

## **Migration and Cultural Dynamics. A Glocal History of Lucca in the Early Middle Ages**

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The project is part of a larger endeavour to examine the history of migration and its importance for cross-cultural interaction and entanglement in the greater Euro-Mediterranean region over the course of the long medieval millennium. As such, it stands in the relatively young tradition of global history. In contrast to universal histories that describe history as the development of humankind as a whole towards an ideal goal, global history is understood to describe economic, cultural and social interactions within systems of global reach without the implication of a linear development or teleology in history. Obviously, cross-cultural interactions never spanned the whole planet during the middle ages as the mediaeval world only comprised Europe, Asia, and North Africa. However, there are no claims to a global scope connected to the usurpation of the label 'global history' but a commitment to the transcultural perspective and methodology behind that label. It is the awareness of the interconnectivity and incessant hybridization of cultures and the interest in cultural dynamics, cross-cultural interaction, and entanglement that the projected study shares with global history. The commitment is not a question of scope but of method.

Long-distance trade, imperial expansion and mass migrations have been singled out as the most important processes of cross-cultural interaction in the pre-modern era. But migration can also be regarded as a basic condition of all of human history. In all periods, people made the decision to leave their homes in order to seek a better life in other regions within cultural, political, and economic frameworks and within social and family relationships weighing perceived opportunity costs against the hoped-for benefits or they were forced to migrate as refugees, slaves, or exiles. Migrants have connected and changed the different contexts they left, arrived in or returned to in a number of ways and at times formed the majority of many societies confronted with a non-migratory, yet socially and discursively powerful minority. In the course of the complex processes of economic and political integration and cultural and social adjustment transcultural spaces are formed that belong neither to the context of migrants' departure nor to the context of their arrival – nor are they merely compounds of both – but are true hybrids. Over time, migrant communities and the receiving societies will come to share certain discourses and other cultural phenomena, they will interact within shared social systems and may ultimately blend to form a new culturally hybrid society. Such transcultural hybridizations have been the rule in every society throughout history and the notion that 'pure' cultures ever existed is more than outdated. But as societies consist of different fields and subsystems unequally receptive to change, these processes of hybridization between migrants

and the receiving societies will go at different speeds in different fields and in some fields a complete hybridization may only occur after many generations or even never at all. Likewise, who is perceived as Other – and labelled accordingly in our sources – does not only depend on power relationships and social, cultural or economic status but also on the field the social interaction documented in our sources is a part of. Differences observed between Self and Other in one field (e. g. religion) can be completely ignored in others (e. g. trade).

However, the accuracy of these models – developed from studies of migration in the modern era and broadened in theoretical reflections – cannot be verified nor refuted for the European middle ages today. In what numbers, when, where from and where to humans migrated, under what conditions and with what consequences, can hardly be determined as we completely lack the necessary tools for broad empirical research. In recent years, much attention has been paid to the so-called Migration Period. The little historical evidence we have – together with evidence from linguistics, archaeology, and, recently, population genetics – has been discussed at length. The image of a host of Germanic peoples leaving their Scandinavian *Urheimat* in a distant past and roaming through the Euro-Mediterranean region for more than a millennium each held together by oral tradition and charismatic leadership of a noble elite has been shown to be misleading, but it is still upheld by some, most notably the adherents of the Vienna School of ethnogenesis. As these debates on the Migration Period have conclusively shown however, ethnic continuity is a myth. Its critics chiefly aimed at – and succeeded in – deconstructing the long and calamitous tradition of ethnic interpretations in early mediaeval history. With their many justified theoretical and methodological caveats they have left historians with the notion that little can be said about the migrations in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries with the help of their methods due to a sheer lack of an empirical basis. But they have also reminded us that the notion of culturally homogeneous communities – imagined communities that allegedly share language, laws and customs, territory and polity, modes of production and distribution, religious beliefs and practices, tradition and heritage – are an ideological oversimplification of the complex sets of collective categories that exist in human societies with their stratifications and functional differentiations. Ethnicity is only one of many collective categories that may stand next to categories like estate, religious affiliation, profession, political allegiance, legal status, kinship, etc. Collective categories are by no means fix, the meaning of the terms that describe them change over time, and so does the set of persons included in each of them.

A study that is supposed to explore the links between migration and cultural dynamics in the early middle ages thus has to choose a subject matter that provides a sound empirical basis of

contemporary sources for migrations. The Italian peninsula lends itself to such a study as it has been the (at times intermediate) destination of migrants and invaders from antiquity to the high middle ages. From the early 8<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a pool of contemporary sources is available in many of its regions that broadens over the course of the following centuries. These legal documents, administrative and judicial records of the late Lombardian, Carolingian, and Ottonian periods obviously give a more detailed impression of the cultural and social contexts they are produced *in* than the few historiographical sources give of the Migration Period contexts they are written *about*.

In these centuries, we can observe different groups of migrants crossing the Alps into northern Italy: Frankish monks, pilgrims, and exiles in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Carolingian officials, clerics, and settlers from different parts of their empire after 774, noblemen and -women from Provence, Burgundy, Alamannia, and Bavaria, and again Ottonian officials after 951. All of them were familiar with different social conventions, venerated different saints, spoke different languages, knew different modes of production from the ones they found in their new homes. They interacted with members of the receiving society and depending on the field and their social position increased cultural dynamics and brought about change in social practices. A thorough study of migrants' role in these changes within the different fields of social interaction and within the different categorizations in early mediaeval Italy would be a colossal undertaking. The subject matter has to be narrowed down regarding time, space or fields.

To limit the study to a certain field is, however, not practical as only the coherent study of processes of cultural hybridization or social inclusion will deepen our understanding of migration and cultural dynamics. Whether migrants become part of the receiving society not by a gradual assimilation, but by inclusion into different social subsystems and fields can only be shown by looking at several fields of social interaction.

The time frame of the projected study may be adjusted for practicality but it cannot be set *ad libitum* either if the long-term effects of migrations are to be studied. To take the historical contexts of the Carolingian conquest of the Lombard kingdom as a starting point seems plausible enough since a number of migrants crossed the Alps into Italy in the process. There are a few older studies by German scholars on these migrants which however clearly show the dated academic contexts in which they were written – the conservative New History that dominated among West German historians in the 1950s and 1960s with its preoccupation with the history of lordship, constitutional history, and the central role of the nobility for the genesis and continuity of the German nation on the one hand and Marxist Historical Materialism dominant in East Germany on the other. A second peak in migrations across the Alps can be

assumed to co-occur with the establishment of Ottonian rule in Italy in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century though there seem to be fewer migrants involved as in the Carolingian case. A comparison of migrations in the context of both campaigns of imperial expansion and their effects is a promising endeavour, but forces us to consider the time up to the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century.

In adjusting the scope of the study for practicality there only remains the spatial scale. Between the two extremes of the whole Italian peninsula and individual settlements this scale can be adjusted to very different levels. A larger scope will yield more representative results, a smaller scope however will yield more valid ones. On a local level possible interrelations between the arrival of migrants and a change in social practice from languages spoken, trade, veneration of saints and foundations to legal practice and administration can be observed in greater detail than on a larger scale. In combining the global history perspective of hybridization through long-distance social, political and cultural relationships in imperial expansion and migration with a study of its local effects in one Italian city and its hinterland I am opting for a 'glocal' approach.

But what local basis should one choose for this undertaking? My suggestion is: Lucca. The Tuscan metropolis had become a centre of political power within the Lombard kingdom and as one of the main cities of the Carolingian Margraviate of Tuscia came to be the destination of many migrants from other parts of the Empire. Situated on the so-called Via Francigena between Pavia and Rome it became one of the most important way-stations for pilgrims and an important centre of commerce for the region – and increasingly beyond. In the context of these developments a small elite was able to establish itself as a local nobility and feudal lords, gain more and more control over the diocesan goods and the nomination of bishops, and restrict the powers of kings, dukes and margraves over the city. In 1081, Henry IV, King of the Romans, bestowed a number of privileges on the city in what came to be interpreted as the Magna Charta of the commune of Lucca.

Doubtless, there exists a sound empirical basis for the time in question in Lucca: The diocesan archives preserve one of the largest sets of charters and documents for the European early middle ages. Most of this impressive collection has been printed already and has been published in facsimile in no less than 21 volumes within the *Chartae Latinae antiquiores* since the 1980s. There are a few older monographs on the early medieval history of Lucca; the one written by the German historian Hansmartin Schwarzmaier deserves much credit for its in-depth prosopographical analyses but again shows affinity to the notorious New History in its combination of social and constitutional history. Obviously, much work remains to be done.