

Medieval Anguillara, A Study in Feudal Lordship

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Anguillara is a small Italian town situated just north of Rome on Lake Bracciano. During the early medieval period, like most such communities in Europe, the town was part of the feudal system. This was a system of simple government based on the establishment of a lord-vassal arrangement, an arrangement which was the very base of medieval society. Feudal lords dictated the directions and wishes of their people, and whatever decision a lord may have made, his subjects were compelled to support him. The history of Anguillara in the tenth to the twelfth centuries demonstrates this clearly. The people of the town had little or no control over the political events in which Anguillara became involved. In particular, Anguillara can be seen as a pawn in the struggle between Papacy and Empire and the strife between Guelf/Ghibelline factions.

Anguillara did not exist before the tenth century, and there are several legends explaining its rather inauspicious beginnings. According to one legend, the site of the town was granted by the Pope to Raimone of Rome who had saved the city of Rome from a ferocious dragon. Until this time, the area around Lake Bracciano seems to have been largely uninhabited, although there is some evidence of Etruscan and Roman activity in earlier times. Thus, it was this man, Raimone, who began the capricious reign of the 'Leoni di Anguillara', the lords of Anguillara during the early medieval period.

The first documented evidence of the existence of Anguillara is found in the Roman writer Galetti, who reported in 1020 that: "... dominum Guido illustriss atque indite comite filio quidem Billizo bone memorie qui appellatur di Anguillaria".

Galetti thus explains the origin of the name. He also mentioned some fishing regulations, and listed the names of the people who had a right to fish in the lake. These were "Petrus Iohannis, Actonis, Saxolino, Ingelbaldun, et Paganus Actonis." In return for this privilege, these people had to "pay 70 libbre papiensi for their fishing rights, give a bond of friendship to the military who protected the town, and contribute to military expenditure against any enemy if the need arose". These conditions show the beginnings of complete domination by the Leoni over the town, and are a typical example of the feudal burdens of such towns.

The Leoni were traditional supporters of the Papacy, a support which was due to Anguillara's proximity to Rome and the belief that the initial grant of land to Raimone had come from the Pope. This traditional support, however, was destined to wax and wane over the next few centuries during the wars between the Guelfs and Ghibellines.

Anguillara, traditionally a supporter of the Papacy, was initially aligned with the Guelfs. This was the faction that believed in the ultimate authority of the Pope over all secular rulers, including the ruler of the western Empire. Their opponents, the Ghibellines, felt that the ultimate authority belonged to the Emperor.

This rivalry directly affected Anguillara in 1090, during the reign of Gherardo. The struggle between the two factions heightened, and it appeared that the Ghibellines

may become the ultimate victors. Gherardo decided to switch allegiance and support the Emperor. Although the Ghibellines did not triumph as expected, it did become a fortuitous move for Anguillara. In changing sides it had allowed the Leoni to ally with the de Vicos of Bracciano, another powerful town on the same lake. This gave Anguillara the local stability that was essential for future growth. However, it also exemplifies the capability of the ruler to change his subjects' beliefs and support in his own name, for pure political gain and with little regard for their traditional alliances. The role of the Leoni was now defined as a strong authoritative one, able to dictate to the people of the town. However, their external policies were not so well defined.

In 1140, Gherardo's son, Giovanni di Anguillara, successfully led a Ghibelline army on Nepe, during the turbulence between Innocent II and the anti-Pope, Anacleto. Under similar conditions, his brother Nicolo defeated Tolfa and S. Severa in 1146. However, the sympathies of the Leoni were never more defined than when, forty years later, Raimone II received a diplomatic envoy from Enrico IV, son of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. This envoy bestowed the lordship of the Italian towns of Sutri, Monte San Stefano and Monte San Giovanni on him in gratitude for his support. The Roman historian Gregorovius said that the Emperor would not in fact have felt so assured of Anguillara's support and it is more likely that Raimone II corrupted the envoy and persuaded him to bestow more than was intended.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Anguillara's new alliance certainly angered the Papacy. In 1205 Innocent III sent a papal bull stating that the Papacy had resumed patronage of Anguillara and, for a short while, denied its residents access to the local church of S. Tommaso. This is another example of the harm done to the people of the town by the actions of the Leoni. The ensuing period was one of uncertainty as to the true allegiance of the town.

During the reign of Pandolfo I, evidence of the Leoni's allegiance is contradictory. In 1243 Pandolfo handed one hundred small provinces in the surrounding area over to the Pope as evidence of his good will, though they had initially been gained at the Papacy's expense. Also during Pandolfo's reign, Enrico VI stayed in the town on his way to Rome for his coronation. This implies that it was still considered a Ghibelline town, at least by the Emperor. In the form of a rebuttal, Pandolfo was made leader of the Guelfs in central Italy by the Pope. However, when Enrico VI's son Frederick Barbarossa II ascended the throne, hostilities between the two factions began again.

Pandolfo once more changed allegiances, and gave his support to the Emperor. Still relying on the military support of the Anguilliese, he commanded a troop on the Guelf town of Viterbo, near Rome. However, he was imprisoned by the Guelfs of Viterbo, and during his imprisonment the Emperor was ex-communicated. With great diplomacy and little fealty, Pandolfo once more changed Anguillara's loyalty back to the Guelfs. However, he was able to create a peace between the Romans and the Viterbese, under direction of the Vatican. The early fourteenth century in Italy was characterised by this uncertainty of loyalties, though now not simply between Emperor and Pope. In 1300 the Pope left for Avignon, causing the 'Great Schism' between two contending Popes.

This schism within the Papacy caused local problems for Anguillara, as the de Vicos of Bracciano gave their support to the anti-Pope, Clement VII while Anguillara gave its support to the Pope in Rome, Gregory VI. From this time Anguillara began to lose its power and significance. As well as the uncertainty created by two rival Popes, the Leoni returned to live in Rome and became even more out of touch with the local people.

In a bid to re-establish the significance of the Leoni, Francesco, the grandson of Pandolfo I, married an Orsini. This family, alongside that of the Colonnas, held most of the power in Rome and supplied most of the Popes. The power of the Leoni was momentarily boosted in Rome, and local problems were also solved by the marriage of Francesco's granddaughter to Pietro de Vico of Bracciano, mending the rift caused by their differing support of the two papal contenders during the schism. However, these problems only remained solved as long as the marriages lasted, and the 'Leoni di Anguillara' never held as much power again.

Feuding soon began with the accession of Everso II. In a bid to re-establish the former glory of his ancestors, he led his army, using also some forces belonging to the Papal forces, to conquer the de Vico's land around the lake, as a beginning in the quest to rule over the entire region of Lazio. As most of Lazio, the area surrounding Rome, belonged to the Papal states, this was interpreted as a hostile move. It was also seen as an extremely arrogant move, to presume to use Papal forces even in the primary stages of the campaign, in itself a presumption since the Leoni no longer had the capability of defeating and ruling other towns. Fed up with the insolence of the Leoni, who had created continual problems for the Papacy, the Pope did not pardon Everso, although he stopped short of imposing excommunication. Everso heeded the warning and ceased his campaign, managing to retain the lordship of Anguillara.

Everso's son, Francesco, driven by the same desire for power and consequence, tried to re-establish his father's campaign. The Pope, however, felt that the Leoni had been given sufficient warning, and took possession of Anguillara. Francesco was excommunicated, a sentence which was very shameful for the town as well. His brother, Deifobo, was able to resume patronage briefly, after much negotiation and diplomacy. However, on his death in 1490, the Papacy reclaimed Anguillara for good. From that time onward, Anguillara has remained a stagnant, inward looking town, an anonymous part of the Papal states.

The medieval history of Anguillara does not reflect the changing needs and development of a small fishing village. Instead, it reflects the interests of external rulers, involved in politics unrelated to the needs of the Anguilliese and using the town merely as a power base. From the beginning of the reign of the Leoni, their attitude was marked by indifference to the people of the town and they used them to fight wars between the Emperor in Germany and the Papacy in Rome. As the Leoni switched loyalties for political gain, likewise were the Anguilliese expected to do so. This is typical of the whole feudal era, the struggle of smaller leaders to retain power in the face of stronger opposition. The Leoni used the town's military strength to achieve their own goals, and much of their income was derived from taxes taken from the locals for fishing rights. This total subjection of the Anguilliese exemplifies feudalism in Italy as a whole.

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