

THE ORIGINS AND STRUCTURAL FORMATION OF THE EARLY CAPETIAN NOBILITY

By
Choi, Saeng-yeoul
Lecturer of Suwon University
Suwon, Korea

The concept of the nobility was thought to be inseparably related with feudalism to the historians who initially named feudalism. However, all of the ruling class in the feudal period were not the nobles and considerable social mobility existed among various groups within the ruling class. In this paper I will study the origins and structural formation of the nobility of the early Capetian Dynasty, which is considered to be a typical feudal period, in order to show that there was social mobility within the ruling class. First of all, since there are many argumentations as to the origins of the nobles of the early Capetian Dynasty, I will refer to the background of the age from which these argumentations derive.

The territory of the Carolingian Empire was initially divided into three kingdoms which in turn were subdivided into several principalities in about 900. The reason the territory was subdivided was that local defence was more suitable for the protection against invasions of the barbarians and civil war brought by the usurpation for the throne. The royal authority became too weak to cope with the military demand of local people properly. As a result the territorial princes came to consolidate their power and held assemblies in their own regions, and princely protection and princely charters became an equivalent and a substitute for royal protection and royal charters. The trend of the weakening of the royal authority and the localization of the territory reached its summit in the late tenth and the early eleventh centuries when castles were constructed in every region and the principalities were again subdivided into various

sections. But this phenomenon varied in different regions and at different times. For example, in the Maconnais region where comital authority disappeared, the county was divided into six castellanies and territories of two or three immunist churches which consolidated its position by the act "peace of God". In this region castellans, immunist churches, and lords of vassals were placed on the same level. Similar phenomenon is shown in Francia, Berry, Auvergne, Bourgogne, Provence, Languedoc, Toulouse, etc. On the contrary, in Flanders and Normandy the public authority was continuously occupied by dukes and counts. But generally an eclectic type was found which the comital authority seemed to weaken considerably in early times but more or less recovered after about 1050. In this type Poitou, Champagne, Gatine, Ile-de-France, Picardie, etc. are included.

As a result of the frequent subdivision of the territory, the royal authority weakened remarkably so that the itinerary of the king was limited to Ile-de-France and the royal diplomas appeared only in Francia after 987. Also in turn the comital authority weakened or sometimes even disappeared in several regions and a new social group, the castellans consolidated sufficient power to join the noble ranks. Finally, when the regional nobles ceased to come to court to do homage to the king, an essential element of the Carolingian system was lost. In this context traditional scholars, including M.Bloch and G.Duby, insisted that as a new social order came, the Carolingian nobility was replaced or replenished by a new elite of knights and vassals. But this view was refuted by other arguments, especially those of K.F.Werner, L.Verriest, L.Genicot, E.Warlop which state that the race lasted from the ninth century to the twelfth century and that new nobility did not exist even in

regions plundered extensively by Normans. According to this opinion, the status of the nobility was never dependent on anything other than birth and was transmitted through both male and female lines, or exclusively through the female line. Suggested by this view, G. Duby revised his former opinion by demonstrating that in the Maconnais region many of the noble families of the eleventh century had at least one ancestor among the Carolingian nobility.

But on the one hand, recent studies of the Freiburg school, especially of Karl Schmid, confirmed by the research of French scholars, make it possible to modify the opinion of "biological continuity". According to these studies, the nobility was fundamentally transformed about 1000. At this time, settled on an hereditary estate, a castle, and no longer reliant on the favour of the king or a territorial prince for its status, the noble family came to depend more and more on its male head to defend its possessions and to pass them intact to his heir. Corresponding to this localization of the territory and the transformation of family structure was the evolution in usage of proper names. From the ninth century to the eleventh century we observe the simple repetition of same names which pass from generation to generation. But around 1000 was installed the usage of patronym which was precisely the name of a patrimonial castle. Because of this fundamental change in noble self-consciousness and family structure, the prominent family of twelfth century can be followed back to the end of the tenth century but whose trace is then lost in the earlier period of single names, and especially the nobles of twelfth century had difficulties in reconstructing their ancestry. For example, in spite of the fact that the Capetians are related to the Carolingians through the female line, not only this

relation but also Robertines beyond Hugh Capet who usurped the crown were overlooked in that time.

Also genealogies of lineage from north-western France demonstrated clearly this interest in descent through the male line. For example, Rambert of Ardres, in honouring his master Arnould of Ardres' ancestors, traces his genealogy through the male line only to the man of the middle of the tenth century, the first constructor of a partrimonial castle, although this genealogy can be traced to the Carolingians through the female line. This interest was certified by the genealogy written by Lambert of Watrelos who belongs to the relatively modest noble family which he traces back to 1050. This transformation of family structure in France generally began the last years of the tenth century. For example, the genealogy describing the ancestry of Count Arnould of Flanders, drawn in between 951 and 959 places the greatest emphasis on women and their illustrious lineage. The crucial point is that the great magnates underwent this structural transformation first and that this phenomenon gradually spreaded to lower social groups in turn.

But the principle that the transformation of the family structure was accompanied by the localization of territory can't be totally accepted because there are some exceptional cases. For example, the observation of the tomb of Count of Champagne illustrates the horizontal relation of the family which considers men and women, the kinship and the ally in the same respect even in twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Moreover, even after patronym was adopted, continuously the names of women were transmitted to infants, especially to younger children - if the maternal relatives were more distinguished in their ancestry, wealth, social position. But at least the name of the eldest son was transmitted patrilineally.

Also self-consciousness of the family as a continuing body may be seen in the tendency to impose constraints of the members of the group for the good of the whole. These include attempts to restrict the size of the group for defending the fortunes, especially the growth of indivisible ownership by heirs, the frequency of consent by kinsmen to alienation, the sending of the children into the church, and the reluctance to marry younger sons. First of all, interest in indivisible ownership, transactions, and gifts was frequent in Picardie in the first half of the eleventh century, next in Maconnais and western France, and finally in most regions in the twelfth century. Second, generally the eldest son or at best two sons among many brothers were permitted to marry for the purpose of avoiding the division of the patrimony. An example is the lords of Shenelay. Although Aswalo I had five sons, he had only two great-great-grandsons in the male line and only one had any children of his own. In this family from generation to generation generally the younger sons entered the church or died on crusade. That's why after knighthood many younger men of good families often spent their time searching for an adventure or a wife.

On the other hand, the theory that the noble class was static in this period may be also questioned in terms of noble marriage. In a word, new men were able to marry into established lineages. The most striking examples of new men who married old nobility were counts of Nevers and counts of Roucy. Although Raynold of Nevers was of quite recent status, son of a castellan who had gained his county in return for loyalty to Duke Henry of Burgundy, he and his descendants contracted men and women from families that ranged from kings to counts, viscounts and castellans. Also Ragnold of Roucy who as a Viking warrior

constructed a fort at Roucy in the middle of the tenth century married Alberada, Lothar's half-sister and their son was Gilbert, count of Roucy. In eleventh and twelfth centuries while small parts of his descendants married the members of relatively modest families, most parts can ally the members of comital families including those of Flanders, Vermandois and Bourgoigne, and royal families including those of England, Navarre and Aragon.

These examples demonstrated that marriages were contracted among several different groups within the noble class and this fact was also found in Lambert of Ardres' genealogy in which not only lineages of counts, viscounts and castellans but also those of knights were woven together. The crucial point is that many lineages of relatively modest lords of the eleventh and twelfth centuries can't be traced into the Carolingian period, and even noble lineages like the Angevins whose ancestry can be traced to that time were viewed as the descendants of upstairs. Therefore, as C.B. Bouchard insisted, the demonstration of "biological continuity" did not disprove that upstairs became son-in-law of noble families and that there was considerable social mobility. As a result membership in this elite constantly increased.

Then why would the old nobles be willingly to marry their daughters to new men? First of all, according to the localization of territory that accompanied transformation of the family structure into the agnatic line and, to the consolidation of primogeniture including restrictive matrimony strategy for avoiding division of patrimony, the supply of females was much greater than that of males. As a result those who has a son to marry could obtain wives of higher rank and in this period generally kings and nobles with many eligible daughters used marriage strategy for establishing political alliances and acquiring homage of

their vassals. That's why genealogical references frequently extolled the prominent nobility of the ancestors on the maternal side.

But the next point we must note is that these marriages can be contracted in so far as they are acceptable. In a word, during the tenth-twelfth centuries, especially influenced by Gregorian Reform after the middle of the eleventh century the attempts by the nobles to find spouses who were not related to them within the seven-or six in practice-forbidden degrees helped lead to marriages between men and women of different strata within the nobility.

Next, I will study the upward mobility of the knights who were included in the ruling class, in terms of enlargement of the noble class. The title of knight at first appeared in the southern area of France in the middle of the tenth century when the castles were built here and there for the military purpose. This title came to prevail in other areas of France by the eleventh century. At first only simple knights utilized this title but next higher nobles used this title to raise their honour. The area where the title of knight was the most prevailing is Maconnais. In this region this title substituted the titles of vassus, fidelis and nobiles. The reason this title was prevailing is first the proper character of the knight who participated in the king's duty of maintaining peace and second, the spread of the idea of "miles christi" since the first Crusade.

But though many nobles became knighthood, all knights are not nobles. This fact can be grasped by studying the contemporaries' view of class which clearly recognized the demarcation among classes. For example, Radulf Glaber put counts and bishops into the maximi, knights into the mediocres and peasants into the minimi. Also in most regions of France, the magnates characterized by family were sharply disti-

nguished from the knights characterized by metier and in the case of title only princes and castellans were called "dominus" and knights were simply called "miles". In addition, miles castri who did not possess their own territory and lived in castles, had the duty of regular castle-ward and were called "knights of X". Moreover, there were great differences in the level of income between great magnates and simple knights.

But by and large, in the late twelfth century and thirteenth centuries when they left their castles and built their own fortified houses, they began to use the title of dominus used only by princes and castellans. Especially in Champagne this fortified house was registered under the category of castle. Moreover, because the knightly family came to intermarry with the members of castellan families since the circa thirteenth century, it can be said that the knights were in the way of flowing into the noble class.

As mentioned above, from the ninth century when the Carolingian Empire was divided into three kingdoms to twelfth century there was considerable social mobility. Especially during 950-1050 when the noble family underwent the structural transformation, a new social group, the castellans consolidated sufficient power to join the noble ranks and married the members of established lineages. As a result membership in this elite increased and this trend came to be consolidated after the last years of the twelfth century when the knights constructed their own fortified houses.