikings, VIIIe-Xe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2009).

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There were also other, “global” crises on a much larger scale, which brought about a more complete reshuffling of the cards. From the fourth to the sixth century, the western Roman world was profoundly transformed in every way: politically, with a weakened state and the integration of an increasing number of Barbarian groups; economically, with an exchange system in crisis and the ruralization of the Western world; and spiritually, with Christianization. This latter element was probably one of the most important, for the conversion to Nicean Christianity brought about a far-reaching redefinition of what power, wealth, and prestige meant—in short, a redefinition of elite identity itself. Still, the social consequences of “denominational mobility” stemming from conversion should not be overemphasized. When, in *De catechizandis rudibus*, Saint Augustine denounced the hypocrisy of those who were Christians in name only, converting to please men rather than God, he was criticizing the conformism that resulted from its generalization into a norm. Rejecting this norm could certainly halt one’s social ascension, and sooner or later lead to social demotion, but it is far from certain that militant zeal had any significant effect on upward social mobility. It is, however, true that the adoption of Christianity by the whole of society did open the way for new, “professional” elites[119]—a fact that brings us back once again to Runciman’s theory of vacant space.

However, the most acute period of crisis for the Western world in the early Middle Ages was probably the sixth century, with its litany of plagues, wars, environmental disasters, and political and social disorder. In recent decades, numerous works have emphasized the continuity of Roman structures throughout the sixth century, leading to a rejection, or a very qualified acceptance, of the idea of an upheaval: if Childeric or Clovis are considered as Roman generals, the fate of the elites will naturally be viewed in terms of slow transformations and “adjustments.” Nevertheless, the writings of Gregory the Great do seem to reflect a fundamental crisis among the elites at the end of the century (or at least what the elites themselves perceived as such)—a crisis that cannot be wholly attributed to the Roman prelate’s dismay at the Lombard invasion.[120]

The recent reinterpretation of archeological data is very useful here, since it clearly points to the appearance of new elites during this period. Between 480 and 530-560, chieftains’ tombs endowed with sumptuous funerary artifacts suddenly appeared in northern Gaul. At the same time, the artifacts in other tombs also became richer, until deposits became less frequent in the seventh century and eventually disappeared entirely. These changes were not determined by changes in beliefs, since the church paid little attention to burial practices in this period, but were most probably the result of social and economic relationships within a system in which dominant positions were determined competitively. In ancient

119. Bruno Dumézil, “La conversion comme facteur de crise des élites (V^{e}-VIIe siècle),” in Bougard, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge*, 45-68; Hervé Inglebert, Sylvain Destephen, and Bruno Dumézil, eds., *Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique* (Paris: Picard, 2010).

120. Bruno Judic, “Grégoire le Grand et la crise des élites,” in Bougard, Feller, and Le Jan, *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge*, 23-43.

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societies, the measure of individual prestige was taken during large public ceremonies that gathered the whole community together, and funerals were particularly important moments when heirs had to renegotiate their position within the community by spending part of the wealth accumulated by the deceased. In some cases they favored funeral deposits, in others they favored redistribution.[121]

Making funeral deposits meant sacrificing highly valuable goods by placing them in the tomb, a gesture that was a clear indicator of wealth and power but also of an unstable power structure, outside of a state system. Guy Halsall's analysis of sixth-century cemeteries in the Metz region and Irene Barbiera's study of Lombard necropolises in Pannonia and Friuli before and after the conquest of Italy both reach a similar conclusion: in northern Gaul, as in Italy after the Lombard conquest, the wealth that is suddenly found in certain tombs, particularly of aged chiefs or young adults (both male and female), indicates that the heirs' position was poorly established and made precarious by the death of the chief. Such funerals attempted to outdo one another in expense, sacrificing prestigious goods in tombs with a view to reinforcing the links with the deceased and legitimizing the power of the heirs. Both Halsall and Barbiera link these practices, which only lasted for a limited time, to the rapid rise of a new Barbarian elite. Able to accumulate and redistribute wealth at an individual level, the first generations of this elite lacked a stable and legitimizing hierarchy, and it was consequently obliged to sacrifice an excessive part of its wealth in order to reproduce itself and create its own legitimacy.[122] From this point of view, the disappearance of chieftains' tombs in Gaul after the mid-sixth century could mark a stabilization of the ruling elite, thenceforth more closely dependent on the king,[123] and of new forms of legitimization that made the ostentatious waste taking place during funerals less necessary.[124]

As for England, the tomb at Sutton Hoo, dating to the 620s, and those around it are probably the sign of the rise of a warrior elite that had access to new wealth. The objects deposited in the tomb—the boat, the rowers (who may have been executed), the forty Gaulish coins of different origins, the helmet, and the objects of Eastern origin—were all manifestations of openness toward the outside world.

121. Testart, "Deux politiques funéraires."

122. Georges Bataille, *La part maudite*, précédé de *La notion de dépense* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1967); Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 152.

123. Guy Halsall, "Social Identities and Social Relationships in Early Merovingian Gaul," in *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Ian Wood (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 141-64, here p. 149; Le Jan, "Prendre, accumuler," 373-74.

124. Irene Barbiera, *Changing Lands in Changing Memories: Migration and Identity During the Lombard Invasions* (Florence: Edizioni All'insegna del giglio, 2005), has shown that Lombard funerary practices changed in less than one generation, between the departure from Pannonia and the settlement in Italy. The tombs ceased to be arranged according to sex and instead were grouped by family, while at the same time the artifacts became richer. Here again, the changes translate the social imbalances brought about by migration and the conditions of conquest, and by the appropriation of new wealth by the elites who competed with one another and attempted to gain recognition of their position.

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At the same time, the sacrifice itself was an indication of the instability and competition that this very openness created within the society.[125]

All these changes can be compared to narrative sources from the end of the sixth century, which condemn persons of lowly origins who had reached exalted positions through the favor of the king, such as Leudaste, Count of Tours.[126] These sources may testify to an increasing rigidity of the hierarchy after a period of fluidity. The diminishing frequency of funeral deposits and their disappearance at the end of the seventh century in Gaul, Italy, and England would thus not only be linked to Christianization—assuming that this was even the case—but would also be a concrete expression of the stabilization of the elites and the appearance of new forms of legitimization, based on birth, which would thenceforth strictly limit the opportunity for rapid upward social mobility.

However vague and sometimes irritating the concept of elites may appear, it is still highly operative for the societies of the early Middle Ages, in which the concentration of prestige, wealth, and power within the same hands guaranteed remarkable social stability over the long term. It is true that we have less information about the lower parts of the hierarchy, since the sources too often lead us to the top of the social pyramid, the sphere of the ruling elites. Nevertheless it is possible, from time to time, to shift the focus onto the local elites who formed the link between power and communities, using sociological concepts to better grasp their diversity. The notion of mediation thus allows us to understand the social and ideological mechanisms used by elites to enforce their domination over local communities despite the absence of a strong institutional structure. It also allows us to comprehend the whole hierarchy at once, without focusing exclusively on birth, on function, or on wealth, and without any prior differentiation between clerics and laymen. Instead we can aim to define identities and strategies of distinction, which represent just as many different factors of recognition and legitimization.

It is important to steer away from an excessively structural analysis, which would gloss over variations and evolutions. Factors of distinction or strategies for gaining recognition might seem to be unchanging and fixed, but in fact they transformed themselves. Thus the mastery of writing, which was one of the most distinctive signs of both the Roman and post-Roman elites and (to a lesser extent) those of the Carolingian period, became less important during the seventh and eighth centuries, and again in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Moreover, distinctions must be made between regions, for writing remained widespread in Italy among lay milieus, particularly judges. Conversely, the practices associated with war, hunting, and horsemanship, which generated little distinction in the Roman world,

125. Martin O. H. Carver, *Sutton Hoo: Burial Ground of Kings?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Carver, ed., *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context* (London: The British Museum Press, 2005).
126. Gregory of Tours, "Decem libri historiarum," 5.48, in Krusch, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum*, 239.

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became universal in nearly all elite spheres, whether lay or clerical, well before the point at which references to "chivalry" became widespread in the written sources of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The relationship to land and to space, which as we have seen played a crucial role in determining elite ways of life in the early Middle Ages, was itself subject to change, with the direct transmission of honors and the local implantation of powers in the tenth and eleventh centuries leading to an increasing number of local actors and greater pressure on dominated populations. A gender-based analysis would also throw light on regional differences and changes in the relationships between men and women within the elite. However, up until the Gregorian Reform, these changes did not greatly affect the system of legitimization and the mode of domination exerted by the elites over communities, which was characterized by a close alliance between clerics and laymen in the management of the *dominium* over men and lands, within an overarching whole defined as an *ecclesia*.

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