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Building an Aristocratic Identity in Medieval Italy

The Counts of the Marsi in the Sources of Farfa and Subiaco

Abstract: The 10th and the 11th centuries were a crucial period for the development of new forms of aristocracy in central Italy. The case study of the Counts of the Marsi, also known as the Berardi family, exemplifies this process. Originally from southern France, the family founder, Berardus, moved to Italy during the reign of Hugh of Arles and settled in the Marsica region, in modern-day Abruzzo. Over the course of several generations, the family managed to acquire substantial wealth and secure an important social role among the local elites. Two of the most important partners in this consolidation of their power were the monasteries of Farfa and Subiaco, located in Latium, not far from the borders of Marsica. The documents held in the monastic archives testify not only to the different phases of the Berardi family's rise to power but also to the progressive establishment of a common identity. This paper discusses these sources to investigate the features of this identity-building process and determine how the Counts of the Marsi represented a new form of aristocratic group.

Keywords: Counts of the Marsi, Medieval Aristocracy, Central Italy, Farfa, Subiaco

1 Introduction

The sources from central Italy in the early Middle Ages make it challenging to conduct thorough studies of individual families. While certain areas of Tuscany and Latium have a remarkable documentary tradition that reaches back to the Lombard period,¹ these records are sometimes too sporadic to trace family histories in detail.² Even for the

¹ The two most notable examples are the city of Lucca in Tuscany and the monastery of Farfa in Latium. Both places preserved documents that go back to the 8th century and cover the last part of the Lombard period and the following years of Carolingian rule. See *Il Regesto di Farfa*, ed. by Ignazio Giorgi/Ugo Balzani, 5 vols., Roma 1879–1914 and Albert Bruckner (Ed.), *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, vol. 30–38, Dietikon-Zurich 1988–1989. For the following period see *Regesto del capitolo di Lucca*, ed. by Pietro Guidi/Oreste Parenti, 4 vols., Roma 1910–1939 (*Regesta Chartarum Italiae* 6, 9, 18.1, 18.2).

² If we focus on the monastery of Farfa, this problem is evident. The chartulary of Farfa contains 164 documents from the 8th century and 124 from the first half of the 9th century. This may seem like a large number, but they are spread out over a long time. For a comparison, the texts originating from the

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upper social classes, the case studies are limited. Rome provides the notable examples of the Crescenzi and Tuscolani families, dominant in the city's politics in the 10th and 11th centuries,³ while Tuscany had the Guidi and Walcherii family, emerging around the same time.⁴ Although a few other cities and regions offer interesting cases, the issue persists:⁵ the documentation of the families from this period remains scarce.⁶

This is the first reason why the Counts of the Marsi represent a highly interesting case. Also known as the Berardi, after their ancestor, they were a landowning family that first appears in sources in the 10th century.⁷ Originally from Burgundy, they settled in

10th and 11th centuries are almost 900. Moreover, these 900 are interconnected with the sources from other chartularies, like Subiaco and Tivoli, which do not have documents from the earlier periods. See *Il Regesto di Farfa* (see note 1), vol. 2, pp. IX–XVI; vol. 3, pp. V–XIII; vol. 4, pp. V–XVI; vol. 5, pp. V–XVI; *Il Regesto sublacense*, ed. by Leone Allodi/Guido Levi, Roma 1885, pp. XIII f.; *Regesto della chiesa di Tivoli*, ed. by Luigi Bruzza, Roma 1880, p. 187.

3 The bibliography about Rome at the time of the Crescenzi and the Tuscolani is very large. For an overview on the topic see Ludovico Gatto, *Storia di Roma nel Medioevo*, Roma 1999; Hendrick Dey, *The Making of Medieval Rome. A New Profile of the City, 400–1450*, Cambridge 2021; Chris Wickham, *Medieval Rome. Stability and Crisis of a City, 900–1150*, Oxford 2015; Girolamo Arnaldi et al. (Eds.), *Il Papato e Roma da Gregorio Magno ai papi forestieri*, Roma 2020 (*Nuovi studi storici* 118); Paolo Brezzi, *Roma e l'impero medioevale, 774–1252*, Bologna 1947 (*Storia di Roma* 10); André Vauchez (Ed.), *Rome au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2010.

4 For a comprehensive analysis of Arezzo in this time frame see Jean-Pierre Delumeau, *Arezzo. Espace et société, 715–1230. Recherches sur Arezzo et son Contado du VIII^e au début du XIII^e siècle*, Roma 1996 (*Publications de l'École française de Rome* 219,1). See also id., *Au premier rang de la noblesse arétine. Les Walcherii*, in: *Liber largitorus. Études d'histoire médiévale offertes à Pierre Toubert par ses élèves*, Genève 2003, pp. 151–171.

5 For example, the Attonides in Abruzzo. See Laurent Feller, *Les Abruzzes médiévales. Territoire, économie et société en Italie centrale du IX^e au XII^e siècle*, Roma 1998 (*Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome* 300), pp. 691–721. More to the north, the Obertenghi family is a notable case study. See Roberto Ricci, *La marca della Liguria orientale e gli Obertenghi (945–1056). Una storia complessa e una storiografia problematica*, Spoleto 2007; Mario Nobili, *Gli Obertenghi e altri saggi*, Perugia 2006. More interesting cases have been studied in *Formazione e strutture dei ceti dominanti nel Medioevo. Marchesi, conti e visconti nel Regno italico (secc. IX–XII)*, Roma 1988 (*Atti del primo convegno di Pisa, 10–11 maggio 1983; Nuovi Studi Storici* 1) and *Formazione e strutture dei ceti dominanti nel Medioevo. Marchesi, conti e visconti nel Regno italico (secc. IX–XII)*, Roma 1996 (*Atti del secondo convegno di Pisa, 3–4 dicembre 1993; Nuovi Studi Storici* 39). On the topic see also Paolo Cammarosano, *Nobili e re. L'Italia politica dell'alto medioevo*, Roma-Bari 1998, pp. 11–134. See also the volumes edited by François Bougard and other historians in the series „Collection Haut Moyen Âge“. See especially François Bougard/Dominique Iogna-Prat/Régine Le Jan (Eds.), *Hierarchie et stratification sociale dans l'Occident médiéval (400–1000)*, Turnhout 2008 (*Collection Haut Moyen Âge* 6) and François Bougard/Hans-Werner Goetz/Régine Le Jan (Eds.), *Théorie et pratiques des élites au Haut Moyen Âge*, Turnhout 2011 (*Collection Haut Moyen Âge* 13).

6 On the academic relevance of the historiographical branch known as *Personenforschung* see Gerd Tellenbach, *Zur Bedeutung der Personenforschung für die Erkenntnis des früheren Mittelalters*, in: id., *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze*, vol. 3, Stuttgart 1988, pp. 943–962.

7 The name Counts of the Marsi originates from the title *comes*, which was used by most male family members, and the Marsi, the ancient population of the Marsica region. It is difficult to establish when

the Marsica region, in the Apennines, on the border between Latium and Abruzzo.⁸ Through a clever politics of land investments and personal alliances, they became the most powerful force in the area. Over several generations, they acquired a strategic network of castles and established strong relationships with the influential monasteries of Farfa and Subiaco. Thanks to this careful strategy by the end of the 11th century most of Marsica was under their control.⁹

Two main types of sources mention the Counts of the Marsi: chronicles and documents.¹⁰ The latter, especially those from Farfa and Subiaco, are the most useful for understanding their power consolidation.¹¹ While the sources do not allow for the creation of a complete genealogical tree, they provide enough details to trace the key stages of their development. Moreover, they reveal that the Counts underwent a process of identity building, transforming from a family of wealthy landowners into an established aristocratic group.¹² The acquisition of land and power, crucial for understanding the rise of the family, was accompanied by a deeper transformation. The Counts of the Marsi, likely seeking to distinguish themselves from the rest of the local elites, adopted

it was used in this form for the first time. In 1615, the priest and historian Francesco Zazzera wrote a chapter about the family in a book dedicated to Italian nobility. The chapter's title is „De la casa de' conti de Marsi“. From this we can infer that the name was already in use at the beginnings of the 17th century. See Francesco Zazzera, *De la nobiltà dell'Italia*, vol. 1, Napoli, Gio. Battista Gargano & Lucretio Nucci, 1615, pp. 104–116.

8 Nowadays, Marsica is mostly part of the region Abruzzo and the province of L'Aquila. However, smaller parts of Latium are also part of its historical space. See Antonio Sennis, *Potere centrale e forze locali in un territorio di frontiera. La Marsica tra i secoli VIII e XII*, in: *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo* 99,2 (1994), pp. 1–77, at p. 5. The first mention of the Frankish origin of the Counts of the Marsi comes from the chronicle of Leo Marsicanus, who was himself a member of the family and a monk in the monastery of Montecassino. See Leonis Marsicani et Petri Diaconi *chronica monasterii Casinensis*, ed. by Wilhelm Wattenbach, Hannover 1846 (MGH SS 7), pp. 571 f.

9 See Sennis, *Potere* (see note 8), pp. 48–57. If we confront the documents from the chartularies of Farfa and Subiaco, we can obtain a general overview of the properties of the Counts of the Marsi at the end of the 11th century. I will discuss this in the main part of the paper.

10 The most important chronicles are those of Farfa, Subiaco, and of Leo Marsicanus. The documents concerning the Counts of the Marsi are preserved in the chartularies of Farfa and Subiaco. See *Chronicon sublacense*, ed. by Raffaello Morghen, Bologna 1927 (*Rerum Italicarum Scriptores. Nuova Edizione* 24,6), and *Gregorius de Catino, Chronicon Farfense*, ed. by Ugo Balzani, 2 vols., Roma 1903 (*Fonti per la storia d'Italia* 33–34).

11 See the section „Overview of the Sources and Methodology“. The decision to focus specifically on the sources from the collections of Farfa and Subiaco does not imply that these are the only sources available on the Counts of the Marsi. However, this article aims to explore the construction of the family's identity through both their interactions with and self-representation toward the two monastic communities. For this reason, the study centres on the two chartularies of Farfa and Subiaco, which complement each other well in supporting this analysis.

12 Maria Carla Somma called them a „famiglia comitale“. See Maria Carla Somma, *I conti dei Marsi. Una famiglia comitale in un territorio di confine*, in: Giorgia Maria Annoscia/Francesca Romana Stasolla (Eds.), *Monaci e castelli nella valle sublacense*, Roma 2016, pp. 45–58.

a set of attributes to identify their family members in documents. The first and most notable was their claim to Frankish ancestry, tracing their lineage back to their founder, Berardus.¹³ The second was the use of a limited set of given names, often of Frankish origin: Berardus, Oderisius, Rainaldus, and Teuduinus.¹⁴ The third was the title *comes*, which was used by most male family members.¹⁵ From a modern perspective, these three elements are pivotal, as they allow us to identify the Counts of the Marsi in the sources with a high degree of certainty. In a society that had not yet adopted family names, this aspect is particularly significant.¹⁶

If we compare the case of the Crescenzi and the Tuscolani with that of the Counts of the Marsi, we can highlight another reason why the latter are an important case study. Both the Crescenzi and the Tuscolani were deeply involved in the power struggles for the control of the city of Rome. They made and deposed popes and engaged with emperors.¹⁷ In other words, they operated on an international stage, and this prominence plays a key role in the attention they receive in the sources. The Counts of the Marsi, while influential, acted more on a regional level.¹⁸ From the perspective of political history this might be seen as a limitation, but for social historians it can be the opposite. In fact, it allows for the study of a family that was less influenced by exogenous factors and more representative of local dynamics. This perspective opens the issue of representativity. While the attributes of the Counts of the Marsi set them apart from other landowners, in other ways their family appears typical of its time.¹⁹ The contracts they signed, the donations they made, and the trials in which they participated are similar to

13 Leonis Marsicani et Petri Diaconi chronica, ed. by Wattenbach (see note 8), pp. 571 f.

14 Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 184, pp. 224 f., Doc. 208, p. 248, Doc. 210, p. 249; Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 393, vol. 3, p. 95, Doc. 399, vol. 3, p. 101, Doc. 400, vol. 3, pp. 101 f., Doc. 430, vol. 3, pp. 144 f.

15 Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 184, pp. 224 f., Doc. 210, p. 249; Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 399, vol. 3, p. 101, Doc. 400, vol. 3, pp. 101 f., Doc. 430, vol. 3, pp. 144 f.

16 Tommaso Di Carpegna Falconieri, Le trasformazioni onomastiche e antroponimiche dei ceti dominanti a Roma nei secoli X–XII, in: MEFRM 106,2 (1994), pp. 595–640. See also Pierre Toubert, Les structures du Latium médiéval, Roma 1973 (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 221), pp. 694–703. In Latium family names started to stabilise after 1200 following a slow process of development and establishment.

17 Toubert, Les structures (see note 16), pp. 998–1038; Wickham, Medieval Rome (see note 3), pp. 20–34; Dey, The Making (see note 3), pp. 142–190; Valeria Beolchini/Paolo Delogu, La nobiltà romana altomedievale in città e fuori. Il caso di Tusculum, in: Sandro Carocci (Ed.), La nobiltà romana nel Medioevo, Roma 2006 (Collection de l'École française de Rome 359), pp. 137–169; Girolamo Arnaldi, Profilo di Alberico di Roma, in: id., Il Papato e Roma da Gregorio Magno ai papi forestieri, Roma 2020, pp. 701–724.

18 Somma, I conti (see note 12), pp. 47–49.

19 For an overview of rural society in early medieval Sabina see two chapters from Marios Costambeys, Power and Patronage in Early Medieval Italy. Local Society, Italian Politics and the Abbey of Farfa, c. 700–900, Cambridge 2007 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thoughts. 4th Series), pp. 164–224, 225–249. The two chapters are dedicated respectively to Sabina's landowners and to its elite families. Costambeys' focus lays primarily on the 8th and 9th century, but his conclusions are valuable also for the following period.

most examples preserved in the archives of Farfa and Subiaco.²⁰ However, even if from an economic and legal standpoint they often acted like the rest of the local elites, the Counts are distinctive due to their visibility in the sources. When we look beyond their titles and examine their relationship with monasteries and other social groups, they emerge as a representative case study. A final aspect must be discussed. When examining their achievements in the high and late Middle Ages, the Counts of the Marsi exhibit remarkable continuity. After their initial power consolidation, they remained the leading family in the area for generations. In the first half of the 12th century, the arrival of the Normans led to a series of conflicts and the loss of many properties. However, several side branches of the family retained power. Petrus of Celano, a descendant of one of these branches, successfully reunited Marsica and other territories under his rule. By the time of his death in 1212, he had become one of the most powerful figures in central Italy.²¹ In the following years, his sons opposed Frederick II and his politics, which weakened their position. Nevertheless, the last descendants of the Counts of the Marsi were not extinguished until the 15th century.²²

This paper investigates the development of the Counts of the Marsi from their first mention in the 10th century to the end of the 11th, when their process of identity building was largely completed. It analyses the testimonies from the chartularies of Farfa and Subiaco, aiming to reconstruct the composition of the family and its power strategies as thoroughly as possible. In doing so, it identifies key steps in the development of their shared identity. On a broader level, the paper also discusses the concept of aristocracy in early medieval Italy and argues why the Berardi can be defined as an aristocratic group. The objective of this study is not only to explore regional history, but also to assert that the Counts were part of a new form of aristocracy emerging in central Italy.²³ In Chapter 2, this paper analyses the terms aristocracy, nobility, and elite from the viewpoint of early medieval and social history. In Chapters 3 and 4, it addresses the current state of research on the Counts, provides an overview of the sources, and outlines the goals and methodology of this study. Finally, Chapter 5 contains the main discussion and focuses on the history of the family, from its beginnings in the 10th century to the height of their power consolidation in the late 11th century.

²⁰ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 185, pp. 225–227, Doc. 208, p. 248, Doc. 210, p. 249; Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 399, vol. 3, p. 101, Doc. 400, vol. 3, pp. 101 f., Doc. 403, vol. 3, pp. 106–108, Doc. 430, vol. 3, pp. 144 f., Doc. 1015, vol. 5, pp. 18 f.

²¹ Sennis, *Potere* (see note 8), pp. 70–74.

²² Alessandro Clementi, *Le terre del confine settentrionale*, in: Giuseppe Galasso/Rosario Romeo (Eds.), *Storia del Mezzogiorno*, vol. 1, Napoli 1988, pp. 17–81.

²³ See the section „The Concept of Aristocracy in Early Medieval Italy“.

2 The Concept of Aristocracy in Early Medieval Italy

Defining the upper classes is a problematic topic for social historians. Philippe Contamine, dealing with the idea of nobility in late medieval France, made an important distinction. There are terms that are mostly used by modern researchers, like *aristocracy* and *elite*, and some that were already widespread in the Middle Ages, like *noblesse* in middle French.²⁴ Even when it comes to this second category, the original meanings were often multiple and different from the modern ones. Janet Nelson studied the use of *nobilis* and *nobilitas* in a selection of sources from the 9th century, and the resulting picture is all but uniform. In the Carolingian bodies of laws, they do not play a major role, because the main difference was between free and unfree rather than between noble and unnoble. Among literary authors, *nobilis* was more common, but it could have different meanings even within the same work. For example, in Einhard's biography of Charlemagne the word is used both as a generic adjective (good or gentle) and to define a social group (the Saxon aristocracy).²⁵ Up to this point, at least, Medieval scholars did not have a consensus about what nobility meant. Studying the concept of chivalry, Jean Flori came to a similar conclusion. In the chapter called „Qu'est-ce que la noblesse?“ he wrote that in the 10th century nobility did not possess a clear legal status.²⁶ He defined nobility „une qualité modulable“ that could have different meanings. Ecclesiastical sources often gave a moral connotation to the word noble, linking it to personal respectability and not to a social group. Flori claimed that this started changing in the 13th century, when a legal framework for nobility started to be defined.²⁷

Nevertheless, social hierarchies were crucial in early Medieval Europe. Giuseppe Albertoni stressed this aspect in his analysis of Carolingian Italy, writing that the difference between the upper classes and the rest of the landowners was clearly perceived. Elaborating on the ideas of Gerd Tellenbach and Karl Schmid, he argued that the concept of family changed during the 11th century. Previously, the aristocratic groups were based on the personal bonds of single members and often lacked a common name. The Latin word *familia* defined a person's entourage and not his biological family. After the change, the word shifted to a more modern idea, namely a group of people related to

24 Philippe Contamine, *Nobles et noblesse en France, 1300–1500*, Paris 2021, pp. 13 f.: „Si le terme de ‚noblesse‘ figure dans le titre du présent recueil, alors que d'autres auraient pu être retenus, tels ceux, à résonance plus sociologique, d'élite ou d'aristocratie, c'est tout simplement parce qu'il revient si souvent, si naturellement, dans les écrits du temps en langue vulgaire ... qu'il devait quand même avoir une signification forte, d'autant qu'il n'est pas sûr que le commun des nobles ait constitué au sens plein du terme une aristocratie ou une élite.“

25 Janet Nelson, *Nobility in the Ninth Century*, in: Anne Duggan (Ed.), *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe*, Woodbridge 2000, pp. 43–51.

26 Jean Flori, *Chevaliers et chevalerie au Moyen Age*, Paris 1998, p. 64.

27 Ibid., pp. 65 f.

each other.²⁸ The unsystematic organisation of early Medieval families may be one of the reasons why identifying them in the sources can be difficult. Jean-Pierre Delumeau noted how some of the most influential families in Carolingian Italy, like the *Supponidi*, the *Unruochingi*, and the *Guidonidi*, seem to vanish after the 10th century.²⁹ This is surprising for groups that played a major role in the previous centuries, but it acquires a different meaning if we consider what a family was in this time. These groups did not necessarily extinguish, but they lost their importance as a network of personal bonds, which was the factor that made them visible in the sources.³⁰

Trying to identify early Medieval nobility as a well-defined social rank is therefore problematic. Although forms of hierarchy, as well as of leading classes and aristocracies, existed, the variety and mobility of these groups were too dynamic to be enclosed in a single definition. Gerd Tellenbach was clear about it in a paper dedicated to the relationship between law and nobility in the high Middle Ages. He underlined how an aristocratic man in a region could hold no power in the neighbouring one, or how a count could be influential on a local level, but almost irrelevant on a higher one.³¹ In the end, Chris Wickham was convincing when he wrote that delimiting the concept of aristocracy in this period is mostly a decision made by modern historians.³² In fact, Wickham underlined the ambivalence of the term *nobilis*, which was never a synonym of aristo-

28 Giuseppe Albertoni, *L'Italia carolingia*, Roma 1997 (Studi Superiori NIS 347), pp. 77 f. On this topic see also Gerd Tellenbach, *Der Großfränkische Adel und die Regierung Italiens in der Blütezeit des Karolingerreiches*, in: id., *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze* (see note 6), pp. 795–825. See also François Bougard/Laurent Feller/Régine Le Jan (Eds.), *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements*, Turnhout 2006 (Collection Haut Moyen Âge 1) and François Bougard/Régine Le Jan/Rosamond McKitterick (Eds.), *La culture du Haut Moyen Âge. Une question d'élites?*, Turnhout 2009 (Collection Haut Moyen Âge 7).

29 Jean-Pierre Delumeau/Isabelle Heullant-Donat, *L'Italie au Moyen-Âge, V^e–XV^e siècle*, Paris 2000, pp. 29 f.

30 More in general, on the thematic of family and parental bonds, compare the conclusions of Gerhard Lubich in his monography on the concept of kinship in the early Middle Ages. Gerhard Lubich, *Verwandtschaft. Lesearten einer politisch-sozialen Beziehung im Frühmittelalter (6.–11. Jahrhundert)*, Köln 2008 (Europäische Geschichtsdarstellungen 16), pp. 235–237. Lubich postulates that the concepts of *Verwandtschaft* and *Verwandtsein* were clearly differentiated. The first one is a modern term that should not be applied to medieval society; the second one defines only the closer circle of familiar relationship and not a larger idea of house.

31 Gerd Tellenbach, *Rechtlicher Anspruch und soziale Geltung*, in: id., *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze* (see note 6), pp. 857–867. I quote a passage from page 859 that summarises the problem: „Aber was ist überhaupt Adel? Wir sind bei der Betrachtung der historischen Quellen auf so viele Ungewissheiten gestoßen, dass wir vorsichtig fragen müssen, was in jedem Jahrhundert und jedem Lebenskreis Adel rechtlich, wirtschaftlich, sozial und politisch eigentlich bedeutet.“ Tellenbach handled the same topic in id., *Zur Erforschung des mittelalterlichen Adels* (Internationaler Historikerkongress Wien 1965), in: id., *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen und Aufsätze*, pp. 868–888.

32 Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages, Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800*, Oxford 2005, p. 153: „... whether we see a given local leader as ‚aristocratic‘ or not depends largely on our own decision about where to draw the line in any given period or region“.

cratic.³³ In summary, it seems that contemporary researchers must accept the structural ambiguity of early Medieval Italian aristocracies.³⁴ The most important aspect is not to seek a universal definition of nobility in a certain geographical or chronological frame, which could easily turn into a ghost chase, but rather to use the related terminology in a clear and coherent way.

For this reason, it is necessary to explain how the terms aristocracy, nobility and elite will be used in this article. The first one comes from the Greek ἀριστοκρατία (literally „power of the best“) and defines the ruling class of a society.³⁵ The second one originates from the Latin *nobilitas* (from *nosco*, which means „to know“) and has a related meaning, but with a notable difference.³⁶ Aristocracy is a broad word that comprehends the leading classes in general; nobility is a narrower term and indicates a more definable social group, marked by specific attributes or rights.³⁷ If we follow this definition, virtually all societies from the past had forms of aristocracy, but only some had actual nobilities. The third term, elite, comes from the Latin *eligere* („to choose“). It will be used to define not only the leading classes, but all social groups that could rely on a substantial economic power, political authority, or cultural influence. Elites include people that are not usually ascribed to aristocracies, like merchants, artisans, lower clergymen, and minor landowners.³⁸

Central Italy in the 10th and 11th century had both elites and aristocracies, but it seems reasonable to say that it did not have a nobility that matches this definition. There were no clear laws to define such a closed group, marked by specific rights.³⁹ As both a proof and a natural consequence of this, the documentary sources do not have a clear terminology regarding these social concepts. The Latin word *nobilis* was used often, especially in the honorary title *nobilis vir*, but the meaning was far from the modern

³³ Wickham, Framing (see note 32), p. 155.

³⁴ See Cammarosano, Nobili (see note 5), pp. 74–108; Bougard/Iogna-Prat/Le Jan (Eds.), Hiérarchie (see note 5); Bougard/Goetz/Le Jan (Eds.), Théorie (see note 5).

³⁵ For the etymology see κράτος in: Pierre Chantraine, Dictionnaire Étymologique de la langue grecque, Paris 1999, pp. 578 f. The Gemoll dictionary translates the term as „Herrschaft der Edelsten“. See ἀριστοκρατία in: Wilhelm Gemoll, Griechisch-deutsches Schul- und Handwörterbuch, München¹⁰2014, p. 129.

³⁶ For the etymology see *nosco* in: Michiel de Vaan, Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages, Leiden-Boston 2008, pp. 413 f. The PONS dictionary translates *nobilitas* as „Berühmtheit“ or „Ruhm“. See *nobilitas* in: PONS, Stuttgart 2016, pp. 602 f.

³⁷ Tellenbach, Rechtlicher Anspruch (see note 31), pp. 857–867.

³⁸ For the etymology of *eligere* see *lego*, in: de Vaan, Etymological Dictionary (see note 36), pp. 332 f. On the concept of small and medium elite in central Medieval Italy see Wickham, Medieval Rome (see note 3), pp. 259–320.

³⁹ Toubert, Les structures (see note 16), p. 1183. Toubert was clear about this, quoting the absence of a legally defined cavalry as an example: „L’institution chevaleresque ne commence à se vulgariser dans le monde des *domini castorum* et des *milites* urbaines qu’à partir du second tiers du XIII^e siècle. Nous espérons revenir ailleurs plus en détail sur ce problème important, qui est évidemment lié à celui de la naissance tardive dans notre région d’une noblesse au sens strict.“

term noble. In fact, the title was carried by men with very different backgrounds, including merchants and artisans.⁴⁰ Tommaso Di Carpegna Falconieri identified a distinction between more prestigious titles, like *nobilis vir* and *vir magnificus*, and more ordinary ones, like *vir honestus* or the name of a profession.⁴¹ On a general level, this differentiation is correct, but it does not always work, because the notaries from this time could be very inconsistent in the use of this terminology. Pierre Toubert, one of the most important historians of Latium in this period, was therefore sceptical about the possibility of understanding honorary titles as clear social status markers.⁴² Nevertheless, titulature is important to study upper classes. Even Toubert used the titles of Alberic of Rome to analyse his political role.⁴³ Étienne Hubert also considered honorary titles while following the urban development in Rome.⁴⁴ More recently, Edward Schoolman researched the titles from Ravenna to offer an interesting analysis of the local elites.⁴⁵ Instead of seeing it as a problem, we should interpretate the inconsistency of the honorary titles as a revealing piece of information. The titulature was incoherent because the upper classes were undergoing a process of transformation. The elites were shifting to a new concept of family, less dependent on individual figures and more anchored to a network of parental ties.⁴⁶

The Counts of the Marsi were one of the families that underwent this process. Even at the end of the 11th century, calling them noble would be misleading, because a real nobility had yet to emerge. However, they can be called aristocratic because they had managed to differentiate themselves from the rest of the local elites and they belonged to an established form of upper class. Studying the Counts means, in fact, observing an example of upper class transformation. The three pillars of their identity construction – the Frankish origin, the limited number of given names, and the title *comes* – can be read as instruments to underline this shift in the sources. This does not mean that all aspects of this process were fully conscious. We will see how the Counts probably took some of these steps because of the social environment they were living in, but this does not make them less important in our analysis.

⁴⁰ Wickham, *Framing* (see note 32), p. 155.

⁴¹ Di Carpegna Falconieri, *Le trasformazioni* (see note 16), pp. 595 f.

⁴² Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), pp. 963 f.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 967 f.

⁴⁴ Étienne Hubert, *Espace urbain et habitat à Rome du X^e siècle à la fin du XIII^e siècle*, Roma 1990 (Publications de l'École française de Rome 135), pp. 163, 178.

⁴⁵ Edward Schoolman, *Vir Clarissimus* and Roman Titles in the Early Middle Ages, in: *Medieval Prosopography* 32 (2017), pp. 1–39.

⁴⁶ See two articles from Karl Schmid that delve into this topic: Karl Schmid, *Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht*, in: *id.*, *Gebetsdenken und adliges Selbstverständnis im Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Beiträge*, Sigmaringen 1983, pp. 183–244 and *id.*, *Über die Struktur des Adels im früheren Mittelalter*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 245–267. Some of the themes analysed in these articles were applied to the Italian context in *id.*, *Zur Ablösung der Langobardenherrschaft durch die Franken*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 268–304.

3 The Historiography on the Counts of the Marsi

In 1615, the priest and historian Francesco Zazzera published a book on the history of Italian nobility. He dedicated a chapter to the „Casa dei conti dei Marsi“, thus initiating modern historiography on the Berardi family. Zazzera's work shows the limitations of an early 17th-century effort, but it is remarkable for its adherence to sources. He consulted many of the documents and chronicles discussed here, although he lacked a modern understanding of the historical context. In particular, he interpreted the honorary titles from the 10th and 11th centuries as feudal titles, leading to a misleading depiction of the family's history. Moreover, he sought to construct an unbroken genealogical tree, sometimes making unsupported assumptions.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Zazzera's interest in the topic exceeded the attention it has received in more recent times.

In fact, more recently, the Counts of the Marsi have been the subject of surprisingly few publications. In the early 20th century, Federico Terra-Abrami and Cesare Rivera researched them, focusing on promoting local history.⁴⁸ In 1930, Hermann Müller dedicated a chapter to them as part of his research on the topographic and genealogical history of Sabina and the Duchy of Spoleto.⁴⁹ Between 1994 and 2002, Antonio Sennis studied the family from a regional perspective, reconstructing the social and political development of the Marsica region.⁵⁰ Pierre Toubert and Étienne Hubert, who were interested in the neighbouring Sabina region, approached the subject from a peripheral point of view.⁵¹ Laurent Feller did the same in 1998, concentrating on medieval Abruz-

⁴⁷ Zazzera, *De la nobiltà* (see note 7), pp. 104–116.

⁴⁸ Federico Terra-Abrami, *Cronistoria dei Conti de' Marsi poi detti di Celano*. Con documenti inediti, in: *Bollettino della Società di Storia Patria Anton Ludovico Antinori negli Abruzzi* 15,8 (1903), pp. 237–252; id., *Cronistoria dei Conti de' Marsi poi detti di Celano*, in: *Bollettino della Società di Storia Patria Anton Ludovico Antinori negli Abruzzi* 16,6 (1904), pp. 55–76; id., *Cronistoria dei Conti de' Marsi poi detti di Celano*. Con documenti inediti, in: *Bollettino della Società di Storia Patria Anton Ludovico Antinori negli Abruzzi* 16,8 (1904), pp. 138–174; Cesare Rivera, *I conti de' Marsi e la loro discendenza fino alla fondazione dell'Aquila (843–1250)*, in: id./Berardo Pio (Eds.), *Scritti sul Medioevo abruzzese*, L'Aquila 2008, pp. 43–262; id., *I conti de' Marsi (parte inedita del capitolo VI)*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 263–316; id., *Famiglie celebri italiane. Conti dei Marsi*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 317–376.

⁴⁹ Hermann Müller, *Topographische und genealogische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Herzogtums Spoleto und der Sabina von 800 bis 110*, Greifswald 1930, pp. 54–71.

⁵⁰ Sennis, *Potere* (see note 8) pp. 1–77; id., *Strategie politiche, centri di potere e forme di inquadramento territoriale nella Marsica nei secoli IX–XII*, in: Étienne Hubert (Ed.), *Une région frontalière au Moyen Âge. Les vallées du Turano et du Salto entre Sabine et Abruzzes*, Roma 2000 (*Publications de l'École française de Rome* 263), pp. 95–139; id., *Strategie politiche, affermazioni dinastiche, centri di potere nella Marsica medievale*, in: Gennaro Luongo (Ed.), *La terra dei Marsi. Cristianesimo, cultura, istituzioni*, Roma 2002, pp. 55–118.

⁵¹ Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), pp. 807–840, 1274–1303. Étienne Hubert, *L'„incastellamento“ en Italie centrale. Pouvoirs, territoire et peuplement dans la vallée du Turano au Moyen Âge*, Roma 2002 (*Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome* 309), pp. 210–230, 252–269.

zo.⁵² In 2016, Maria Carla Somma published a paper focusing on the archaeological and topographic aspects of their expansion around the monastery of Subiaco.⁵³ Finally, the Lumen Historical Society has made significant efforts to research local history.⁵⁴

The studies by Terra-Abrami and Rivera are important as they opened contemporary research on the Counts of the Marsi, although they mostly offer an overview of the main events aimed at a local audience. Pierre Toubert did not mince words when he wrote: „Il n’y a rien d’utile à tirer de Rivera ... et peu de Terra-Abrami.“⁵⁵ However, both authors made a valuable effort to collect documents and information about the Counts. While it is legitimate to focus on more recent publications, their contributions deserve appreciation. This analysis opens with Pierre Toubert’s observations. In 1973, he published his well-known monography on medieval Latium, in which he referred to two members of the Berardi family, Count Berardus and Count Rainaldus, as „grands incastellatores“.⁵⁶ However, he acknowledges the limitations of the sources, noting that we do know little about the genealogy of the Counts before the 10th century.⁵⁷ This is an important remark, since Zazzera had attempted to link them to the Carolingian dynasty.⁵⁸ Toubert’s main interest lay in the family’s expansion into the diocese of Rieti during the early 11th century, an endeavour that ultimately failed after 1030.⁵⁹ He also supported the idea that Carsoli was the Counts’ main residence during this period.⁶⁰ Still, his overall interest in the subject was rather limited.

Antonio Sennis, who dedicated his dissertation to the history of Marsica, studied the Counts in greater depth. His work, summarised in articles from 1994 and 2002, begins with a comprehensive analysis of the region’s history in the early Middle Ages, when sources are extremely scarce.⁶¹ Regarding the Berardi family, he distinguished between the title *comes* – which he called „dignità comitale“ – and the County of Marsica as a territorial entity, which emerged only in the 10th century.⁶² He linked the Berardi’s settlement in the area to Hugh of Provence’s political problems, as he needed to

52 Feller, *Les Abruzzes* (see note 5), pp. 562–564, 637–646, 685–692, 840 f.

53 Somma, *I conti* (see note 12), pp. 45–58.

54 I thank especially Luchina Branciani, who gave me some precious advice while working on this paper. See Luchina Branciani, *La diocesi di Carsoli tra Tardo antico e Medioevo alla luce delle recenti ricerche territoriali*, in: *Il foglio di Lumen* 58 (2020), pp. 2–8.

55 Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), p. 1276.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 378.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 1109.

58 Zazzera, *De la nobiltà* (see note 7), p. 104. „L’antichissimo principio de i Conti de Marsi, come fu in Italia chiarissimo traendo l’origin sua per diretta linea, dall’Imperadore per sempre gran Carlo Primo, cioè da quel suo annipote detto Berardo, che fu per eccellenza cognominato Francesco.“

59 Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), pp. 1274–1276.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 376 f.

61 Sennis, *Potere* (see note 8), pp. 13–25.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 26–29; Sennis, *Strategie* (see note 50), pp. 105 f.

consolidate his control over his kingdom's southern borders.⁶³ Sennis noted that the Berardi stopped being involved in the higher Italian politics after Hugh's death and started focusing on more regional problems. Since Marsica did not possess a comital administration yet, the family soon splintered into several branches that pursued different goals.⁶⁴ Sennis argued that this process stabilised during the Ottonian age, as Marsica developed into a more cohesive entity. Through their control of the diocese, the Berardi consolidated their power and became the leading force in the region.⁶⁵ Sennis also noted that their role in the judiciary system was limited, as major monasteries preferred to turn to the emperor rather than to local counts. He highlighted how the Counts of the Marsi oscillated between acting as private landowners and public officials.⁶⁶ The arrival of the Normans in southern Italy further diminished their power, forcing them to seek alliances and ultimately accept a reduction in influence.⁶⁷

In 1998, Laurent Feller made a parallel analysis dealing with Abruzzo's history. In his comprehensive monography, which follows Toubert's methodological approach, Feller situated the Berardi's within the larger context of Frankish migration to Italy in the 10th century. He noted how the phenomenon concerned the upper classes, with new families joining the already existent Lombard aristocracy, and connected this displacement with the emersion of new forms of ethnic identities.⁶⁸ In the later chapters, he focused mainly on the familiar relationships between the Counts of the Marsi and the Attonides, the leading family around Teate, the modern city of Chieti. He did, however, use these links to understand more the history of the Attonides than that of the Berardi.⁶⁹ In fact, he defined the latter as agents of the Attonides in the western part of the region.⁷⁰ However, Feller identified the Counts' religious politics as an exceptional element of their activities in this period, and especially their ability to occupy the bishop seats in their region. As a possible explanation he mentioned their origin from Burgundy, where this kind of strategy was more common.⁷¹

Étienne Hubert dedicated two parts of his monography from 2002 on the Turano valley to the Counts of the Marsi. In the chapter on the genesis of the *incastellamento* he studied the role of large landowners. The Counts were one of the about dozen families that controlled sizable portions of the valley around the year 1000. Hubert noted how most of these groups did not possess a common name and appeared in the sources only

⁶³ Sennis, *Strategie* (see note 50), pp. 106 f.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 108 f.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–113.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119 f.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 120–128.

⁶⁸ Feller, *Les Abruzzes* (see note 5), pp. 562–564.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 637–646.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 685.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 826.

as „sons of“.⁷² This confirms the idea that the process of construction of new familiar identities was just at its beginnings in the area. Hubert then came back to the topic in the chapter focussed on the first main phase of the *incastellamento* in the 11th century. He estimated that the Counts had arrived in the Turano valley around 1030, since their member Berardus was mentioned as owner of the castle of Offiano in 1037.⁷³ Notably, Hubert used the terms „projet territorial“ and „implantation comtale“ to define the arrival and expansion of the Counts of the Marsi in the Turano valley. Confronting the different sources, he saw an organised long-term effort in their strategy to take control of the area.⁷⁴ In a first phase the project was successful, but in the central part of the 11th century it came to a stop. One of the reasons was the division of properties among the family members, which weakened the range and power of their sphere of influence. A second cause was the predominance of Benedictine monasteries such as Farfa and Subiaco, which obtained sizable donations from the Counts. Hubert did not question the legitimacy of these acts, but he detected how the Berardi emerged weakened from this transfer of properties.⁷⁵

In 2016, Maria Carla Somma examined the activities of the Counts of the Marsi around the monastery of Subiaco. She summarised some of the conclusions of the previous authors, noting that the Berardi were able to take control of a large area in the Apennines but failed at creating a stable and cohesive territorial entity.⁷⁶ By calling the relationships between the family and Subiaco as a system of „condivisione/acquisizione“, she claimed that the Counts actively wanted to place their properties under the sphere of influence of the monks.⁷⁷ As a reason she identifies the high degree of legal and administrative autonomy that Subiaco was achieving. In other words, the Counts would have tried to exploit the monastery's privileges. This reconstruction does not necessarily clash with Hubert's theory. We could assume that the family tried to gain an advantage through its donations, but ultimately was weakened by them.

The overview of over fifty years of research shows how the history of the Counts of the Marsi has been studied from different perspectives. While Toubert and Hubert focused on their role as castle builder, Feller explored their place in Abruzzo's aristocratic history, and Sennis emphasised their regional dominance in Marsica. Somma, in contrast, centred on their activities in the Aniene valley. This paper will build on the ideas of these scholars but will return to the original sources from Farfa and Subiaco. The goal is to use the tools of social history to go beyond the Berardi's role as promoters of the *incastellamento* and influential family in medieval Abruzzo. These aspects are significant but must be viewed within the broader context of medieval aristocracy.

⁷² Hubert, L'„incastellamento“ (see note 51), pp. 210–215.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 252–254.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 264–269.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 299–303.

⁷⁶ Somma, I conti (see note 12), pp. 47 f.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

4 Overview of the Sources and Methodology

Due to their importance at the border between Latium and Abruzzo, the Counts of the Marsi appear relatively often in the sources from the monasteries of Farfa and Subiaco. In fact, the relationship between the family and the two abbeys was a central element in shaping the identity of the Counts. Estimating the number of the documents concerning them is challenging, because some family members possibly acted as witnesses and judges without carrying distinctive titles. An approximation is however possible. From the first attestation in 981 to the end of the 11th century there are 12 documents from Farfa and 5 from Subiaco that mention the Counts.⁷⁸ The number may seem small, but it becomes remarkable when compared to the general situation. The landowning families are mentioned only rarely in many documents and different chartularies. The 17 documents concerning the Berardi therefore emerge as a significant body of sources.

Before presenting the individual documents, it is important to make a further clarification. The sources of the cartularies of Farfa and Subiaco are copies compiled between the late 11th and 12th centuries.⁷⁹ Therefore, the texts have undergone a process of selection and transcription that must be taken into account. Inevitably – though this is certainly not a problem unique to this region – historians must work with a selection that is not only shaped by the passage of time but also influenced by the monks' decision to prioritise certain documents over others. The table below summarizes the key elements of these documents and is also useful for outlining the main methodology of this article. The analysis is based on archival research, specifically on monastic cartularies, and document analysis. In a preliminary phase, the main factors considered are the chronology of the sources, their place of production and preservation, and the types of contracts they contain. In a second phase, the analysis continues with a socio-historical and prosopographical approach, identifying the members of the Berardi family who appear in the texts. As outlined in the introduction, the aspects given the most consideration are personal names, honorific titles, public offices, and geographical attributes.

⁷⁸ Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 388, vol. 3, pp. 90 f., Doc. 397, vol. 3, pp. 99 f., Doc. 399, vol. 3, p. 101, Doc. 400, vol. 3, pp. 101 f., Doc. 403, vol. 3, pp. 106–108, Doc. 430, vol. 3, pp. 144 f., Doc. 451, vol. 3, p. 164, Doc. 570, vol. 3, pp. 277 f., Doc. 879, vol. 4, pp. 274–277, Doc. 919, vol. 4, p. 315, Doc. 946, vol. 4, p. 340, Doc. 981, vol. 4, pp. 360 f., Doc. 1015, vol. 5, pp. 18 f.; Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 168, pp. 214 f., Doc. 184, pp. 224 f., Doc. 185, pp. 225–227, Doc. 208, p. 248, Doc. 209, pp. 248 f., Doc. 210, p. 249. The five judgments from this list have been also edited in *I placiti del „Regnum Italiae“*, ed. by Cesare Manaresi, vol. II, Roma 1957 (*Fonti per la storia d'Italia* 96), Doc. 189, pp. 189–191, Doc. 198, pp. 215 f., Doc. 199, pp. 217 f., Doc. 222, pp. 316 f., Doc. 253, pp. 435–437.

⁷⁹ Il Regesto sublacense (see note 2), pp. V–XI; Il Regesto di Farfa (see note 1), vol. 1, pp. VII–XLVII.

Chartulary	Document	Year	Place	Type	People
Farfa	397	981	Campo de Cedici (Marsica)	Judgement	Teuduinus <i>comes</i>
Farfa	399	982	Rieti	Judgement	Teuduinus <i>comes</i>
Farfa	400	982	Rieti	Judgement	Teuduinus <i>comes</i>
Subiaco	185	983	Rome	Waiver	Berardus <i>comes</i>
Farfa	403	986	Rieti	Exchange	Teuduinus <i>comes</i> Berardus <i>comes</i> (†)
Subiaco	210	993	Carsoli	Donation	Rainaldus <i>comes</i> Berardus <i>comes</i> Gualterius <i>episcopus</i>
Farfa	388	995	Campo de Cedici (Marsica)	Judgment	Oderisius <i>comes</i>
Farfa	430	999	Villa Transaqua (Marsica)	Judgment	Oderisius <i>comes</i> Rainaldus <i>comes</i>
Subiaco	184	1000	Carsoli	Donation	Rainaldus <i>comes</i> Berardus <i>comes</i> (†)
Farfa	451	1014	Rome	Imperial diploma	Oderisius <i>comes</i>
Farfa	570	1038	Rieti	Donation	Berardus <i>comes</i> Rainaldus <i>comes</i> (†)
Farfa	879	1050	Rome?	Imperial diploma	Oderisius <i>comes</i> (†)
Subiaco	208	1060	Subiaco	Donation	Rainaldus <i>comes</i> Berardus <i>comes</i> (†)
Subiaco	209	1060	Subiaco	Lease	Rainaldus <i>comes</i>
Farfa	946	1067–1068	Carsoli	Donation	Rainaldus <i>comes</i>
Farfa	981	1068–1069	Marsica?	Donation	Oderisius <i>comes</i> Berardus <i>comes</i> (†) Berardus Herbeus Teuduinus <i>comes</i> (†)
Farfa	1015	1074	Rieti	Donation	Oderisius <i>comes</i> Berardus <i>comes</i> (†) Berardus Oderisius Rainaldus (†) Litelda Sikalgaita Rainaldus (†) Berardus (†) Gilla (†)

Tab.: Summary of the documents († if already dead).

Several researchers have tried to reconstruct the Berardi's family tree. The most accurate proposals are those of Antonio Sennis and Étienne Hubert.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, piecing together all familiar ties with the surviving sources is an almost impossible task. To offer a clear overview of the situation, I decided to focus on the different generations instead of proposing another genealogical tree. The analysed period begins with the first mention of a family member in Farfa in 981 and ends in 1074, year of the last notice from the 11th century. To mitigate the confusion that may arise from the repetitions of the same names, the different generations are briefly introduced. The first generation of the Berardi coincides with the family founder Berardus *franciscus*, also known as Berardus I. The date of his death is unknown, but it was before 986.⁸¹ Several of his sons reached adulthood, and four are recorded in Farfa and Subiaco. Teuduinus, Berardus, and Rainaldus carried the title *comes* and were active as landowners and judges between Rieti and the Marsica region. A fourth son, Gualterius, was a bishop, although his seat is unknown.⁸² These four men represent the second generation of the Berardi in central Italy. A third generation is first recorded in 995. Count Oderisius, son of Rainaldus, appears in several documents from Farfa. His brother Berardus is also mentioned in a donation made in 1038. In comparison to the previous generation, their role seems to be less prominent. The situation changes with the fourth generation, the last one discussed in this paper. The most important member was Rainaldus, who was active between 1060 and 1068. He was the son of Berardus, who might have been either the Berardus from 1038 or one of his cousins.⁸³ At this point, distinguishing between brothers and cousins becomes virtually impossible, but we know the names of several other members of this generation. Two were called Oderisius and one Berardus. The last document, a donation from 1074, is the only one recording some female names: Litelda, Sikelgaita, and Gilla.

Generation	Known members	Recorded years of activity
1st	Berardus I <i>franciscus</i>	Only mentioned after his death.
2nd	Teuduinus <i>comes</i>	981–986
	Berardus II <i>comes</i>	982
	Rainaldus <i>comes</i>	981–1000
	Gualterius <i>episcopus</i>	993
3rd	Berardus III <i>comes</i>	993–1038
	Oderisius <i>comes</i>	995–1014

⁸⁰ Sennis, *Potere* (see note 8), pp. 75–77. Hubert, *L'„incastellamento“* (see note 51), p. 271.
⁸¹ In this year Berardus is mentioned as the deceased father of the count Teuduinus in a donation to the monastery of Farfa. *Il Regesto di Farfa*, Doc. 403, vol. 3, pp. 106–108.
⁸² *Il Regesto sublacense*, Doc. 210, p. 249. The problem will be addressed further in the chapter dedicated to the analysis of each individual document.
⁸³ *Il Regesto di Farfa*, Doc. 388, vol. 3, pp. 90 f.

Generation	Known members	Recorded years of activity
4th	Rainaldus II <i>comes</i>	1060–1074
	Oderisius II <i>comes</i>	1068/1069–1074
	Herbeus	1068/1069
	Berardus IV	1074
	Oderisius III	1074
	Litelda	1074
	Sikelgaita	1074
	Gilla	1074

For the aim of this paper, the most important generations are the second and the fourth, as they were those who played a major role in building the family identity. The sons of Berardus *franciscus* were confronted with the uneasy task of consolidating their fortune and prestige in central Italy. Their grandchildren in the second half of the 11th century, coming after what looks like a transitional phase in the family history, revoked their Frankish ancestry to stabilize their common identity and strengthen their position towards the monasteries of Farfa and Subiaco. If we compare the chronology of these two phases – respectively from 981 to 1000 and from 1060 to 1074 – to the general situation of the Italian peninsula, we can trace a connection between the latter and the history of the family. The first one encompassed the central part of the Ottonian rule in Italy, a moment of conflict and reorganisation.⁸⁴ The second one coincided with the peak of the Norman conquest of southern Italy, which ultimately extended to include the Marsica region and most of modern-day Abruzzo.⁸⁵

5 The Counts of the Marsi in the Sources from Farfa and Subiaco

The history of the Counts of the Marsi begins in the first decades of the 10th century, when Berardus, a man from southern France, settled in central Italy. Despite Francesco Zazzera's effort to portray him as a descendant of Charlemagne, Berardus' origin remains unclear.⁸⁶ The only source about these early years is the chronicle of Leo Marsicanus, monk in Montecassino and bishop of Ostia. Leo, who wrote between the end of the 11th century and the beginnings of the 12th, was himself a member of the Berardi family.⁸⁷ Describing the reign of Hugh of Arles in Italy (926–947) he recorded: „Cum hoc

⁸⁴ Hagen Keller, *Die Ottonen*, München 2001, pp. 62–86.

⁸⁵ Hubert Houben, *I Normanni*, Bologna 2015, pp. 57–108.

⁸⁶ Zazzera, *De la nobiltà* (see note 7), p. 104.

⁸⁷ Vincenzo D'Alessandro, *La cronaca di Leone Marsicano*, in: *L'età dell'abate Desiderio*, vol. 3. Atti del IV convegno di studi sul Medioevo meridionale (Montecassino-Cassino, 4–8 ottobre 1987), Montecassino 1992, pp. 265–278.

Hugone venit Italiam Azzo comes Burgundiae avunculus Berardi illius qui cognominatus est Franciscus a quo videlicet Marsorum comites procreati sunt.⁸⁸

Since Hugh was crowned in Pavia in the summer of 926, we can situate Berardus' arrival in Italy in the second quarter of the 10th century.⁸⁹ Leo did not mention any relationship with Charlemagne and wrote only that Berardus' uncle was a Burgundian count. In fact, it seems that Leo was more interested in Berardus' descendants rather than in his ancestors. The two pieces of information we are given are his Frankish origin and his role as family founder, which confirm the formula „ex natione Francorum“ found in several documents.⁹⁰ Estimating that Berardus *franciscus* arrived in Italy towards 930, over 50 years passed until his family was first mentioned in Farfa in 981.⁹¹ This fact undermines the idea that Berardus was a leading political figure when he settled in Italy. If he had been, his role would have probably been recorded in one of the documents from this time. Instead, the comparison between Berardus' absence in the sources and the prominence of his sons points toward a slow growth of the family's fortune. We do not know the size of Berardus' properties when he first moved to Marsica, but the main growth apparently took place during the following generation.

A foundation of wealth was a fundamental step to allow the establishment of the family. Concretely, Berardus *franciscus* and his sons gathered enough estates and resources to sustain the donations they made to the monasteries of Farfa and Subiaco.⁹² These acts, which had an important religious motivation, strengthened the authority and the reputation of the Berardi. They were accompanied by the gain of important clergy positions, as shown by the case of Gualterius, one of Berardus' sons, who was a bishop by 993.⁹³ Another important role acquired by the family concerned the judiciary system. Central Italy in this time did not have a professional body of judges large enough to deal with trials without the help of the local elites.⁹⁴ Therefore, court cases were decided by judicial assemblies made up by a core of professional judges, known as *iudices ordinarii*, and a variable number of prominent men from the area, usually called *iudices dativi*.⁹⁵ We do not know exactly how these non-professional judges were

⁸⁸ Leonis Marsicani et Petri Diaconi chronica, ed. by Wattenbach (see note 8), p. 572.

⁸⁹ Storia d'Italia. Vol. 2: Vito Fumagalli, Il Regno italico, Torino 1978, pp. 192–196; Paolo Cammarosano, Storia dell'Italia medievale. Dal VI all'XI secolo, Roma-Bari 2001, p. 214.

⁹⁰ Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 403, vol. 3, pp. 106–108, Doc. 1015, vol. 5, pp. 18 f. Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 184, pp. 224 f., Doc. 208, p. 248.

⁹¹ Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 397, vol. 3, pp. 99 f.

⁹² Ibid., Doc. 570, vol. 3, pp. 277 f., Doc. 946, vol. 4, p. 340, Doc. 981, vol. 4, pp. 360 f., Doc. 1015, vol. 5, pp. 18 f. Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 184, pp. 224 f., Doc. 208, p. 248, Doc. 210, p. 249.

⁹³ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 210, p. 249.

⁹⁴ For an overview of the judiciary system in central Italy see Toubert, Les structures (see note 16), pp. 1194–1315 and François Bougard, La justice dans le royaume d'Italie de la fin du VIII^e siècle au début du XI^e siècle, Roma 1995 (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 291), pp. 17–113.

⁹⁵ Dario Internullo, Senato sapiente. L'alba della cultura laica a Roma nel Medioevo (secoli XI–XII), Roma 2022 (La corte dei Papi 33), pp. 193–230; Toubert, Les structures (see note 16), pp. 1217 f., 1308;

selected, but to perform this role they had to count on the respect of their local community. Members of the Berardi family started to act as judges as early as 982.⁹⁶ By this year they were integrated enough in the local society to absolve this delicate task.

The first mention of a family member in either Farfa or Subiaco is from the year 981.⁹⁷ The document is a judgment and sees the participation of Teuduinus *comes*, one of Berardus' sons. In this case he did not act as judge, but as one of the lawsuit's parties. Teuduinus and other landowners contested the ownership of a watermill and other estates in the hands of Farfa's monks. Since Iohannes, the abbot, was able to present a document to prove his rightfulness, the landowners had to renounce their claims. I consider the identification of Teuduinus as one of Berardus' sons as almost certain, because he carries the title *comes*, he appears in three other documents in the same decade, and the name was rare in central Italy. However, based on the source it appears that in this period the fact of being a count was not a very distinctive element. In this document alone there are four other men who are identified as *comites*. By this time the Counts of the Marsi can be hardly distinguished from the rest of the region's elite.

In 982, Teuduinus served a more prestigious role when he presided the judicial assembly of two trials involving another group of landowners and the monastery of Farfa.⁹⁸ The first case saw three men, Gaiderisius, Rainerius, and Adalbertus, contending the monks several estates in the diocese of Rieti. The properties had to be profitable, because the monastery used its connections to the imperial court and obtained the intervention of the bishop of Pavia Petrus, who presided the assembly together with Teuduinus.⁹⁹ Petrus, acting as *missus domni imperatoris*, came to Rieti with three collaborators, the *iudices de Papia* Herizo, Aldo, and Liuzo.¹⁰⁰ The rest of the assembly was composed by local officials and members of the elite. Five carried the title *iudex*, five are only mentioned by name, and the rest are recorded collectively as *reliqui plurimi circum sedentes et astantes*. After the interested parties were heard, the monks won the lawsuit and obtained the properties back. The second instance, which was judged by the same assembly together with the previous one, regarded the property of two fishing ponds (*piscarie*) in Sabina.¹⁰¹ In this case nobody stepped in front of the judges to defend

Wickham, *Medieval Rome* (see note 3), pp. 212 f.; Ingrid Baumgärtner, *Romerneuerung im Zeichen der Praxis? Der Bibliothekar im kommunalen Zusammenhang*, in: *Rom im hohen Mittelalter. Studien zu den Romvorstellungen und zur Rompolitik vom 10. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, Sigmaringen 1992, pp. 70 f.

96 *Il Regesto di Farfa*, Doc. 399, vol. 3, p. 101.

97 *Ibid.*, Doc. 397, vol. 3, pp. 106–108.

98 *Ibid.*, Doc. 399, vol. 3, p. 101, Doc. 400, vol. 3, pp. 101 f.

99 Francesco Magani, *Cronotassi dei vescovi di Pavia*, Pavia 1894, pp. 36–38.

100 Giulio Savio records the three judges in his prosopographic lexicon. Herizo also appears in a document from 994 and Aldo in one from 990, while Liuzo cannot be identified in other sources. Giulio Savio, *Monumenta Onomastica Romana Medii Aevi* (X–XII sec.), Roma 1999, vol. 1, p. 231, vol. 2, p. 379, vol. 4, p. 804.

101 *Il Regesto di Farfa*, Doc. 400, vol. 3, pp. 101 f. On this topic see Marco Vendittelli, *Diritti ed impianti di pesca degli enti ecclesiastici romani tra X e XIII secolo*, in: *MEFRM* 104,2 (1992), pp. 387–430.

their claims, and the assembly simply confirmed the abbey's rights over the lakes. If in the document from 981 Teuduinus was virtually indistinguishable from other local landowners, in this case his role is better defined. Presiding a judicial assembly together with Pavia's bishop was an influential task, especially since the trial involved a powerful institution such as the monastery of Farfa.

The following attestation comes from a waiver made in April 983 and preserved in the chartulary of Subiaco.¹⁰² Leo, abbot of the monastery of Cosma and Damiano in Cave, renounced his claim over a land called *massa iuventiana* and other properties in favour of the monastery of Subiaco. The judicial assembly was held in Rome and was presided by Pope Benedict VII together with the bishops Geribertus of Tours, Petrus of Pavia, Gregorius of Albano, and Leo of Ostia. The abbots Iohannes of Farfa and other clergymen were also present. Among the laymen there were three palatine judges, who were the most important public officials in Rome in this time and absolved both administrative and judicial functions. They were seven and their titles were: *primicerius*, *secundicerius*, *protoscriniarius*, *arcarius*, *sacellarius*, *primus defensor*, and *nomenclator*.¹⁰³ The three judges present at this waiver were the *primicerius* Iohannes, the *arcarius* Leo, and the *protoscriniarius* Azzo. The list was completed by the *dativi iudices* Rigizo and Benedictus, the *consul* Iohannes, the *comes palatii* Sergius, and Berardus, *comes civium Tiburtine*.¹⁰⁴

In this case, identifying Berardus as a member of the Counts of the Marsi is not easy. However, it seems that the attribution is likely, as the combination of the given name Berardus, the title *comes*, and the city of Tivoli is quite distinctive. The existence of a count Berardus, son of Berardus *franciscus*, is confirmed by another document written in 993.¹⁰⁵ As for Tivoli, the town lays very close to Marsica's western border. Finally, the previous charters involving count Teuduinus show that the use of the title *comes* in the Berardi family had already begun. Therefore, Berardus' identification cannot be described as certain, but it is supported by several elements. If this interpretation is correct, it means that two sons of Berardus *franciscus* were active as judges in judicial assemblies of great importance. They worked next to influential officials and clergymen such as bishops, abbots, and palatine judges.

The four documents discussed so far are very important to assess the influence and social prestige of the Berardi family in the late 10th century, but they reveal no direct information about their concrete wealth. The first source to do so is an exchange from 986 preserved in the chartulary of Farfa.¹⁰⁶ Count Teuduinus, appearing for the

¹⁰² Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 185, pp. 225–227.

¹⁰³ On the roles of the Palatine judges see Wickham, *Medieval Rome* (see note 3), pp. 187 f. and Baumgärtner, *Romerneuerung* (see note 95), pp. 71 f.

¹⁰⁴ On the situation in Tivoli see Dario Internullo, *Sui beni pubblici nel Lazio altomedievale. Una nuova interpretazione del politico di Tivoli*, in: *Rivista storica italiana* 135,3 (2023), pp. 817–858.

¹⁰⁵ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 210, p. 249.

¹⁰⁶ Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 403, vol. 3, pp. 106–108.

third time, exchanged several properties with the monastery of Farfa. Differently from his other attestations, in this case Teuduinus is described as „filius cuiusdam Berardi comitis ex natione Francorum and as habitator ducatu spoletano“. This is both the oldest document in which Berardus *franciscus* is mentioned and the first reporting the expression „ex natione Francorum“. An analysis of the exchanged properties can help us estimate the proportions of the family's wealth in this decade. Teuduinus gave the monastery 16 plots of farmland and vineyards located in the regions of Marsica and Sabina. In exchange, the monks gave him a castle (*rocca*) in the diocese of Rieti. The following table summarises the location and size of the different properties. The unit of measurement was the *modius*, which was primarily a unit of volume but could also be used to measure an area. According to the estimate reported by Pierre Toubert, in medieval Sabina a *modius* was equivalent to about 0,23 hectares.¹⁰⁷

	Size
1st	21 <i>modii</i>
2nd	7 <i>modii</i>
3rd	12 <i>modii</i>
4th	3 <i>modii</i>
5th	19 <i>modii</i>
6th	3,5 <i>modii</i>
7th	2,16 <i>modii</i>
8th	22 <i>modii</i>
9th	2,5 <i>modii</i>
10th	2,5 <i>modii</i>
11th	2 <i>modii</i>
12th	3 <i>modii</i>
13th	0,5 <i>modii</i>
14th	0,5 <i>modii</i>
15th	0,37 <i>modii</i>
16th	0,25 <i>modii</i>

Overall, the 16 properties given by Teuduinus measured just over 100 *modii*, which equal to about 23 hectares. This result is only an approximation, but it gives us an estimate of the size of the exchanged land. As for the property given by the monks, it consisted of a single castle and its adjacent lots, which altogether measured 100 *modii* too. Therefore, the exchange was apparently balanced, even though we can hardly estimate other important factors like fertility, altimetry, and slope. 23 hectares may not be an immense estate, but they were a sizable amount of land. However, the high degree of fragmentation of the properties suggests that these were acquired through a process of purchases and inheritance rather than through military conquest or a royal donation at the time

¹⁰⁷ Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), p. 459.

of Berardus *franciscus*. As for the socio-political implications of the contract, the choice to exchange many plots of land with a single, larger castle looks like an attempt to concentrate and valorise the family's properties. Controlling one stronghold surrounded by sizable farmland implicated that the Berardi could project more power than by owning 16 small plots spread out between Rieti and the Marsica region. Moreover, the fact that the abbey of Farfa was willing to allow this operation may indicate that the Counts enjoyed a certain support among the monks.

The most important source to understand the Berardi's family structure in this generation is a donation from 993.¹⁰⁸ This document, copied in the chartulary of Subiaco, was originally made in Carsoli at the very heart of the Marsica region. The donation was made by three members of the family. Two, Count Rainaldus and the bishop Gualterius, were almost certainly sons of Berardus *franciscus*. The third, also named Berardus, is recorded as Rainaldus' son. The beneficiary of the donation was Petrus, abbot of Santa Scolastica in Subiaco. The identification of Rainaldus and Gualterius as sons of Berardus *franciscus* is not fully certain, as the text does not mention the family founder. However, several clues support this interpretation. The count Rainaldus is mentioned again in a document from 1000, which will be discussed later, and is described there as son of Berardus *franciscus*.¹⁰⁹ In addition to this, we know that Carsoli was one of the most important seats of the family.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the reconstruction of the familiar ties is in this case highly probable.

The second problem that must be addressed is the location of Gualterius' episcopal see. The text records him as *epyscopus*, but no places are mentioned. This sparked a brief but interesting debate among specialists. In his chronology of the bishops of Tivoli, published in two parts in 1922 and 1923, Giuseppe Cascioli argued that Gualterius may have been bishop in Tivoli.¹¹¹ Although there is no direct evidence of this, no other bishop is recorded in the city around 993. The hypothesis is therefore plausible but quite circumstantial, as Cascioli himself wrote at the end of his brief analysis. Antonio Sennis shared this scepticism and identified Gualterius as bishop of Forcona in modern day Abruzzo.¹¹² In fact, the text mentions that some of the men present at the donation were from a place called *Forcone*, even though this does not refer specifically to Gualterius. To further sustain this theory, in his work dedicated to Italian bishops under the Saxonian and Salian emperors Gerhard Schwartz had recorded a bishop named Gualdericus in Forcona between the 10th and the 11th centuries, even if the exact chronology is all but certain.¹¹³ Finally, we must consider the possibility that Gualterius was bishop in

¹⁰⁸ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 210, p. 249.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Doc. 184, pp. 224 f.

¹¹⁰ Somma, I conti (see note 12), pp. 45, 53.

¹¹¹ Giuseppe Cascioli, Cronotassi dei vescovi di Tivoli, in: Atti e memorie della società tiburtina di storia e d'arte 2 (1922), pp. 106 f.

¹¹² Sennis, Potere (see note 8), p. 75.

¹¹³ Gerhard Schwartz, Die Besetzung der Bistümer Reichsitaliens unter den sächsischen und salischen Kaisern, Leipzig 1913, pp. 280 f.

the local diocese of Marsica, whose bishops are not always recorded.¹¹⁴ The debate is interesting, but from a socio-historical perspective it is not decisive. The crucial fact is that one of the sons of Berardus *franciscus* had managed to become bishop by the end of the 10th century. The occupation of an episcopal see is another piece of evidence which reveals the importance of the family among local elites.

Unfortunately, the document is vague when it comes to the extent of the donated properties. These included all Rainaldus and Gualterius' possessions in the places called *Monte de Spina*, *Colle Longu*, and *Campu Siccu* not far away from Carsoli. The number and titles of the witnesses, however, might indicate that the donation was of a certain importance. Apart from the already mentioned abbot Petrus, the people present included three priests and monks from Subiaco, the judge Adenolfus, the viscount Ildebrandus, and several other men from Marsica and from the town of Forcona.

Two years later, in 995, a new member of the family, Count Oderisius, appears for the first time in the sources. As attested in a later document,¹¹⁵ he was Rainaldus' son, which would identify him as the brother of the Berardus who was mentioned in 993. The document is from the chartulary of Farfa and concerns a trial held in Marsica. The dispute involved the monastery of Farfa and two brothers, Rachisius and Remedius, who had occupied several properties of the monks. Once again, the source is vague about the size of the estates, which were located in Marsica. The judicial assembly was presided by the count Oderisius and the bishop Helmpertus, who represented Hugh, duke and marquis of Spoleto.¹¹⁶ The rest of the assembly consisted of four judges and several prominent men from the region. The fact that Oderisius could preside a trial involving the monastery of Farfa next to a bishop confirms the socio-political relevance of his family in this period. This is further sustained by the following document, written in 999 and also preserved in Farfa's chartulary.¹¹⁷ Oderisius acted again as leader of a judicial assembly, this time to settle a dispute between the monks and his own father Rainaldus. This concerned the property of a church in Marsica. Even in the late 10th century, it seems surprising that a son was called as a judge in a trial concerning his father. However, the document shows that no actual dispute was held. Rainaldus freely renounced his rights over the church and the trial ended on peaceful terms. This reveals that Oderisius' role was that of a mediator rather than of a real judge. The background of this case remains unclear, but the presence of a full judiciary assembly suggests that the agreement was not a simple donation, but a settlement that came after a form of dispute. Rainaldus' decision to renounce his rights can be put into the context of the Berardi's will to maintain good relationships with the monastery of Farfa and more in general to acquire a role of influence as mediators and protectors of religious institution in the region.

¹¹⁴ See Branciani, *La diocesi* (see note 54), pp. 2–8.

¹¹⁵ *Il Regesto di Farfa*, Doc. 388, vol. 3, pp. 90 f.

¹¹⁶ See Savio, *Monumenta* (see note 100), vol. 2, pp. 1003 f.

¹¹⁷ *Il Regesto di Farfa*, Doc. 430, vol. 3, pp. 144 f.

The following year, in February 1000, the count Rainaldus made a sizable donation to the monastery of Subiaco.¹¹⁸ The formula „ex natione Francorum“ appears for a second time, referred to Rainaldus' father, Berardus *franciscus*. The donated properties encompassed the three castles of Arsoli, Roviano, and Anticoli.¹¹⁹ Although they are referred to as *castella* in the source, the text suggests that they were fortified villages with significant agricultural and artisanal activities. The writer mentioned churches, houses inside and outside the walls, fields, vineyards, watermills, rivers, and pastures, as well as some additional uncultivated land. The dimension of Rainaldus' donation is striking, especially if compared to the documents analysed in the previous pages. This document is a clear proof that the Berardi disposed of a considerable number of properties by the very beginning of the 11th century. As for the reasons behind the donation, several elements can be suggested. First, the religious aspect should not be underestimated. The tight relationships between Farfa, Subiaco, and the Berardi underline not only a political strategy, but also a devout attitude toward monastic institutions. However, strengthening Subiaco's position in southern Marsica could have two positive effects for the Berardi. On one hand, it meant guaranteeing the support of an ancient and influential monastery such as Santa Scolastica. On the other, it ensured that the area between Subiaco and the Berardi's power base in central Marsica remained out of the reach of potential rivals.

After this, the counts of the Marsi are not recorded in either monastery for several years and they reappear in Farfa in 1014.¹²⁰ Count Oderisius, previously active in 995 and 999, is mentioned again, this time as a monastery founder. The document is an imperial diploma issued by Henry II and confirming several properties to the monks of Farfa. Among these, the text mentions the churches of Saint Peregrine and Saint Mary in the territory of Balba in the Marsica region, stating that Oderisius had repopulated them with monks. Once again, a source confirms how the Berardi invested in the preservation of religious institutions. Despite this important document, the first half of the 11th century provides scarce information about the activities of the Counts in Farfa and Subiaco. In 1038 a donation to the abbey of Farfa mentions the count Berardus, Rainaldus' son and Oderisius' brother, who had already appeared forty-five years earlier in 993, when he was probably very young.¹²¹ However, he does not play any significant role in the contract and is cited only as a neighbour in relationship to a property located in the diocese of Rieti. The donor, Transaricus of Rieti, was not a member of the Berardi family. Although this source is useful to reconstruct the genealogy of the Counts, it reveals little about their political and economic activities in this period.

118 Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 184, pp. 224 f.

119 Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), pp. 376 f., 403.

120 Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 451, vol. 3, p. 164.

121 *Ibid.*, Doc. 570, vol. 3, pp. 277 f.

The same holds true for the following source, an imperial diploma from 1050 issued by Henry III in favour of the monastery of Farfa.¹²² The document confirms a long list of properties, among which the church of Saint Peregrine that had already been cited in 1038. In relation to it, the writer recorded: „aecclesiam sancti Peregrini in qua comes Oderisius monasterium construxit“. Since Oderisius was active as a judge and thus an adult man in 995, we can suspect that he was probably dead by 1050, but the text does not specify it. However, this source is important because it implies that the memory of Oderisius' foundation was not only alive at the middle of the 11th century but also considered important enough to be recorded in an imperial diploma.

The following document, written in 1060 and copied into the chartulary of Subiaco, is the oldest one concerning the fourth generation of the Counts in Italy.¹²³ It is a donation made by Rainaldus, son of Berardus, to the monks of Santa Scolastica. In the text Rainaldus is described with several titles and attributes: „illustrissimus comes, gloriosus comes, natione Francorum, and habitator in Carsoli“. The use of adjectives in their superlative form was not uncommon in Latium, as shown by other documents preserved in the chartulary.¹²⁴ However, the combination of these four attributes is very peculiar and stands out from the rest of the source. The choice to combine the title *comes*, which had been common in the family for eighty years, with pompous attributes such as *illustrissimus* and *gloriosus*, is innovative. Moreover, the claim of a Frankish origin after three generations spent in Italy shows that this element had become an important feature for the Berardi. Finally, the mention of Carsoli as Rainaldus' home supports the idea that the counts had established a residence in this town of Marsica.

As for the document itself, the donated properties were conspicuous. The monks, represented by their abbot Umbertus, received the castle of Camorata – nowadays Camerata Nuova in the province of Rome –¹²⁵ and the nearby church of Saint Peter. Camerata lays very close to Arsoli, Roviano, and Anticoli Corrado, the three castles that had been donated to Subiaco by Rainaldus' ancestors in 993. With this addition, the monks gained control over much of the area between the core of Marsica, where Carsoli is located, and the valley of the Aniene river that leads to Tivoli and to the city of Rome.¹²⁶ Although, as already mentioned, the religious aspect of these donations should not be underestimated, a strategic thinking also may have played a role behind this transfer of fortified villages. It is possible that the Counts of the Marsi wanted the monastery of Subiaco to have a secure control over the communication lines between Marsica and

¹²² Ibid., Doc. 879, vol. 4, pp. 274–277.

¹²³ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 208, p. 248.

¹²⁴ Ibid., Doc. 35, p. 74, Doc. 44, pp. 85 f., Doc. 81, pp. 124 f., Doc. 109, pp. 155 f., Doc. 120, pp. 168 f., Doc. 156, p. 204. Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 628, vol. 4, pp. 24–26, Doc. 651, vol. 4, pp. 48–50, Doc. 682, vol. 4, pp. 85 f., Doc. 903, vol. 4, pp. 196 f., Doc. 926, vol. 4, pp. 320 f., Doc. 1189, vol. 5, pp. 186 f.

¹²⁵ Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), pp. 377 f.

¹²⁶ On the importance of the Aniene valley for the Counts see again Somma, *I conti* (see note 12), pp. 45–58.

central Latium. However, this transfer of power was mitigated by a second contract, stipulated at the same time, and also copied into the chartulary of Subiaco.¹²⁷ In this second document Count Rainaldus leased both the church of Saint Peter and the castle of Camorata in exchange for a yearly payment of three solidi of Pavia.¹²⁸ In this case, a strategic thinking appears more clearly. Rainaldus was willing to strengthen Subiaco's patrimony, but, at least for the moment, he made sure to retain control of his stronghold in the Apennine mountains. A few years later, in a document dated in 1066 or 1067, Rainaldus appeared again, this time to make a sizable donation to the monastery of Farfa.¹²⁹ The monks received two properties in Marsica: the church of Saint Silvester and the church of Saint Salvatore and Saint Mary. The donation was conspicuous, as the churches came with land and properties. In this case Rainaldus carried the title *comes de provincia Marsorum*. Although the Frankish ancestry was not mentioned, it is interesting to see that the connection to the Marsica region had acquired an important role for the Counts. However, it should not be missed that there is no reference to a county of Marsica. The attribute should probably be interpreted as an ancestry and not as a claim to the ownership of the whole region.

Rainaldus was not the only member of the Berardi family who entertained strong relationships with the monastery of Farfa. In 1068 or 1069 another branch of the family exchanged the castle of Repasto and the church of Saint Andrew in Marsica for the castle of Acqua Mezza, all located in the territory of Rieti.¹³⁰ The donors were three family members: Oderisius, Berardus, and Herbeus. Oderisius was son of Count Berardus, which would make him Rainaldus' brother. Berardus and Herbeus were sons of Count Teuduinus. They were probably Oderisius' cousins, although the exact degree of kinship is difficult to reconstruct. Every single member of the Berardi family mentioned in the document – Oderisius, Berardus, the other Berardus, Herbeus, and Teuduinus – carries the title *comes*. The brothers Berardus and Herbeus do not have it in their first mention, but they are called *comites* in the signature list. Although the problem will need to be addressed further, this is a hint that the Counts of the Marsi used the title as an honorific attribute and not as a form of office. In fact, the document does not mention any specific region, town, or castle of residence, but only a generic reference to other castles and properties owned by the family around Rieti.

The last source mentioning the Counts in either chartulary is a document from 1074 preserved in Farfa.¹³¹ It is a peculiar contract, partly a donation and partly a purchase, stipulated in the city of Rieti by a larger group of family members. Since the familiar network is quite complicated and the names tended to repeat themselves, a

¹²⁷ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 209, pp. 248 f.

¹²⁸ Wickham, *Medieval Rome* (see note 3), p. 173.

¹²⁹ Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 946, vol. 4, p. 340.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, Doc. 981, vol. 4, pp. 360 f.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Doc. 1015, vol. 5, pp. 18 f.

visual representation might be clearer to understand. The following table summarises the situation:

Husband	Wife	Parents
Oderisius	Gilla (†)	Berardus (†)
Berardus	/	Rainaldus (†)
		Sikelgaita (†)
Oderisius	Litelda	Rainaldus (†)
		Sikelgaita (†)

Moreover, the text mentions two deceased children, Rainaldus and Berardus, saying only they were the children of the previously mentioned count. However, since the document mentions several counts, it is impossible to understand if Rainaldus and Berardus were children of Berardus or of one of the two men called Oderisius. Moreover, it is also possible that they were instead sons of one of the two deceased fathers, Berardus and Rainaldus. Like the previous donation from 1068 or 1069, this contract was stipulated by two brothers and a third man who was probably their cousin. Once again, most male family members carry the title *comes*. The most interesting attribute concerns the family's ancestry. After the list of donors, the notary wrote this sentence: „quoniam omnes nos insimul ex natione Francorum“. It must not be forgotten that 148 years had passed since Hugo of Arles' coronation as king of Italy. The Counts of the Marsi had been living in Italy for almost a century and a half, and yet their claim to a Frankish ancestry still retained a prominent role in their self-representation. Another peculiarity of this source is the presence of several women, a unique example in the documents analysed for this research. Three women are mentioned, all wives of family members: Litelda, Sikelgaita, and Gilla.¹³² Litelda, wife of Oderisius, was the only one alive at the time of the donation. Sikelgaita, remembered only as mother of two of the donors, had already passed, as had her husband Rainaldus. Gilla was also deceased, but her death had been probably a premature one, as his husband wanted to remember her in the donation.

The properties acquired by Farfa consisted of the castle of Offiano, also called Montaliano, and half of the monastery of Saint John.¹³³ Both were located in the territory of Rieti. In exchange, the monks paid 100 pounds, which were not equivalent to the full prices of the two holdings. The rest of the value was in fact donated to the monastery in exchange for the salvation of the souls of the deceased relatives mentioned in the text. This kind of solution was very unusual at the time, as I could find no other example of it in the chartularies of Farfa and Subiaco. This contract concludes the list of the seventeen documents concerning the Counts of the Marsi in the 10th and 11th century. The compar-

¹³² Savio records all three women in his lexicon: Savio, *Monumenta* (see note 100), vol. 2, p. 614; vol. 3, p. 796; vol. 4, p. 925.

¹³³ Toubert, *Les structures* (see note 16), p. 430.

ison of the sources has highlighted the elements already discussed in the introduction: the limited set of given names, the use of the title *comes*, and the claim of a Frankish ancestry. Moreover, the analysis of the sentences has been useful to understand the level of social prestige reached by the Berardi in central Italy, while that of purchases, donations, and exchanges has revealed some information about their economic influence. The following conclusion will address these aspects as a whole and tie them into a general reflection on the topic.

6 Conclusions

This paper's documentary analysis has examined a specific case study. The broader premise, however, is to investigate whether a new form of aristocratic identity was emerging in Italy in the transitional phase between the early and the high Middle Ages. From this viewpoint, the Berardi family has revealed a promising example to understand at least some possible aspects of this social shift toward a new form of leading classes. A single case study is not enough to describe such a large phenomenon, but it aims to build the ground for further research. The first element to be discussed is the use of honorific titles. Ever since their first contracts made between 981 and 986, stipulated by single family members and not by larger groups, the Berardi were characterised by the virtually omnipresent use of the title *comes*. In fact, one or several counts appear in every one of the seventeen texts. Although the title was widespread in Latium,¹³⁴ such an imposing presence suggests that the Berardi had a particular attachment to it, using it in the fashion of a personal attribute. To support this interpretation, there is no evidence that the titles of count corresponded to specific administrative units or autonomous local powers. Marsica had a certain form of administrative cohesiveness within the Duchy of Spoleto, but as far as we can understand it was not a mosaic of semi-independent counties.¹³⁵

For these reasons, I believe that the Counts of the Marsi operated a form of title appropriation, adopting *comes* as an attribute to distinguish themselves in the sources in opposition to the other local landowners.¹³⁶ While these occasionally used the title too, they generally appeared only with their names or with other generic titles such as

¹³⁴ For example, in Subiaco the title appears in: Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 14, pp. 34–38, Doc. 36, p. 75, Doc. 78, pp. 121 f., Doc. 154, pp. 101 f., Doc. 184, pp. 224 f., Doc. 185, pp. 225–227, Doc. 205, p. 246, Doc. 208, p. 248, Doc. 209, pp. 248 f., Doc. 210, p. 249.

¹³⁵ Sennis, *Potere* (see note 8), pp. 15–47.

¹³⁶ Another possibility should be considered: the use of the title *comes* may have referenced an earlier Frankish tradition associated with the family. If this were the case, the title could be seen as a relic of the past, linking the family to a late Carolingian tradition. However, the available sources do not allow us to establish this connection with a sufficient degree of certainty.

nobilis vir or *vir magnificus*.¹³⁷ The operation was successful and the Berardi managed to be associated with the title *comes*, as proven by the judicial assemblies in which they were involved. Since these assemblies included influential figures such as bishops and palatine judges, the fact that the Berardi were called *comites* supports the idea that this title use had been accepted by the rest of the local elites. A further aspect concerns the family names. If we focus on the names that appear at least twice, the list consists of only four names: Berardus, Oderisius, Rainaldus, and Teuduinus. Two more names, Gualterius and Herbeus, are found only once. In the last contract from 1074 the female names Gilla, Litelda, and Sikelgaita are also recorded. Including the family founder there were at least four men named Berardus, three named Oderisius, two named Rainaldus, and two named Teuduinus. The actual list, however, was much longer, as not all family members appear in the chartularies.¹³⁸ While honorific titles point to a social strategy, the use of a determined set of first names should not be interpreted only as a deliberate tactic. However, the repetition of the same four names over four generations can be used an indirect source to see the identity cohesion of the Counts of the Marsi. The names Oderisius and Teuduinus are particularly interesting because they were uncommon in central Italy.¹³⁹ Rainaldus and Berardus were more widespread, but they did not belong to the most common names in the region.¹⁴⁰

The third and last pillar of the Berardi's identity was their claim of a Frankish ancestry. This is the most distinctive feature of the family. While other landowners use the title *comes* and other familiar groups could use the same names over different generations, a Frankish origin was a rare characteristic in this time and place. The expression „ex natione Francorum“ is used four times: in 986, in 1000, in 1060, and in 1074.¹⁴¹ The chronological distribution is interesting because it covers almost the whole investigated period. The first two mentions, those from 986 and 1000, are not surprising, as they referred to Berardus *franciscus*, who came from Southern France, and his children, whose birthplace is unknown, but whose Frankish ancestry was still very near. The other two mentions are more interesting, as they show a remarkable continuity of the claim. While we cannot know how ‚Frankish‘ the Counts of the Marsi were after over a century in Italy, we know that they believed in it. And more importantly, they probably wanted the rest of the local elites to know they had this distinctive feature that made them unique and different from their neighbours and rivals.

¹³⁷ Again, some examples from the chartulary of Subiaco: Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 24, pp. 63 f., Doc. 38, pp. 77 f., Doc. 61, pp. 102 f., Doc. 65, pp. 107 f., Doc. 89, pp. 134 f., Doc. 97, pp. 142 f., Doc. 110, pp. 156 f., Doc. 117, pp. 165 f., Doc. 122, pp. 171 f., Doc. 205, p. 246.

¹³⁸ See Sennis, Potere (see note 8), pp. 75–77.

¹³⁹ See Savio, Monumenta (see note 100), vol. 3, pp. 1224–1236; vol. 4, pp. 1121–1134.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 722–759; vol. 4, pp. 433–442.

¹⁴¹ Il Regesto sublacense, Doc. 184, pp. 225 f., Doc. 208, p. 248; Il Regesto di Farfa, Doc. 403, vol. 3, pp. 106–108, Doc. 1015, vol. 5, pp. 18 f.

As stated before, a single case study does not suffice to prove a whole historical process, but the example of the Counts of the Marsi supports the theory that a new form of aristocratic identity was emerging in Italy at the turn into the second millennium. This aristocracy was not necessarily wealthier or more powerful than before, but it was more cohesive and self-aware from a social standpoint, and consequently more visible in the sources. This paper has focused on a specific family, but other cases could be considered to further elaborate the understanding of this new type of elite. Two examples that could be most promising to conduct this research are the Counts Guidi in Tuscany and the Aleramici in Northern Italy. Although both families have been object of several publications, a new analysis of the attributes discussed in this paper will be useful to compare the self-awareness and social complexity of Italian aristocratic groups in this timeframe.¹⁴² The hope is therefore that this study may serve as a building block for constructing a new interpretation of this phenomenon.

142 On the Counts Guidi see Federico Canaccini (Ed.), *La lunga storia di una stirpe comitale. I conti Guidi tra Romagna e Toscana*. Atti del convegno di studi organizzato dai Comuni di Modigliana e Poppi, Firenze 2009 (Biblioteca storica toscana 57) and Natale Rauty, *Documenti per la storia dei conti Guidi in Toscana. Le origini e i primi secoli, 887–1164*, Firenze 2003 (Documenti di storia italiana 2,10). On the Aleramici see Andrea Paleologo Oriundi, *Storia degli Aleramici. Una famiglia medievale*, Bologna 2019 and Rinaldo Merlone, *Gli Aleramici. Una dinastia dalle strutture pubbliche ai nuovi orientamenti territoriali (secoli IX–XI)*, Torino 1995 (Biblioteca storica subalpina 212).