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ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
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Dipartimento di Storia Culture Civiltà



DOSSIER

**MATILDA 900: REMEMBERING
MATILDA OF CANOSSA WIDE WORLD**

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Numero 13 - 2017

ISSN: 1825-411X

Art. 16

pp. 1-38

DOI: 10.12977/stor667

Editore: BraDypUS

Data di pubblicazione: 17/07/2017

Sezione: Dossier: “Matilda 900: Remembering Matilda of
Canossa Wide World”

Matilda and the Cities: Testing a “Figurational” Approach

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The relation between Matilda of Tuscany and the cities of the Italian Kingdom has to date often been the subject of short case studies or of overly general considerations, such as the opposition between ‘feudal’ and ‘communal’ power. The article aims to propose an interpretation of this relationship based on a ‘figurational’ approach, i.e., one that focuses on an entanglement of interdependencies and interactions between multiple actors (prince, bishops, cathedral chapters, urban monasteries, lay groups). This figurational view confirms the complexity of the context of the emergence of city-communes.

Introduction¹

The countess Matilda of Canossa (1046/1047–1115), the last in a powerful noble line, was the ruler of a complex and extended dominion in the Kingdom of Italy (see Fig 1) in politically tense decades during the so-called investiture controversy (1076–1122). In this context, the

¹ I would like thank Alberto Cotza, Giorgio Cremonesi, Enrico Faini and Chris Wickham for their words of encouragement and their advice. I would also like to thank Alheydis Plassmann, Gwendolin Goldbloom and Takeo Watanabe for their help.

relationship between the countess and the cities has often been interpreted according to an idealist dialectic as being between ancient feudalism and modern city communes. Such an interpretation is still more or less widespread, despite recent research on the genesis of the communes which has modified the predominant teleological model. Consequently a new model of interpretation seems necessary. This is the aim of this short article, which tries to suggest

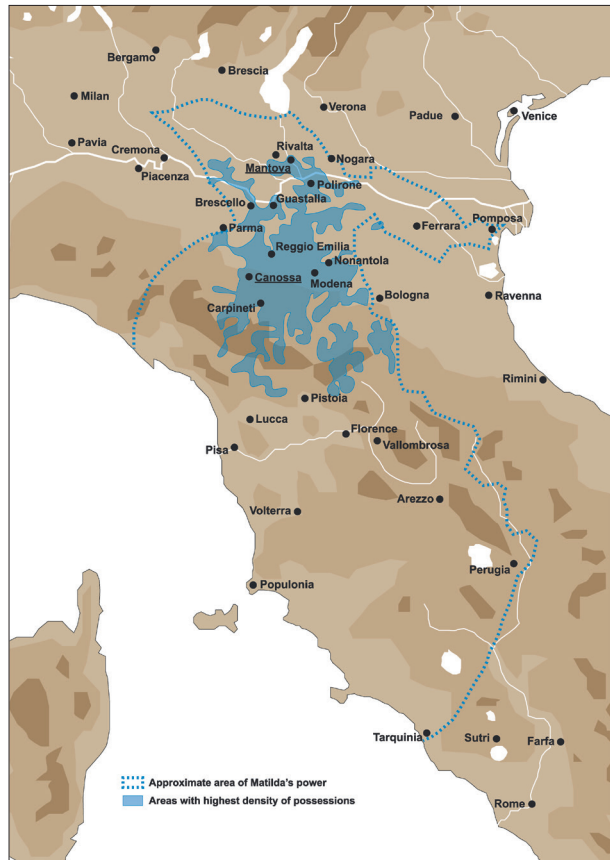


Fig. 1. Matilda's domains in central and northern Italy (Eugenio Rivarsi, 2016)

a more complex way of imagining the relationship between Matilda's *domus* and the groups and institutions active in the urban contexts. During a prestigious series of lectures on Matilda, presented in Bologna in 2015 to mark the 900-year anniversary of the death of the countess, Professor Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli of the University of Bologna once again addressed the problem of the relationship between Matilda and the cities, which, she maintained, had often been represented simplistically as a «misunderstanding» or an «incompatibility»². The basis of

² *Celebrazioni per il IX centenario della morte di Matilde di Canossa (1115) e della*

this «misunderstanding», in her view, was the idea that Matilda and the cities belonged to two different «worlds» or «cultures», the «feudal» and the (pre)-«communal» respectively, which, in an implicit idealist vision of history, were opposed and consecutive. This view is also expressed, for example, in the representation of Matilda by Vito Fumagalli, who published fundamental studies about the power wielded by the countess and her ancestors. He could affirm: «Era nella logica delle cose si direbbe oggi; certo tutto questo obbediva al movimento di emancipazione delle città dal dominio del ceto feudale tradizionale»³.

Although repeatedly questioned and elaborated on [Romagnoli, Ricci 2008, 153-155], this view has never been superseded by another model. The time now seems ripe to explicitly propose a new interpretative pattern of the specific relationship between Matilda and the cities. This model aims to deconstruct both “actors”, Matilda and the cities, in order to avoid them becoming, more or less unwittingly, the protagonists in a “plot” of the Italian Middle Ages: that of the rise of the city communes.

Deconstructing means first of all recognising the contradictions within the established pattern of Matilda being “feudal” and the cities “(pre-)communal”. These contradictions have been pointed out and overco-

nascita del Comune di Bologna (1116): Muzzarelli’s lecture dealt with the comparison between Matilda and other women of the High Middle Ages («Le grandi donne della storia»). Later, Rossella Rinaldi gave a lecture about this subject in the same series that stressed the continuity of relations between Matilda’s dynasty and the cities (*Matilde, i Canossiani e le città*). On the occasion of this anniversary conference Glauco Maria Cantarella has repeatedly stressed the need for reviewing this historiographical problem. For his views on this context see Cantarella 2015, 243-258; on the European dimension of that transformation: Cantarella 2011.

³ Fumagalli 2008, 245, who stressed that Matilda would have understood the dissolution of her “state”: «Ma la gran contessa capì quale era la strada da prendere, quale era l’evoluzione delle cose, il corso della storia favorevole da tempo ineluttabilmente al trionfo delle città». Fumagalli’s representation of Matilda’s awareness is clearly an assumption that depends on the idealistic model. Fumagalli’s overview of the dynastic power: Fumagalli 1981.

me time and again by historians in their concrete analysis of case studies which took advantage of the new description of the communal society⁴. Indeed, the relations between Matilda and the urban societies are characterised not only by conflicts but also by types of collaboration and even sharing, i.e. by having connections with the same goods, the same institutions and the same individuals or groups. As has been established, cities such as Pisa, Florence and Mantua can in some ways even be considered dynastic residences⁵.

The last of the three, Mantua is usually described with good reason as being a source of conflict, although this presupposes that largely conflict-free coexistence and lasting collaboration between the power of the dynasty and some of the urban actors was possible⁶. This was

⁴ For instance, see Bordini's recent and excellent interpretation of a multiple-case study (Parma, Reggio, Modena) that, on the one hand, deliberately shows the complex interrelations between Matilda's rule and the actors from the cities («perché i due momenti – l'età canossana e l'età comunale – sembrano svolgersi senza soluzione di continuità. Pur non spingendosi a sostenere, del resto erroneamente, che l'una fu diretta emanazione dell'altro, dovremo, però, osservare che, nella zona presa a campione, la novità del regime comunale fu collegata a doppio filo al passato canossano» [Bordini 2011, 138]); yet, on the other, does not propose a new model: despite the detailed reconstruction, the model remains dichotomic (*Vassallità canossana e istituzioni comunali: due universi a confronto*, 142).

⁵ Cf. the known episode of the magnificent Easter celebration in Pisa (1074), where Beatrice and Matilda with their *entourage* appeared as powerful rulers («*quasi cuiusdam dominationis praefecturas*»): *Chronicon Sancti Huberti*, 583–584; see Ronzani 1996, 133–135.

⁶ During the investiture controversy, Mantua was besieged by Henry IV for a long time (1090–1091). The long resistance – before the “betrayal” – is proof of a working partnership between the *domus*, led by Matilda's husband Welf V, and the urban actors, particularly the *militia*. Despite his polemical attitude, Donizo's representation of the interaction between the “characters” of Matilda and Mantua in his *Vita Mathildis* (1111–1115) implies a synergy that the “city” had refused (note once again the significant reference to Matilda's customary stay in the city during the Easter celebrations: a typical feature of a residence): «*Catholicis plena dudum celebrare solebas/ Pascha Dei Christi, cum splendiferaque Mathildi,/ Curia cuius erat dapibus donisque repleta./ [...] Consilium dignum cape, lugeto scelus istud./ Iura licet prisca corruperis et nova scripta,/ Plange tamen pure, plebs omnis plangat in urbe,/ Communi vero voto revocare studeto/ Cultricem Christi, vestram dominamque Mathildim./ Hinc restaurabis leges, et honore mica-*

true of the cities that fell under her delegated and lordly powers as well as those that did not. The restitution of the castle of Sambuca to the cathedral chapter of Pistoia (1104) and the restoration of the road to Copermio for the benefit of the church of Parma (1106) are acts on Matilda’s part that demonstrate the possibility of an agreement between the many urban and non-urban actors – a complex figuration in both cases – involved⁷.

In order to better understand such situations in general, we must go one step further and replace the previous framework with a more complex model, in which both Matilda and the cities are no longer hypostatizations; not “individual” actors, but structured social formations, constituted by many individuals, groups and even institutions. This model can be conceived through a “figurational” approach, which has previously been used to investigate pre-modern and specifically medieval societies, too, with the aim of conceptualising complex and dynamic interdependencies in power relations. The figurations, as mobile and processual social structures, are made up of multiple actors in mutual dependence, which cannot simply be absorbed under general labels following idealist plots. This meets the current need for complexity in historical explanation and interpretation⁸.

bis;/ Urbes vicinae laudabunt te sat opime;/ Ac fore securo tamen haud aliter potes unquam» [Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II 525–527; 542–549]. The interests the countess had in Mantua were strengthened by the burial of Anselm II of Lucca in the cathedral and by the hagiographical promotion of his cult (1086–1087; see *Vita Anselmi*), as well as the foundation of a hospital for the poor: *Urkunden* 67, 200–203; Dep. 65, 433–434. The conflict during the years 1091–1114 is confirmed by the scarcity of contacts, most of which were punitive; but see the interesting context in which Bishop Hugo of Mantua granted tithes to the dynastic abbey of Polirone (*Urkunden*, 80, 231–233).

⁷ *Urkunden*, 81–82, 234–239 (Pistoia); 96, 264–266 (Parma).

⁸ Torre 1996, 199–201, referring to the bishops in the old regime. For an example of use in the High Middle Ages: Fiore 2010, 131–238. The figurational approach is derived from the sociological theory of Norbert Elias (and of Georg Simmel); for the wide range of uses see a clear summary in: *Figurational Studies*. In the present context, these concepts have been adopted and reworked conceptually to arrive at an

Thus at that time the “city” was only one of the identifiable actors in the social and political processes, at first not a frequent one, but gradually becoming more visible. In other words, we should not always assume the “city” as a collective actor with which individuals, groups and institutions could primarily identify themselves. We should instead imagine an urban “stage” or “context” for the actions of these various institutions, groups and individuals who do not necessarily act for the political autonomy of their city, but rather to defend and improve their individual positions. To be clear, this does not mean denying the rise of the communes between the eleventh and twelfth centuries; it actually acknowledges once again the gradual and complex nature of the development⁹. None of Matilda’s “counterparts” could be identified as a city commune.

The same might also be said for the other partner in the relationship: the countess herself¹⁰. There is a risk of reducing “Matilda”, too, to an individual actor, even though it is evident that we are looking at a *domus*, i.e. a complex, vertical and at the same time multicentric struc-

attempt at applying them when describing the power structures in medieval society. Moreover, a figurational analysis represents a more qualitative approach capable of resolving some problems encountered in network analysis, the quantitative requirements of which cannot be fulfilled in many medieval contexts; cf. Hitzbleck/Hübner 014. Regarding the complementarity and differences between these approaches cf. Willems 2010. For a recent example of network analysis of a medieval context see Gramsch 2013.

⁹ There is now agreement on a possible return to Tabacco’s complex reflections on the social structures of the city, within which the communal government arose: Tabacco 1989, 182–236; recently see: Pio, De Matteis 2011; Caciorgna, Carocci, Zorzi 2014; Wickham 2014; Wickham 2015. Regarding the relationship between marquises and cities in the tenth and eleventh centuries cf. Sergi 1995, 328–343.

¹⁰ Regarding Matilda’s *domus* see Riversi 2013, 450–469, with further references. The analysis of the decision-making in the assembly of Carpineti (1092), although we see it through Donizo’s eyes, allows us to observe the participation of different actors, even with institutional significance (e.g. the bishops), in Matilda’s important decision to continue the war against Henry IV. Regarding the assembly of Carpineti cf. Riversi 2015.

ture – which is also in turn made up out of many individuals, groups, and institutions. Moreover, applying a Marxist or idealist label such as “feudal” is not adequate for this plural formation, which was defined as a “diverse conglomeration” (*coacervo*) and aptly described more than twenty years ago as «the powers of the Canossa»¹¹.

In a similar vein, it is not adequate to use the label “reform” in an abstract Gregorian sense in this context to describe the politics of Matilda’s *domus*: it, too, is a simple but misleading concept. This last consideration is significant because it plays a part in the representation of the relationship between Matilda and the cities¹². One only has to read the first chapters of the *Historia Mediolanensis* by Landulf of St Paul for this chronicler’s polemical and ironical narrative to explain the complexity of the religious field and its institutional structures at the dawn of the twelfth century in Milan and Lombardy¹³.

One consequence of this first attempt at deconstruction is that, when describing the relationship between Matilda’s *domus* and the urban societies, other cities than those within her delegated powers also come to the foreground – for example Milan, whose political collaboration with the *domus* of the countess through some urban and non-urban actors has mostly remained in the shadows so far¹⁴.

¹¹ See the incisive analysis of Sergi 1994, who developed the research of Vito Fumagalli. See also Bertolini 2004a, 42-43. Regarding the complexity of aristocratic power see now Lazzari 2008.

¹² For example, see Fasoli’s interpretation of the relationship between Matilda and the cities: «Matilde [...] non amava molto risiedere in città, e questo le rendeva meno facile la comprensione della mentalità e delle necessità dei centri urbani, anche in relazione al problema centrale della sua politica: la vittoria degli ideali gregoriani» [Fasoli 1978, 57]. But at the same conference Capitani 1978, 371-376, assessed the motives of Matilda’s conduct differently.

¹³ Landulphus de Sancto Paulo, *Historia Mediolanensis*: Matilda appears in the first chapters: 1-8, 3-7.

¹⁴ Matilda was a «protagonista discreta, eppure incisiva, delle vicende milanesi di fine XI e inizio XII secolo, sebbene questo tema risulti piuttosto trascurato nella riflessione storiografica sulla contessa e su Milano» [Lucioni 2003, 150]. On Milan in

Finally it should be added that, for the theoretical purposes of this article, an internal chronology of events and actors is left aside here. An inquiry into a possible “evolution” of the relationship between Matilda and the cities over approximately forty years would require a deeper and broader description of the contexts than is possible here¹⁵.

Bishops

The highest-ranking actor on the urban stage is certainly the bishop. In this case the unravelling is quite easy, even if the historiographical pattern of the *sintesi* between the bishop and the (pre-) communal cities remains at the same time, and with good reason, a valid interpretation model¹⁶. However, the bishop lends himself well to being reformulated conceptually in terms of a “figurational” approach, which is to say in a web of dynamic interdependencies involving not only “Matilda” and the urban actors, but also the king, the pope, other bishops and regional powers. The diocesan schisms caused by the investiture controversy show this quite clearly: the case of Lucca, and especially that of Anselm II and his imperial opponent Peter, is significant in illustrating the bishops’ complex network of interdependencies, which obviously require more than a “city” storyline as an adequate explanation¹⁷.

these decades see: Wickham 2015 and Dartmann 2012, 33-120, with references to the wide previous literature; regarding the context of the 1090s in which Matilda was politically influential see particularly: Lucioni 2011.

¹⁵ For an exemplary analysis of the case of Lucca see: Bertolini 2004b.

¹⁶ Tabacco 1989, 321-344; see Tabacco 1979; Francesconi 2001; more generally: Pellegrini 2009.

¹⁷ Regarding Lucca see: Schwarzmaier 1972, 401-410; and above all Savigni 1994, Savigni 1996, Savigni 2001, and his forthcoming article in Calzona, Cantarella 2016; see also Puglia 2013, especially 1-23; and Eldewik 2012, 127-138, 165-175. Unfortunately there is no comparative study of the diocesan schisms in the Italian Kingdom during the investiture controversy, which might be developed according to a “figu-

With regard to these urban actors, who were of primary importance in, and at the same time fundamental pivots of, the kingdom, Matilda and her *domus* advanced a claim based on the dynastic influence she inherited from her ancestors¹⁸: obviously, this entailed more than simply grants and donations¹⁹. The hyperbolic image of the chronicler Cosmas of Prague, who composed his work before 1125, according to which the countess had a hold over more than 120 bishops, is a significant perception *a posteriori* of the relationship between them and the dynasty’s power²⁰. This perception may well correspond to the actual position held by the bishops in Matilda’s *entourage* during the investiture contest – a figurational (inter-)dependency –, although they could in

rational” approach.

¹⁸ The interdependency between the bishops and the house of Canossa had been structurally fundamental – as agreement as well as opposition – ever since the first generation of the dynasty. Donizo’s poem offers an interesting perception of this durable feature of dynastic power; for example, see this passage on Boniface, father of Matilda, in which superiority, emulation and respect are mixed: «*Pontifices sacros habuit quam maxime caros:/ Ipsis donabat quae censuit fore grata;/ Psallebant semper cappellani reverenter/ Horas nocturnas sibi cotidieque diurnas;/ Nemo cappellam super ipsum praesul habebat*» [Donizone, *Vita di Matilde I*, 1072–1076]. See Caterina Ciccopiedi’s forthcoming study on the relationship between Matilda and the bishops in *Matilde di Canossa e il suo tempo*, 2016.

¹⁹ *Urkunden*: 23, 87–92 (Landulf of Pisa); 24, 93–94 (Volterra); 28, 104–107 (Lucca); 108, 289–290 (Dodo of Modena); 115, 304–306 (Landulf of Ferrara); 40–41, 133–136 (Ubaldo of Mantua); 96, 264–266 (church of Parma); 108, 289–290 (Dodo of Modena); 115, 304–306 (Landulf of Ferrara); 131, 336–338 (Manfred of Mantua); 132, 338–340 (Bernard of Parma); 136, 347–349 (church of Mantua). Judgments and jurisdictional decisions: 5, 44–47 (church of Lucca); 13, 66–68 (Leo of Pistoia); 14, 68–70 (Anselm of Lucca); 20–21, 81–85 (Anselm of Lucca); 26, 97–100 (Anselm of Lucca); 31–32, 112–116 (Gratian of Ferrara); 52, 158–161 (Rangerius of Lucca); 58, 181–182 (Rangerius of Lucca); 63, 190–192 (church of Pisa); 65, 195–196 (church of Reggio); 77, 226–227 (Laurentius of Populonia); 97, 266–269 (Dodo of Modena); 106, 285–287.

²⁰ «*Mathildis potentissima domina, quae post obitum patris sui Bonifacii totius Longobardiae simul et Burgundiae suscepit regni gubernacula, habens potestatem eligendi et intronizandi sive eliminandi 120 super episcopos*» [Cosma, *Chronica*, II, 31, 126]. Regarding the representation of Matilda in this chronicle: Wolverton 2015, 161–169.

turn play the role of influential advisers and even, in the case of Anselm II, assume some functions of the “male” head of the *domus* according to the representation of the anonymous author of the *Vita Anselmi*²¹.

Bernold of Constance’s chronicle, written at the time of the events, confirms this: he relates how, thanks to Matilda’s intervention, the bishops of Modena, Reggio and Pistoia were ordained in 1085. Bernold also refers to a significant failure: a few years later, the *catholici* of Piacenza who appointed Bonizo of Sutri – a former member of Matilda’s *entourage* – as bishop probably received no support from the countess, and the famous reformer paid the consequences of this isolation²².

One case in which Matilda and her *domus* intervened to support a new bishop, and one for which far better records are available, is certainly that concerning Parma, a city on the border of her delegated and sei-

²¹ The presence of bishops as participants in various ways in Matilda’s actions (in this case not as recipients, for which see note 17 above): *Urkunden* 8, 52–54 (Anselm of Lucca); 42, 136–139 (Ubalduus of Mantua); 44, 142–143 (Ubalduus of Mantua, Heribert of Reggio); 50, 154–156 (Peter of Pistoia); 57, 178–180 (Petrus of Pistoia); 59, 183–184 (Rangerius of Lucca); 67, 200–203; 80, 231–233 (Hugo of Mantua; Bonussenior of Reggio); 81–82, 234–239 (Dodo of Modena); 89, 251–252 (Bonussenior of Reggio); 93, 258–260 (Hugo of Mantua); 97, 266–269 (Peter of Pistoia, Bernard of Parma); 100, 274–276 (Hugo of Mantua); 101, 276–277 (Hugo of Mantua, Dodo of Modena); 109, 290–292 (Dodo of Modena); 114, 302–304 (Landulf of Ferrara, Bernard of Parma, Hugo of Mantua); 115, 304–306 (Bernard of Parma); 132, 338–340 (Bernard of Parma, Bonussenior of Reggio, Manfred of Mantua); 134, 342–344 (Bernard of Parma). It is probably no coincidence that the bishops’ presence increased after 1090. Moreover, this form of interdependency mostly concerned the bishops of the northern sees, who were not infrequently present together. See again Donizo’s representation of Matilda: for instance in the reference to her support to the bishops: «*Vestibus e sacris multos haec nota ducatrix/ Patres catholicos vestisse quidem reminiscor;/ Inter quos fulsit reverendus episcopus urbis/ Lucensis, lucens Anselmus, maxime prudens*» [Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II 279–282]. On the “leading role” played by Anselm of Lucca in Matilda’s *domus* see above all: *Vita Anselmi*, particularly chapter 19. Consider also the case of Frogerius, chaplain to Bonussenior and later Matilda, whose career develops between the two entourages.

²² «*Sicque eius prudentia Mutinensi aecclesiae et Regiensi atque Pistoriensi catholici pastores ordinati sunt*» [Bernoldus, *Chronicon*, 454]. On Bonizo of Sutri supported by the *Placentini catholici*: 477.

gneurial powers²³. Here, in the urban society, loyalty to the king had lived on among the elite for a long time. Even so, as a consequence of the mounting political crisis during the reign of Henry IV, some of the elite invited the legate for Northern Italy, Cardinal Bernard, abbot-general of Vallombrosa and Matilda’s close collaborator, to Parma in 1104. Bernard – and his great wealth – were used as a “picklock” to gain control of this strategic bishop’s seat. However, this did not happen without conflict (1104–1106), which was a prelude to a long but probably turbulent episcopate (1106–1133)²⁴. The difficulties encountered by Bernard show not so much the *sintesi* as the dialectic discrepancy between urban society and the bishop, whose position was determined by the complex interdependencies of clusters of groups – and above all Rome –, which cannot be easily reconstructed²⁵.

Milan offers another prime example of Matilda’s intervention with regard to bishops and urban contexts. Indeed, according to the previously

²³ The dynasty had had important links with Parma from the very first: thus a nephew of its founder, Sigefred II, became bishop of Parma. Donizo also reports (Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, I, 846–870) the decisive intervention of Boniface in Parma, which had rebelled against the emperor Conrad II in 1037. Certainly, the city constituted a dialectic pole of dynastic power during Bishop Cadalus’ term as Pope, and it is no coincidence that one of the leaders of the city troops who clashed with those of Matilda in Sorbara (1084) was the bishop of Parma, Everard. On this Parma context see: Schumann 1973, Albertoni 2010, Greci 2010; and, with specific focus on the connection with Matilda: Nasalli Rocca 1964.

²⁴ Donizo narrated this episode in some detail, portraying it as a great victory for Matilda and the party supporting the Pope: Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II 955–1022. The rapid intervention of Matilda’s vassals: «*Atque sui fortes athletae iussit ut omnes/ Adversus Parmam deferrent insimul arma;/ Fines tunc nempe retinebant hanc Motinenses./ Ut volucer velox cito pergens haec pia vero,/ Parma die terna prope sensit eam, timet ex qua,/ Nobilibus vassis illius reddere statim/ Inuste captum [sc. Bernard] studuit supra titulatum*» [1010–1016]. Concerning the context see Alberzoni 2010: 291–295; Silanos 2005; and forthcoming Riversi 2016a.

²⁵ Bernard’s conferring of the standard (*vexillum*) on citizens during the first conflicts with other cities seems a rationalization in the later hagiographical tradition concerning the bishop. Concerning the context see also Schumann 2004, Greci 2005, Greci 2009 and the methodologically promising comparative essay by Bordini 2011.

mentioned chronicle by Landulf of St. Paul, the countess played a major role in the election of two archbishops, Anselm IV of Bovisio (1098) and Grossolano (1102)²⁶. She was able to influence the decision thanks to the support of certain members of the elite, such as the *capitaneus* Arialdo of Melegnano, who was very close to the countess, and her collaboration with the legate Arimann, bishop-elect of Brescia²⁷. More so, in the case of Anselm IV, the chronicler noted that the archbishop obtained the pastoral staff from Matilda, presumably not as a simple gift, but more probably as a symbolic present that replaced the investiture²⁸. The latter is one of the clues that suggest that Matilda and her husband

²⁶ Landulf, referring to the election of Anselm, uses the expression twice: «*Matildis comitisse favore*» [Landulphus de Sancto Paulo, *Historia Mediolanensis*, 2, 3]. On the initiative of Cardinal Bernard, the confirmation of Grossolanus was decided on at the court of Matilda; Bernard, with the *pallium*, reached Milan where Grossolanus was enthroned. «*Ibique Grosolanus stola indutus; et abbas, in suo tempore remuneratus, quievit et recessit, et post paucos dies in gratia predictae comitissae Matildis idem abas Parmensem episcopatum suscepit*» [Landulfus de Sancto Paulo, *Historia Mediolanensis* ed. cit. (n. 98), 8, 7]. Landulf's account is critical and ironic, intertwined as it is with allusions to irregular exchanges and procedures implicitly, but clearly, "simoniacal".

²⁷ Regarding the context: Lucioni 2011; concerning Arialdo of Melegnano in particular: 109–115, 137–138. On the point of view of Landulf of San Paolo see also: Rossini 1968; Capitani 1989; the work in the context of the urban historiography: Busch 1997, 41–50.

²⁸ In the account Arimann was opposed to the choice of Landulf of Baggio, decided by a *nobilis multitudo*, to which the *vulgus* was violently averse: «*Corona unde vulgi, gratia Romane ecclesie et Bripsiensis ac Matildis comitisse favore putans, illum fore virum religionis, mox ubi sensit, illum Armanum huic electioni abesse, cepit adversus ipsam electionem insanire, et clericos et sacerdotes pugnis et fustibus vehementer lacerare*». Then, Arimann had Anselm of Bovisio, provost of the collegiate church of San Lorenzo, elected: «*Hic [sc. Anselm] vero, ut se sensit electum a Bripsiensi illo Armano et populo impetuoso conlaudatum, illico cathedram archiepiscopatus ascendit et sedit. Et deficientibus sibi sufraganeis episcopis, omnes ecclesiasticos ordines usque ad presbiteratum, ordinationem quoque episcopatus ab extraneis episcopis suscepit. Virgo quoque pastoralis per munus comitissae Matildis adhesit; stollam autem, per legatum domini Urbani pape sibi delatam, induit. Deinde homo iste, effectus prudens, neglexit Obertum agnomine Baltricum, qui propter investituram Bripsiensis episcopatus, quam a rege suo Henrico susceperat, Armano repugnabat; et Armanum, qui se in archiepiscopum elegit, in episcopum Bripsiensem ordinavit*» [Landulphus de Sancto Paulo, *Historia Mediolanensis*, 2, 3].

Welf V of Bavaria, as lord of the *domus*, assumed the role of the higher lay authority in Northern Italy during the conflict with Henry IV in the 1090s: at least for individuals as well as groups and institutions who opposed the emperor’s supporters in the different contests; something akin to Bishop Anselm II of Lucca and Cardinal Bernard’s vicariate for Lombardy. Thus they occupied a pivotal position in the figurations of the Kingdom²⁹.

Canons of the cathedral

Nothing is more difficult to unravel, on the other hand – even in this figurational approach, and in the absence of monographic studies or surveys – than the canons of the cathedral. The complexity of the institution “cathedral chapter” consists in its intricate interdependencies, which can be briefly summarised in a double aspect: on the one hand the canons could either act as an autonomous ecclesiastical institution or represent the whole urban church (with or without the bishops); on the other hand they were a body whose members belonged to different parts of the élite of the urban and non-urban society, mediating between and representing different interests regarding not only the main church and its estates in the diocese but also the cities³⁰. We mentioned above the restitution of the castle of Sambuca and the court of Pavana to the cathedral chapter of Pistoia (1104): in an impressive and complex “figuration” the recipients were the «*canonici sancti Zenonis de Pistoria, venerabiles clerici Bonutus archipresbiter et Ildebrandus primicerius, cum qui-*

²⁹ This could be a significant element – of legitimation – in the interpretation of the interdependencies between Matilda’s *domus* and the urban actors in cities which did not fall under the delegated powers of the countess. See more broadly: Riversi 2016b.

³⁰ For a specific example see Savigni 2001 on Lucca; a general overview may be found in Keller 1977.

*busdam civibus ex melioribus civitatibus*³¹.

Moreover, the cathedral chapter was a structural counterweight to the bishop, although this does not necessarily mean – in the logic of the interdependencies – that it was opposed to the bishop. The privileges granted by Henry V to the cathedral chapter of Parma in May 1111, without intervention on the part of Bishop Bernard and after the agreement of Bianello between Matilda and the emperor, are in themselves significant: they could be interpreted according to a “figurational” approach as an act of balancing power in the urban context, regardless of whether imperial intervention was achieved in agreement with Bernard or with the approval of the countess³².

The direct relations between the dynastic ruler and the cathedral chapters are not as well documented as those with the bishops and other religious urban institutions. The countess made donations or other concessions: for example to the cathedral chapter of Bologna³³ (1105); or she acted in her judicial function, i.e. for the cathedral chapter of Volterra (1075; 1107)³⁴.

In the case of donations to the canons of Bologna, we can already see a significant element of interdependency between Matilda and these urban institutions: the liturgical commemoration³⁵. It's well known that Matilda's parents were in fact buried in the building complex of

³¹ *Urkunden*, 82, 237. On Sambuca: Rauty 2006, especially 283.

³² *Le carte degli archivi parmensi del secolo XII*, 31, 29-30 (1111 maggio 26).

³³ *Urkunden* 89, 251-252 (Donation of the church of San Michele in Argelato). Further donations: 10-11, 58-63 (Mantua); 23, 87-92 (Pisa); 27, 100-104 (Mantua); 74, 217-220 (Pisa).

³⁴ *Urkunden* 17, 76-77; 104, 281-283. Other judicial and jurisdictional decisions: 18, 78-79 (Lucca); 56, 176-178 (Florence); 61, 186-188 (Pisa); 65, 195-196 (Reggio E.); 81-82, 234-239 (Pistoia).

³⁵ It is perhaps no coincidence that the church Matilda granted to the chapter of Bologna was dedicated to the archangel Michael, to whom her father Boniface had probably been especially devoted: «*do, cedo, offero pro remedio anime mee et parentum meorum in perpetuum*» [*Urkunden* 89, 251].

two cathedrals, in Mantua and Pisa, two cities that were in some degree dynastic residences. This shows a strong connection between the countess and these urban institutions, which are therefore reciprocally involved in significant exchanges³⁶. The case of Pisa is particularly interesting; here, the countess protected the chapter and financed the construction of the cathedral, one of the most relevant binding features in the emerging political identity of a collective urban actor³⁷. In Modena, in an urban community that was without a bishop at the time, the urban clergy, i.e. first of all probably the canons of the cathedral, engaged with the other urban groups in the project of rebuilding the cathedral and made Matilda the privileged partner³⁸.

What we cannot gauge directly is Matilda's possible influence on the recruitment of members of the cathedral chapter. We can only infer indirect relationships with those canons who belonged to family groups close to Matilda. But these relations, which must have already existed at the time, are frequently attested only later³⁹.

Certainly, the relation between the chapter and Matilda might give rise to conflict; especially if the latter supported initiatives of "reform" which concerned the habits and property of the canons, the *vita communis*⁴⁰. In this case we have a most remarkable piece of literary eviden-

³⁶ On the cathedral chapter of Mantua: *Urkunden* 10, 58–61; 11, 61–63; 136, 347–349 (the court donating Pacengo to the church of San Michele in the building complex of the cathedral).

³⁷ On the cathedral chapter of Pisa: *Urkunden* 23, 87–92; 61, 186–188; 63, 190–192 («*curam quondam cum nostris [fidelibus hab]eremus eiusque domum miris tabularum lapideis ornamentis incoeptam, qualiter ad effectum perducere dignis possemus auxiliis*»; «*ad operam perficiendam vel ad aliquam restaurationem*»); 74, 217–220 («*ad explecionem operis [ecc]l[esi]e sancte Marie*»).

³⁸ See note 51.

³⁹ See scattered specific examples in the mentioned monographs about the urban societies and churches concerned.

⁴⁰ There are already references to this aspect in the abovementioned documents. For example, clearly: «*ut medietas predictorum bonorum sit in sumptu et usu predicti episcopii*,

ce, that of the *Vita Anselmi* by Rangerius of Lucca (about 1096–1099). Rangerius gives an account of the clash that arose in the Tuscan city between the canons on the one hand and the bishop, the pope and Matilda on the other. The resulting schism shows not only the split of the local urban society, but also indicates the existence of “grey areas” in the elites of the city and the march who gave their opportunistic consensus to the leader of the canons, Peter: this illustrates the dynamic of the interdependencies between urban and non-urban groups and the city church and external actors such as Matilda and Henry IV⁴¹.

The representation in Rangerius’ poem requires more in-depth analysis. However, it is important to point out a particular narrative construction: the future imperial bishop Peter, the leader of the rebels among the canons, gives two consecutive speeches. The first, addressing the smaller group of the canons, aims to justify the interests and defend the position of members of the chapter: in this way, Rangerius staged the effective interests of those parts of the urban élite that controlled the cathedral chapter. The second speech to the citizens shows a sweeping and idealistic vision seeking to create a large civic consensus supporting the interests of the smaller group of canons⁴². Moreover, in front of an

altera vero medietas ad usum et sumptum predictorum canonicorum communiter et caste viventium»; «et si canonici canonice non vixerint, predicto usufructu careant, usque quo ad communem et castam redierint vitam, et similiter in potestate civium deveniat» [Urkunden 23, 91]. Note this latter shift from chapter to citizens.

⁴¹ Rangerius, *Vita metrica Anselmi*; particularly regarding two different members of the élite, Tado and Count Ughiccio, who acted as “Nicodemites”. He says on Tado’s position: «*Adsunt, qui sapiunt, sed pia corda tegunt;/ De quorum numero subtilis ad omnia Tadus,/ Rem simulat Petri, sed comes est fidei*» [5254–5256, 1266]. Ughiccio was the only one of the Tuscan counts who did not like the imperial bishop Peter: «*Hugicio, vir magnanimus, se spondet in arma,/ Sed Petri fraudem non amat*» [4799–4798, 1257]. Regarding the relationship between kings and cities see Struve 1997 (about Henry IV); Ronzani 2012.

⁴² On the other rebel canons: (Rangerius, *Vita metrica Anselmi* 1833–1876, 1195–1196); to the people of Lucca: see the beginning «*cives et socii*» [1879–1910, 1196–1197]. The two different meanings of freedom in the two speeches are worth noting.

audience of citizens Peter presents a very negative view of the lordship of the Canossas in Lucca, who are depicted as seigneurial oppressors of the *libertas* of the *cives*. By defending the interests of the canons of the cathedral chapter as in a broad sense those of members of the elite, Peter interpreted the interdependency between the city and Matilda as opposition and claimed – in this fiction – a collective identification [of the canons] with the city, which was not in fact the principal reason for their actions⁴³. The figurational approach allows us to imagine that the conflict in Rangerius’ polyphonic narrative is much more complex than the dialectic contrast between feudal power and city freedom or – not without contradictions – reform and not reform.

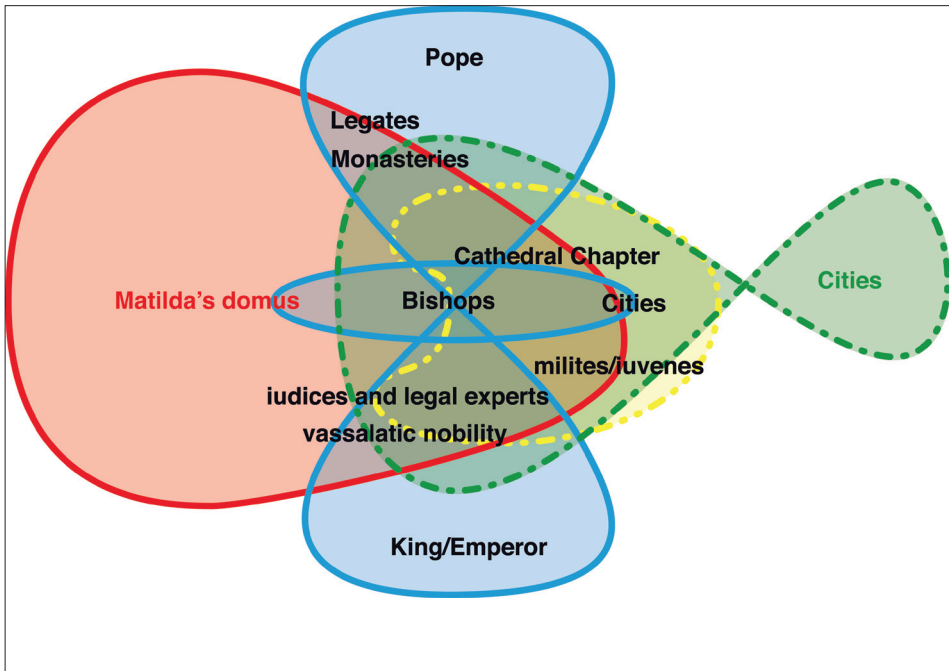


Fig. 2. Hypothetical ‘figuration’ of the relationship between ‘Matilda’ and the ‘cities’ (yellow area = generative social area of the political autonomy of the cities). – (Eugenio Riversi, 2016)

⁴³ Rangerius, *Vita metrica Anselmi* 1892–1910. Peter puts the opposition in a historical perspective: «*Quem [sc. Henry IV] si non fuerit victoria laeta secuta,/ Quas vobis strages saeva leena dabit?/ Maiores nostri pro libertate tuenda/ Oppressere duces et sine rege suos*» [1903–1906]. On Rangerius’ representation see: Savigni 1994; Savigni 1996, 345–376; cf. Riversi 2016.

Urban monasteries

Another pivotal aspect of the configuration of the relations between Matilda and the urban societies were the monasteries, which were able to create considerable social coherence and garner support as they were the guardians of collective remembrance, and by granting goods, incomes and lands. And here we are not only referring to the urban monasteries, but also to those in the diocese, which had significant interests in the cities, too⁴⁴.

The donations urban monasteries received from Matilda were certainly a form of religious devotion⁴⁵. But it is probable that these donations as well as favourable judgments⁴⁶ also allowed her to establish relations or further contacts with other groups that were active in the city and linked with the monastery. This interdependency permits us to glimpse particular figurations. For example, Matilda's collaboration with the Guidi in Florence (1100) was tied to their complex relationship with the abbey of Vallombrosa, which at the time was led by the above-mentioned abbot-general Bernard. The active role of the monks of this congregation in urban contexts and especially in shaping the opinions of some groups of the local population (*Teilöffentlichkeit*) is well

⁴⁴ Generally see: Trolese 1998; particularly on the cities mentioned here: Golinelli 1998 and Kurze 1998.

⁴⁵ *Urkunden* 1, 31–35 (Sant'Andrea in Mantua); 6, 47–49 (San Prospero in Reggio); 8, 52–54 (San Zeno in Verona); 9, 55–57 (San Paolo in Parma); 19, 80–81 (San Sisto in Piacenza); 33, 116–119 (San Prospero in Reggio); 51, 157–158 (San Ponziano in Lucca); 70, 207–208 (San Sisto in Piacenza); 99, 272–274 (San Paolo in Parma); 118, 310–313 (San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro in Pavia). Note also the privilege to Montecassino through which the abbey was exempted from commercial duties in Pisa and Lucca (62, 189–190); see the protection of the monastery of San Gorgonio and its church San Vito in Pisa (124, 322–324).

⁴⁶ *Urkunden*: 7, 49–52 (San Salvatore and Santa Giustina in Lucca); 12, 64–66 (San Ponziano in Lucca); 16, 73–75 (San Prospero in Reggio); 93, 258–260 (San Salvatore in Pavia); 95, 263–264 (San Prospero in Reggio).

known⁴⁷.

Urban monasteries could also provide balancing forces to the cathedral chapters and the bishops. Matilda’s presence in the monastery of San Prospero in Reggio Emilia in 1072 and in 1080 and her further relations with this community are a case in point⁴⁸. This evidence could be significant, when we consider the well-known claim to incomes and goods declared simultaneously by the bishop and the canons of Reggio, which Matilda’s ancestors had usurped. Moreover, Bishop Gandolf became a supporter of Henry IV. This could be another example of the complex interdependencies between the urban institutions and the dynastic ruler warranting further investigation⁴⁹.

While the monastery of Reggio was benefited by Matilda in a competition between urban institutions, the important one of Sant’Andrea in Mantua, which had received the first donation from Matilda (1072),

⁴⁷ «*Quapropter predicti sepius memorabiles viri in Tuscie partibus nostre dignitatis clementiam pro superius relato negotio precibus adeuntes, postularunt a nobis super hac re institutionis scriptum fieri, nostra auctoritate suffultum multorumque testimonio comprobatum. Quare eorum dignis petitionibus una cum consensu et voto predictorum comitum [sc. Guido Guerra and his father] annuentes, dum in Florentino palatio presidentes cum nostris militiarum et aliorum fidelibus de diversis et huiusmodi negociis tractaremus, quod iuste postulabant, incunctanter fieri iussimus*» [Urkunden 57, 178–180]. This Florentine figuration suggests many interdependencies that concerned broader power relations and perhaps the end of the rule of Conrad, son of Henry IV. On the urban expansion of the congregation of Vallombrosa, see: Monzio Compagnoni 1999. Cf. the “provocative” role of a monk in Lucca during the schism: Rangerius, *Vita metrica Anselmi* 5153–5176.

⁴⁸ *Urkunden* 6, 47–49; 16, 73–75 (with a significant interdependency around the court of Nasseta); 33, 116–119; 65, 195–196; 95, 263–264; A7, 482–484; A10, 491–492 Rombaldi 1982; on a broader context: Tincani 2012.

⁴⁹ *Le carte degli archivi reggiani*, IX, 15–17. On the complex context of urban society in Reggio Emilia: Golinelli 1980; Cantarella 2012 (about the evolution under the bishops closely connected to Matilda); Golinelli 2012; and focused on the lay groups in relation with the bishop and the other church institutions: Rinaldi 2001; Rinaldi 2012. The religious–institutional field of the church of Reggio has yet to undergo broad and exhaustive research. The prospect is promising: see the forthcoming contribution by Nicola Mancassola in *Matilde di Canossa e il suo tempo* and Cantatore’s MA thesis.

was later subjected to a significant punitive measure⁵⁰. In a further interesting and complex “figuration” (1101), the legate and cardinal Bernard took the control of the urban hospital founded by Matilda near the city walls away from Sant’Andrea. On this occasion the issue was not only the condemnation of the mismanagement of the hospital, but also the rejection of the claims to the urban hospital made by the canons of the cathedral, who had joined the schismatic bishop Conon. Thus, to penalize the rebelling institutions and the associated groups of the urban society, Bernard transferred control of the hospital to the dynastic (not urban) monastery of San Benedetto Polirone⁵¹.

A development in the relationship between an urban monastery and Matilda – in a very interesting context of interdependencies between urban and non-urban actors – can be seen in the case of the important convent of San Sisto in Piacenza, too. Here the donations are linked to the religious life of the nuns and therefore to the community’s management of lands and goods and of the related vassal bonds, such as in the strategic court of Guastalla (1102). Their mismanagement was the reason for another intervention on the part of Matilda, who seems to have promoted the dissolution of this community in order to support a male one in an urban context. This decision, too, was endorsed by the pope⁵².

⁵⁰ *Urkunden* 1, 31–35.

⁵¹ *Urkunden* 67, 200–203; see also Gardoni 2002. On the canons: «*Deinde quibusdam ex Mantuane ecclesie clericis, qui huic deffinitioni intererant, causantibus hospitii curam et providentiam iuxta commendationis scriptum canonicis beati Petri debere transferri, quia omnes simoniaci et excommunicati Cononi invasori et excommunicato participantes et obedienter extiterant, ne interim expectando catholicos hospitium funditus deperiret eiusque substantiam providentia neglecta dilapidaret, eis pariter tam presentibus quam futuris bene vel male in canonica conversantibus, omnem audienciam de hoc ulterius agendo negocio sub excommunicatione etiam interdiximus*».

⁵² *Urkunden* 19, 80–81 (investiture of Cortenuova); 70, 207–208 (concession of the castle of Guastalla). In his document pope Paschal II stressed Matilda’s initiative: «*Quam ob rem sapientium ac religiosorum virorum consilio provisum est, agente precipue illustris memorie Matildi comitissa, ut in eodem monasterio pro feminis viri ponerentur,*

Matilda and urban lay groups

As is widely known, much of the available evidence primarily concerns the affairs of ecclesiastical and religious institutions, and above all their assets. It is more difficult to observe the relations of Matilda and her *domus* with lay individuals and groups whose activities were based in the city.

First of all, it can be said that there was rarely an urban community acting as a lone entity in its dealings with Matilda and, even when this did occur, it almost never represented a unified political structure. Nonetheless, an impressive example of the relationship between an urban community – deliberately represented in an inclusive way – and Matilda is that of Modena. In the so-called *Relatio aedificationis* (ca. 1106–1110) the whole community of the church, with the significant exception of the bishop, became Matilda's partner in the issue of the restoration of the cathedral and the transfer of the relics of St. Geminianus⁵³.

Clearly it is possible to find further cases in which all the institutions of a city appear to be in conflict with Matilda: for example, through a few verses of Donizo, we know of the revolt of Ferrara against the countess – a city that was part of the dynasty's domain. We do not know precisely who led the revolt at the time of the siege (1102). According to

quatimus et religio illic eiusdem, id est monastici ordinis, servaretur et monasterii possessiones, que iam diu distracte fuerant, per eorum restituerentur industriam» [Kehr, *Papsturkunden* V, 297–299, 3].

⁵³ *Relatio aedificationis et translationis* 1, 1310: «*non tantum ordo clericorum, sed et universus quoque eiusdem ecclesie populus inter se vicissim conferre ceperunt, quid consulendum quidve sit inde agendum. Tandem divina disponente providentia, unito consilio non modo clericorum, quia tunc temporis prefata quidem ecclesia sine pastoralis cura agebatur, sed et civium universarumque plebium prelatorum seu etiam cunctorum eiusdem ecclesie militum una vox eademque voluntas, unus clamor idemque amor totius turbe personuit: iam renovari, iam rehedificari, iam sublimari debere tanti talisque patris nostri ecclesiam. Quod quidem consilium ubi ad aures Mathildis Dei gratia egregie comitisse pervenit, qui fari possit, quanto qualique gaudio exilarata, quanta in laude firmata, quantis amminiculis sit obstinata*». On the context of Modena: Bonacini 2001; Golinelli 2006.

Donizo, the countess was supported by troops from Ravenna, which participated in the repression together with those of many other cities⁵⁴. Donizo's work more than once indicates an urban provenance of the troops during the military conflicts between Matilda and Henry IV. And not only of one kind, namely armed *cives* against the countess and her vassals, as in the case of the battle of Sorbara⁵⁵. It is significant that the confrontation between Matilda and Henry IV over the castle of Nogara was supported respectively by troops from Modena and Verona⁵⁶: armed *cives* were probably able to join the countess, too, as in the case of Ravenna mentioned above. In this episode, which concerns the conflict between Matilda's *domus* and Henry IV, we find a dynamic urban interdependency that foreshadows future competition between cities – and particularly between their elites – for the control of strategic territory and the readiness of the urban militias to engage in plundering⁵⁷.

The political significance of the military contribution of the cities is shown by the well-known reference to a league between the cities of Milan, Lodi, Piacenza and Cremona, led by Welf V of Bavaria: a league

⁵⁴ Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II 930-939: «*Qui venit, duros in quo Ferraria muros/ Obsessos sensit, fuerat quia facta rebellis/ Ipsa ducatrici, nec ei servire cupivit./ Contra quam gentes numero sine duxit et enses,/ Tuscos, Romanos, Longobardos galeatos,/ Et Ravennates quorum sunt maxime naves./ Circumstant equidem multae maris atque carinae,/ A duce preclaro transmissae Venetiano./ Considerans demum Ferraria ne superetur,/ Optavit pacem magnae Mathildis amare*». Ferrara had probably been the place where Matilda's troops had assembled against the archbishop of Ravenna twenty years earlier (1080): *Urkunden* 31, 112-113. On Ferrara: Castagnetti 1985; Castagnetti 2001c, 437-455.

⁵⁵ At Sorbara urban troops were led by the marquis Oberto and by the bishops of Parma and Reggio: «*Urbibus ex multis cives hoc tempore multi/ Insimul armati, clipeis et equis falerati,/ Principe cum celso, prudenti prorsus Oberto,/ Ducunt Parmensem, Reginum pontificemque*» [Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II 338-341].

⁵⁶ Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II 779-783: «*Civibus accitis secum Veronensibus, ivit/ Vallavit castrum Nogarae forte vel amplum./ Hoc discunt aures Mathildis, novit ut autem,/ Mox accersitos Motinenses corpore firmos,/ Eridanum transit*».

⁵⁷ Regarding these fundamental military features in the different figurations of urban contexts see: Maire Vigueur 2004; see also: Grillo 2014.

whose inception Bernold of Constance dated to 1093. The groups of the urban elite in these cities would have recognised – probably after the defeat of Henry IV in the Appennines in the winter of 1092 – the superiority of the Duke, Matilda’s husband, throughout the Kingdom, disregarding at the same time that of Henry IV⁵⁸. Significantly these cities did not belong to the dynastic domain, which corroborates the suggestion that Matilda’s authority might have replaced that of the king in Northern Italy during the investiture controversy.

We have assumed that the consensus was driven by the urban élite. For example, the episode of the destruction of the castle of Rivalta by the rebelling Mantua in 1114 shows how the élite, faced with the threat of military repression on the part of Matilda, imposed a more appeasing attitude towards Matilda on the *iuvenes* – who are probably the urban *milites* whose lifestyle was characterized by plunder and booty. Donizo’s account of this urban political conflict – including the “smaller group” that expressed its intention to leave the city –, of its political resolution and of the subsequent appeasement between Matilda and Mantua is without doubt the best evidence we have of a politically structured action toward the countess on the part of the many social groups in a city identifying themselves more or less as a complex whole⁵⁹.

In fact there is more evidence of direct relations between Matilda and members of the aristocratic urban élite, particularly those who were the

⁵⁸ Bernoldus, *Chronicon*, 501: «*Civitates quoque de Longobardia, Mediolanum, Cremona, Lauda, Placentia, contra Heinricum in XX annos coniuraverunt, qui omnes praedicto duci fideliter adheserunt*».

⁵⁹ Donizone, *Vita di Matilde*, II, 1327–1339: «*Urbs avibus dives, degit sed gens ibi triplex;/ Ocius explorant quid agant simul atque laborant./ “Bellum ferre libet” pars quaedam dicit inique,/ “Nostis nos usos fore sat defendere muros”./ Pauperior quaedam se pergere pars ait extra./ Talia iactantes dictis, ac stulta putantes,/ Pars melior surgit iuvenes affatur et urbis: “Vos iuvat o pueri raptu seu vivere predis,/ Sed pudeat pueri nos obsidione teneri;/ Advena vult miles nostras incidere vites,/ O iuvenes fortes fugiat discordia longe./ Pars eat ad veniam nostrorum, supplicet illam/ Nos omnino decet cui latius esse fideles”*».

most important vassals, sometimes referred to as *proceres* or *capitanei*: that was the case, for example, of the abovementioned Arialdo of Melegnano in Milan; or of the de Ermengarda group in Bologna–Ferrara. But we may also suppose that there were growing interdependencies between Matilda’s most important vassals and the cities, interdependencies that, in the next two generations after the death of the countess, became a form of influential involvement and authoritative protagonism in the urban political dynamic: for example the da Cornazzano in Parma⁶⁰. The previously mentioned donation to Vallombrosa during a judicial session in Florence illustrates how Matilda and this aristocratic elite were able to take the urban stage⁶¹.

Unfortunately, little information is available on Matilda’s direct relationship with the “middle” strata of urban society. Nevertheless, the episode of the rebellion of Mantua tells us that the lay groups characterised by a warrior and predatory lifestyle (*iuvenes*) were highly significant and probably constituted the bulk of the city’s troops involved in the conflict between Matilda and Henry IV: in fact, in all likelihood they had a vested interest in prolonging it. But Benzo of Alba recalled that the king’s Italian troops would have preferred plundering Matilda’s domains to the military manoeuvres executed by Rome⁶².

We should also briefly mention the complex group of the *iudices* and

⁶⁰ Castagnetti 2001a; Cortese 2014; for the Tuscan context see Collavini 2001 and Cortese 2007; on the members of the family group De Ermengarda as Matilda’s vassals: Lazzari 1994; on the involvement of the main vassal families see the example of Modena: Rölker 1994; compare the consideration of Bordini 2011, 142–146, about Emilian cases; and Bordini 2012a. But see also the broader literature on the dynastic vassals, which is in need of renovation: see the forthcoming study by Fontana in *Matilde di Canossa e il suo tempo*.

⁶¹ *Urkunden* 57, 178–180. On the context of Florence see generally: Cortese 2007, 231–248; and Faini 2010. Another appearance of Matilda with her *militia* («*princeps Mathildis cum suo exercitu*») in the urban stage (Modena): *Relatio aedificationis et translationis*, 3, 1312.

⁶² Benzo, *Ad Heinricum*, VI, *Praef.*, 516: «*quod magis valeret reditus ad devastandam Mathildam*». For the interesting case of Bologna see Lazzari 2004.

other legal experts, who could be either members or “coequals” of the aforementioned social strata, or belonged to the diverse group of the other *cives*⁶³. Consider for example the judge Flaipertus in Lucca, who was linked to Matilda’s parents. In the case of many of those who collaborated with Matilda and came from and operated in an extra-urban context, we can presume the same growing interdependencies with the other actors and institutions of the cities, relations that would become increasingly clear after Matilda’s death; one instance being their decisive role in the above-mentioned restitution of Sambuca and Pavana to the church of Pistoia⁶⁴.

The remainder of the *cives* – actually a collection of disparate and composite urban groups that could include the already mentioned lay groups – was highly diversified and played an increasingly important role in the dynamics of the urban society. However, in the sources on Matilda, this social stratum remains in the background: depicted as those farthest from establishing direct relations with the countess, they are often included in the collective identities of the urban community. For example, they are a part of the *cives* that were the recipients of the well-known privilege that Matilda accorded to the urban community of Mantova in 1090 on the basis of the royal models – a further foreshadowing of the king being replaced by Welf and Matilda in the 1090s⁶⁵. It is difficult to say whether this broader and diverse group of *cives* is

⁶³ On the complex identity of this urban group: Maire Vigueur 1994; see also: Menzinger, Vallerani 2014; according to Grillo 2014, 171, they were «*il più significativo elemento di stabilità nella lunga transizione che fu alle origini del comune*».

⁶⁴ *Urkunden* 81–82, 234–239. See Fried 1974; on the case of Reggio Emilia: Bordini 2012b. On the legal experts and Matilda: Roversi Monaco 2007; Goetz 2006, 324–329.

⁶⁵ *Urkunden* 43, 139–141: «*qualiter nostri fideles Mantuani cives nostram adierunt clementiam quorundam suorum concivium oppressiones relevari petentes*». It is not possible to contextualize this famous privilege here. On the urban context of Mantua see: Fumagalli 1987; Gardoni 2007; Gardoni 2011; and the forthcoming contribution in *Matilde di Canossa e il suo tempo*; on the preconditions: Gardoni 2012. On the specific aspect of *arimanni*: Castagnetti 1987 and more broadly: Castagnetti 1996.

included in the *ceteri homines* of Cremona, who – in a well-known source about the relationship between the cities and Matilda – had to (militarily) serve the countess if the *capitanei* refused to do so: perhaps it referred to the *milites*. In any event, in return the countess invested three men from Cremona in 1097 with the conspicuous benefice of the *insula Fulkeria*: «*homines Cremone, scilicet Gotefredus de Bellusco et Moricius seu Cremoxano Aldoini a parte sancte Marie Cremonensi ecclesie seu ad comunum ipsius Cremonae civitatis*». In this document, it seems to refer to collective identity of the urban society defined as church and as – the word occurs – *comunum*. Although, as is generally known, at the time the word meant “collective” and did not refer to a political regime, the document is often considered an early sign of a conscious (pre-)communal urban community. Disregarding some doubts about a possible later forgery, this is not the exception that proves the “rule”, or the “storyline” of the “misunderstanding” and the “incompatibility” between Matilda and the cities, but once more an example of the complex figurations involving the aristocratic *domus* as well as the diverse collection of actors that constituted the urban communities⁶⁶.

Conclusion

However, here we see again the subtle power of the storyline of the “city communes”. Such a narrative even influenced the perception of the case of Bologna, despite the excellent studies on the (pre-)communal period that revealed the complexity of this context⁶⁷. Even in this case, the contacts between Matilda’s *domus* and the urban groups and

⁶⁶ *Urkunden* 48, 150–151; Tabacco 1989, 321–322; Menant 2004, 133; Romagnoli, Ricci 2008, 155–163; Coleman 2012, particularly 25–29.

⁶⁷ Lazzari 1998; on the emergence of the commune: Pio 2007; Vasina 2007; Greci 2011; see also the forthcoming study by Edoardo Manarini on aristocratic rule in the territory of Bologna in *Matilde di Canossa e il suo tempo*.

institutions encourages us to test the proposed figurational approach with its implicit comparative view.

This approach allows us to consider Matilda as the “apex” of a complex social formation, which as a whole or through its in(ter)dependent parts could have multiple forms of access to institutions, groups and individuals located in the cities, making the centre of their actions. Less frequently, the cities became Matilda’s partners as collective actors, a fact that is actually documented in a few historical accounts describing conflict situations. The latter evidence contributes to the common misconception of the “incompatibility” or “misunderstanding”, which only scholars informed of the true complexity of these contexts are able to avoid entirely. Even in these cases of conflict, as the examples of Mantua, Parma and Lucca show, there are actually signs of diverse attitudes and behaviours with which the actors on the urban “stage” respond to their aristocratic *domus*.

In short, the common feature of the relations between “Matilda” and Parma, Milan, Pisa, Lucca, Mantua, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Cremona, Florence, Bologna, and Ferrara is not to be found either in their opposition or in their support, but rather in the complexity and significance of the multiple interdependencies and interactions between the dynastic “*domus*” and the many urban institutions and groups not consciously driven by the aim of establishing a “communal city”.

This attitude has recently been described by Chris Wickham as being akin to the movement of sleepwalkers: an effective metaphor that seeks to resolutely contrast with our deep-seated teleological and idealistic images of the transformation of the political structure of the Italian Kingdom between the tenth and twelfth century. It is only by adopting a complex perspective that we can avoid the opposition between feudal/signorial and communal and better understand the emergence of new political structures in close interaction with Matilda’s inherited rule: those more horizontal civic institutions that are distant and quite unfamiliar ancestors of modern republican regimes. Pursuing a “figu-

rational” approach to the relationship between Matilda and the cities, as proposed here, would constitute a major stride toward grasping that complexity⁶⁸.

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⁶⁸ This complexity of the emergence of city communes, which historiographical surveys and essays have discussed for years (Maire Viguer 2004; Keller 2007; Grillo 2009; Vallerani 2011; Wickham 2014; Wickham 2014), has already been mediated by recent contributions: see for example Milani 2005; Faini, Maire Viguer 2011; Menant 2011. The awareness of the complexity and diversity is now part of the new research attitude: see for example Faini 2010; Faini 2013, Faini 2014 and his forthcoming study: *Firenze nell'età comunale. Una complessità originaria*. But see also Hartmann 2013, which reveals the importance of the *ars dictandi* for the elaboration of the new political culture of the cities, which relativized the function of formal legal knowledge; see also Hartmann 2015.

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