

THE BRANCALEONIS FROM PIOBBICO  
AND THE ALLIANCE WITH THE MONTEFELTROS  
XIII-XIV CENTURIES

di Anna Falcioni

### **The Origins of the Alliance**

The Archive of the Counts Brancaleonis of Piobbico, held at the Fondo Antico of Urbino University Library, represents a fundamental source to trace the history of this family and its quite intricate genealogical development and branching, given that the Counts Brancaleonis established four distinct territorial Signorie of Castel Durante, the Rocca, Piobbico and the Pecorari during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The content and composition of this archive are also extremely significant in order to investigate the Marche Apennines, a vast strategic area at the edge of a more important historical geography but, nonetheless, crucial for what concerned the events of the Marche as a whole. Undoubtedly the analysis of the material held in Urbino can provide a useful contribution to reconsider the spreading and the role of a rural Signoria, that of the Brancaleonis, which was part of the many noble power centres that dotted the countryside of the Montefeltro and the Massa Trabaria.

Recent studies pointed out the need to examine the late medieval rural Signoria, highlighting that this field had not yet received the attention it deserves. This historiographical neglect is primarily due to the predominant role recognised to cities and states in political events, and in the development of society and economy as well. Conversely to the great amount of scholarly studies that dealt with the central centuries of the Middle Ages, investigations regarding this period were not many mainly because the Signoria was approached as a political and institutional phenomenon, which hindered its economic and social importance to emerge. The causes of this historiographical delay vary according to local contexts and different historiographical traditions<sup>1</sup>. With regard to centre-northern Italy, studies

<sup>1</sup> The delay concerning studies on rural Signorie regarding Lombardy, the Emilian area under

approach the Signoria as a declining phenomenon in contrast to the hegemonic role played by cities at the political, ideological and economic level. Especially in Veneto, Tuscany, Umbria and Marche, studies on the

the Viscontis-Sforzas, Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta is not very evident. For Trentino and Friuli, several investigations tackled the presence of Signorie, but their outcomes are significantly different. Studies on Liguria are almost absent. In Lazio, the analysis of the rural Signoria covers the period up to the beginning of the fourteenth century and then the modern era. With regard to the south, despite «feudal powers» intended as obstacles to monarchy and to economic development being crucial, investigations are limited to legal studies on feudalism and on dynasties and their patrimonies, and concern the period from the late thirteenth century up to the end of the fifteenth century. On this point, see the crucial studies of L. Arcangeli, *Gentiluomini di Lombardia. Ricerche sull'aristocrazia padana nel Rinascimento*, Milano, Unicopli, 2003; A. Barbero, *Il ducato di Savoia. Amministrazione e corte di uno stato franco-italiano*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002; Id., *Politica e comunità contadina nel Piemonte medievale*, in «Studi storici», 35/1, 1994, pp. 5-48; M. Benaiteau, *Vassalli e cittadini: la signoria rurale nel Regno di Napoli attraverso lo studio dei feudi dei Tocco di Montemiletto (XI-XVIII secolo)*, Bari, Edipuglia, 1997; M. Bicchierai, *Ai confini della Repubblica di Firenze. Poppi dalla signoria dei conti Guidi al vicariato del Casentino (1360-1480)*, Firenze, Olschki, 2005; S. Carocci, *Baroni di Roma. Dominazioni signorili e lignaggi aristocratici nel Duecento e nel primo Trecento*, Rome, École Française de Rome, 1993; Idem, *Signorie di Mezzogiorno. Società rurali, poteri aristocratici e monarchia (XII-XIII secolo)*, Roma, Viella, 2014; G. Chittolini, *Ascesa e declino di «piccoli stati signorili» (Italia centro-settentrionale, metà trecento-inizi cinquecento). Alcune note*, in «Società e storia», 31, 2008, pp. 473-498; Idem, *Note sul comune di Firenze e i «piccoli signori» dell'Appennino secondo la Pace di Sarzana (1353)*, in *From Florence to the Mediterranean and Beyond. Essays in honour of Anthony Molbo*, edited by D. Ramada Curto, E. R. Dursteler, J. Kirshner, F. Trivellato, Firenze, Olschki, 2009, pp. 193-209; S.M. Collavini, *I signori rurali in Italia centrale (secoli XII- metà XIV): profilo sociale e forme di interazione*, in «Mélanges de l'École française de Rome-Moyen Âge», 123, 2011, pp. 301-318; M. Della Misericordia, *Divenire comunità. Comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombarda nel tardo medioevo*, Milano, Unicopli, 2006; A. De Vincentiis, *Guerre e paci dei baroni romani (1417-1484): la prospettiva curiale*, in M. Chiabò (edited by), *Congiure e conflitti: l'affermazione della signoria pontificia su Roma nel Rinascimento: politica, economia e cultura*, Roma, Roma nel Rinascimento, 2014, pp. 217-246; A. Gamberini, *Oltre le città. Aspetti territoriali e culture aristocratiche nella Lombardia del tardo medioevo*, Roma, Viella, 2009; L. Provero, *Le parole dei sudditi. Azioni e scritture della politica contadina nel Duecento*, Spoleto, Fondazione CISAM, 2012; F. Cengarle, G. Chittolini, G.M. Varanini (edited by), *Poteri signorili e feudali nelle campagne dell'Italia settentrionale fra Tre e Quattrocento: fondamenti di legittimità e forme di esercizio* (atti del convegno, Milano 11-12 aprile 2003), Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2005; F. Senatore, *Sistema documentario, archivi e identità cittadine nel regno di Napoli durante l'antico regime*, in «Archivi», 10/1, 2015, pp. 33-74; G. Vallone, *Istituzioni feudali dell'Italia meridionale. Tra Medioevo ed antico regime. L'area salentina*, Roma, Viella, 1999; P. Villani, *Signoria rurale, feudalità, capitalismo nelle campagne*, in «Quaderni Storici», 19, 1972, pp. 5-26; M. Zacchigna, *Il patriarcato di Aquileia: l'evoluzione dei poteri locali (1250-1420)*, in L. Ferrari (edited by), *Studi in onore di Giovanni Miccoli*, Trieste, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2004, pp. 91-113; S. Zamperetti, *I piccoli principi. Signorie locali, feudi e comunità soggette nello Stato regionale veneto dall'espansione territoriale ai primi decenni del 600*, Venezia, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 1991.

heterogeneity of medium and small centres, the complexity of rural areas and the presences of many Signorie, which seem widespread even in non-marginal areas, have been neglected.

By considering the Signoria of the Brancaleoni family from Piobbico in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this study aims to investigate both the signorial power and its impact on different aspects of the local, social and economic life, and on political entities such as cities and states, with which the Signoria interacted in the Montefeltro and Massa Trabaria. The protagonists of the time were aware of this territory's strategic importance: indeed, the counts of the Montefeltro and the emerging local municipal communities turned their attention towards this impervious area and its lords to establish and strengthen their power. Within this context, the Brancaleonis of Piobbico's first decades of history<sup>2</sup> is tied to that of the Montefeltros and the great Ghibelline alliance sealed during the fourteenth century.

Starting from Costanzo Felici and Francesco Sansovino<sup>3</sup>, a number of hypotheses have been made about the lineage of the Brancaleoni family: all these hypotheses do not rely on any documentary basis and can be traced back to two lines: the first hypothesis – wholly imaginative – suggested that the Brancaleonis were of German origin and had been part of an emperor's retinue; the second hypothesis argued that they were Italians. By abiding by the second hypothesis, Tarducci<sup>4</sup> reckoned that the Brancaleonis descended

<sup>2</sup> In the last thirty years, the only studies dedicated to the Brancaleoni family in the signorial context of the Montefeltro and the Massa Trabaria are those of G. Chittolini, *Su alcuni aspetti dello Stato di Federico*, in G. Cerboni Baiardi, G. Chittolini, P. Floriani (edited by), *Federico di Montefeltro. Lo Stato, le arti, la cultura*, I, Roma, Bulzoni, 1986, pp. 72-74; F.V. Lombardi, *Territorio e istituzioni in età medioevale*, in G. Allegretti, F.V. Lombardi (edited by), *Il Montefeltro. Ambiente, storia, arte nelle alte valli del Foglia e del Conca*, Villa Verucchio, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Pesaro, 1999, pp. 141 ff.; W. Tommasoli, *Signorie rinascimentali e tarda feudalità*, in *ivi*, p. 171; S. Remedea, *I rapporti tra Comune e la piccola nobiltà rurale nel nascente Stato di Urbino: Cagli e i Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, in «Atti e memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche», 103, 1998, pp. 349-369; J.C. Maire Vigueur, *Comuni e signorie in Umbria, Marche e Lazio*, in *Storia d'Italia*, diretta da G. Galasso, VII/2, Torino, Utet, 1987, pp. 567-570; A. Falcioni, *I Brancaleoni di Piobbico dal Trecento agli albori del Quattrocento: le pergamene inedite della Biblioteca Universitaria di Urbino*, in «Studi Montefeltrani», 33, 2011-2012, pp. 163-181. Alongside these studies, see also the edited volume *Atti del I convegno di storia locale*, entitled *I Brancaleoni e Piobbico*, which is the outcome of the conference held at Piobbico in 1983, and published in Piobbico in 1985.

<sup>3</sup> D. Bischì, *I Brancaleoni di Piobbico in Costanzo Felici e Francesco Sansovino*, Rimini, ed. B. Ghigi, 1982, pp. 57-75.

<sup>4</sup> A. Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, Cagli, Tip. Balloni, 1897, pp. 7-11.

from the Frangipanis of Rome. However, he did not cite any historical evidence. Bricchi's thesis<sup>5</sup>, for which the Brancaleonis came from Bologna as part of Martin IV's retinue, is to be strongly rejected because of an evident anachronism: archival documents attested the presence of the family in the territory of Piobbico and its surroundings almost a century before the advent of that Pope. Moreover, Bricchi, while narrating the happenings of the family, stated that «questa derivò da Brancaleoni padre di Alberico huomini illustri in pace e in guerra» and that «d'Alberico nacque Brancaleone e da Brancaleone vennero Bellabranca, Alberico, Ranuccio, Gentile e Nicola»<sup>6</sup>. These references date back to the beginning of the thirteenth century, but archival documents<sup>7</sup> provide a more precise picture of the family. In 1206, Guido of Paganico, in becoming a citizen of Città di Castello, swore «item facere hostem parlamentum specialiter contra Bonumcomitem (qui est de comitibus Montis Feretri) et filios Brancaleonis»<sup>8</sup>; five years later, in 1211, these sons of Brancaleone, Alberico and Gentile, submitted themselves, their lands and their castles – wherever located – to Città di Castello, in the presence of Orlando Bruni, consul of the Umbrian city, and paid 11 *denarii* per family per year, as documents dated 11 May 1211 showed<sup>9</sup>.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Brancaleone's sons, or at least Brancaleone alone, were well-known and feared figures. They were undoubtedly identifiable to the extent that they were referred to with their names and linked to Buonconte of Montefeltro, son of Montefeltrano I,

<sup>5</sup> F. Bricchi, *Delli annali della città di Cagli*, In Urbino, apud Aloysium Ghisonum impressorem cam. & archiepiscopalem, 1641, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 58, 62.

<sup>7</sup> The diplomatic archive of the Brancaleonis of Piobbico is composed of two-hundred-thirty parchments regarding the period from the thirteenth century up to the sixteenth century. It includes twenty-three parchments regarding the thirteenth century and classified according to the numbering provided by Nardini (cf. L. Moranti, *Antichi documenti storici della famiglia Brancaleoni esistenti nella Biblioteca Universitaria di Urbino*, in *I Brancaleoni e Piobbico*, cit., pp. 131-140). Four parchments, which were published by Pietro Paolo Torelli together with other seventeen parchments had been lost (G. Colucci (edited by), *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico; illustrati con note dal signor Pietro Paolo Torelli*, Fermo, G.A. Paccaroni, 1796 (*Delle antichità Picene*, 27), pp. 63-74, nn. I-IV; pp. 79-81, n. VI; pp. 82-83, n. VIII; pp. 94-119, nn. XII-XX). These four parchments were dated 14 August 1236, 7 August 1240, 2 August 1261, 3 November 1288, respectively. With regard to the thirteenth-century parchments survived, ten parchments concern acts of emphyteusis, eight are acts of division and sales of goods; and then, there are one arbitration, one exchange, one *instrumentum* of submission, one renunciation of privileges and a will.

<sup>8</sup> G. Muzi, *Memorie civili di Città di Castello*, II, Città di Castello, F. Donati, 1842, pp. 31 ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

progenitor of the Montefeltro family's glories<sup>10</sup>. This connection gives a glimpse of the interests and aims the two families shared: they both controlled castles and men in the mountainous area between Tuscany, Umbria, Romagna and Marche, which the imperial vacancy caused by the death of Henry VI and the struggle for succession between Otto IV of Brunswick and Philip II of Swabia had abandoned to the rule of great noble families and to the interference of two powerful neighbours, Rimini and Città di Castello. At that time, probably the Brancaleonis, too, like the Bernardinis and the Olivas from Piagnano<sup>11</sup>, were already part of that dense network of alliances and family ties through which the Montefeltros exercised their power over the vast Urbino's countryside.

### The Documents of Urbino University Library

The first document regarding the Brancaleonis is preserved at the Fondo Antico of the Urbino University Library, and sheds light, at least in part, on the family's properties. Through this document, signed in *castro Plobici* by notary Ugolino on 15 October 1213<sup>12</sup>, Alberico and his brother Gentile divided up their father's assets. Alberico, who was probably the first-born son and bore the name of a paternal ancestor, defined the terms of the division: «Hec est divisio que ego Albericus Brancaleoni fatio inter me et fratrem meo Çetilem». The first share included *castro de Plobico* and the Rocca with their courts and appurtenances; the second share concerned the family's possessions from Urbino to the sea, a third of the castle of Monte Ghisole and the assets held in «Carlano and in Pultro et in Carutoli, da la serra de Closalto usque ad Matram, de Petra Çauli insuper usque ad Flacantum», the Spina with its court and all the properties *in plebe Aplici*. The one who obtained Piobbico would commit himself to pay the third part of the debt that Ugolino *Latini* had towards the castle of Monte Ghisole, the other would pay up the rest, except for 100 pounds of Pisan *denarii*, which would be borne by the brother taking over Proverzo or Piobbico<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> M. Rossi, *I Montefeltro nel periodo feudale della loro signoria (1181-1375)*, Urbania, Scuola tip. Bramante, 1957, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> W. Tommasoli, *Per una storia delle Signorie minori fra Marche e Romagna: i conti Oliva di Piandimeleto*, in *Il convento di Montefiorentino. Atti del convegno, Montefiorentino 29 agosto 1979* (Studi Montefeltrani-serie Atti dei Convegni, II), Rimini, B. Ghigi, 1979, pp. 7 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Urbino, University Library, *Fondo Antico* (= BUU, FA), *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 2; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 63-65, n. I.

<sup>13</sup> This document has been also examined by C. Curradi, in *Pergamene sulle origini dei*

This document provides some crucial starting points for this study: at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the process of encastellation had already begun in Piobbico. Studies on the pre-existing architectural structure of the Brancaleoni palace and on the ceramic finds discovered during restoration works came to a similar conclusion<sup>14</sup>. According to Pagnani<sup>15</sup>, the toponym *Plobico*, or *Plubico* as mentioned in primary sources, must be interpreted as *Publicum*. This term has the meaning *agrimensores* attributed to this word: a section of land at the edge of a Roman municipality, which had not been measured with the method of centuriation, that is to say, a public land, owned by the State. These public areas consisted mainly of vast grasslands and woodlands for grazing and building timber; they were leased or given in use upon payment of a *vectigal*, or a tax. This is a consistent interpretation, given that Piobbico is crossed by two rivers, completely enclosed by mountains, and, in ancient times, surrounded by the following Roman municipalities: *Pitinum Mergens*, *Tifernum Tiberinum*, *Tifernum Mataurense*. A Celtic settlement was already established in this area by the fourth century BC<sup>16</sup>, and, between the late antiquity period and the Middle Ages – before the Brancaleonis' documented arrival – it was probably inhabited by a free community of people, who had settled in the inaccessible area at the edge of the main economic and military arteries, precisely where the flow of the Candigliano river marked the boundary of the dioceses of Urbino and Cagli.

Alongside the Brancaleonis' properties located in the area from Urbino to the sea, the second part of the act of division between Alberico and Gentile mentioned every existing place between Piobbico and Città di Castello: Monte Ghisole, Carlano, Pietragialla, Fraccano are toponyms that can still be clearly identified within the municipalities of Apecchio and Città di Castello. In the *instrumentum* of division, the reference to Pisan *denarii* is noteworthy: indeed, all the other parchments referred to currencies such as Ravenna's and Ancona's *denarii*. Could this be ascribed to the creditor's residence? Or does it testify that Brancaleone's sons, with their possessions, had entered into the orbit of Città di Castello, as the 1211 oath of submission to the *commune's* authority suggests? In fact, Città di Castello's documents of the time showed that the town's currency was the Pisan *denarii*, while in other areas of Urbino's countryside such as Castel

*Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, in *I Brancaleoni e Piobbico*, cit., p. 115.

<sup>14</sup> M.L. Polichetti, *Storia di un recupero*, in *I Brancaleoni e Piobbico*, pp. 181-188; L. Marchetti, *Il restauro del palazzo Brancaleoni, scoperte e conferme*, in *ivi*, pp. 191-199; G. Volpe, *Il Palazzo Brancaleoni di Piobbico appunti e riflessioni*, in *ivi*, pp. 209-218; G. Gardelli, *La ceramica metaurense del castello Brancaleoni*, in *ivi*, pp. 307-315.

<sup>15</sup> G. Pagnani, *Il nome Piobbico*, in *I Brancaleoni e Piobbico*, cit., pp. 13-26.

<sup>16</sup> Bischi, *I Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, cit., p. 136.

delle Ripe, Ravenna's and Ancona's *denarii* were already used in 1205. Moreover, in various acts of the *commune* of Città di Castello, a certain Ugolino *Latini* is mentioned, and, according to Torelli, a *dominus* Ugo Ugolini *Latini* received various goods in emphyteusis from the Benedictine abbey of San Cristoforo del Ponte<sup>17</sup>.

The Pecorari castle is not mentioned among the estates included in the division between Alberico and Gentile. In 1217, there is evidence of Ranuccio Brancaleoni's ownership of half of the fief by the monastery of Saint Vincent of Furlo, which held assets along the entire upper flow of the Candigliano river<sup>18</sup>. This Ranuccio was another son of Brancaleone, brother of Alberico and Gentile: on 17 March 1218, an act drawn up by notary Corbolino *in castro Pecurari* in the presence of four witnesses showed that the presbyter Pietro Saraceno and his family submitted to Ranuccio's authority<sup>19</sup>. The sure existence of a third brother supports Curradi's argument: he maintained that the 1213 division was not meant to be immediately effective, but it was just a preliminary agreement, the details of which were to be further defined. In any case, it confirmed that, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Brancaleonis' Signoria stretched for a vast territory, which spanned from the countryside of Cagli and Urbino to the Massa Trabaria and the outskirts of Città di Castello.

The interest of both the town of Città di Castello and the Montefeltros towards this family is easily understandable: an alliance with the Brancaleonis was essential for anyone who wanted to control the roads that led from the sea and from the north to the upper Valtiberina and Tuscany. Therefore, in 1226, Frederick II of Swabia allowed Buonconte and Taddeo of Montefeltro to rule over the town and county of Urbino; in 1228, the towns of Città di Castello and Rimini stipulated an agreement to mutually guarantee each other's rights over the territory of Urbino<sup>20</sup>. In addition, Città di Castello imposed on Rimini the respect for all family clans, already subjected to its protection and enjoying the privileges guaranteed by being its citizens:

et idem Ariminenses teneantur facere Castellanis... et eorum cuilibet quos habent in comitatu Urbini vel episcopatu, scilicet de Castro Riparum cum suis castellanis de Bernardinis et de filiis Brancaleonibus et de filiis Rainaldi

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> D. Bischì, *Il castello dei Pecorari di Piobbico (Pesaro) nei secoli XIII-XVIII. Note storiche*, in «Atti e memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche», 98, 1993, p. 121.

<sup>19</sup> This document is cited in Curradi, *Pergamene sulle origini dei Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, cit., pp. 122 ff.

<sup>20</sup> G. Franceschini, *I Montefeltro*, Varese, Dall'Oglio, 1970, pp. 17-20.

de Belmonte... et de castro Turris Abatia... et de aliis civibus, quos dicta Civitas Castelli habet in comitatu vel episcopatu Urbini<sup>21</sup>.

Città di Castello also took charge of settling their disputes and, in order to protect these noble families, asked for Rimini's help against the towns of Urbino and Cagli: the latter, raised to the status of free *commune*, tended to defend its prerogatives, to unify and expand its territory against the numerous feudal lords of its countryside, thus turning out to be a dangerous opponent to Città di Castello. A case in point is that of Rainaldo of Belmonte, who, after having sworn to become citizen of Città di Castello by submitting to this *commune* his properties in the *comitatus* and in the diocese of Urbino in 1206, a few years later, in 1219, became a citizen of Cagli in the presence of Alberico and Gentile Brancaleoni as witnesses<sup>22</sup>. The Brancaleonis, the Belmontes, the Bernardinis, all of whom holders of property between the Candigliano and the Metauro rivers, became the means through which Città di Castello imposed its political prominence. In these areas, the jurisdiction of its bishop had already spread out and, according to the ancient high-medieval ecclesiastical districts, went as far as the parish church of Ico, now Mercatello sul Metauro<sup>23</sup>.

Moreover, after the crusade in the East, the strengthening of Frederick II of Swabia led all the forces that had favoured the Roman Curia to redefine their strategies: therefore, Città di Castello sought the Counts of Urbino's endorsement, and, on 6 September 1230, entered into a pact of friendship and citizenship with the Montefeltros; the following year, in 1231, Buonconte of Montefeltro became Podesta of Città di Castello, and, by means of his military strength, turned the town from an ally into a vassal. This alliance allowed the Montefeltros to consolidate their positions in Urbino and its countryside, weakening the ancient families that ruled over castles and men in the bishopric of Urbino: among them, there were the Brancaleonis of Castel delle Ripe.

As we saw earlier, in the 1213 agreement, there is also the castle of Proverzo, near Castel delle Ripe: this point suggests that Brancaleone's patrimony also included properties around the abbey of San Cristoforo of Ponte. Although the agreement did not specify how the two parts of his inheritance would be divided, subsequent acts allow to infer that Gentile received Piobbico and the Rocca, and Alberico the remaining Brancaleone's assets. Alberico should

<sup>21</sup> G. Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, I-II, Urbino, Argalia, 1982, I, pp. 16-20.

<sup>22</sup> G. Mei, *Appunti e documenti per una monografia sul feudo di Rocca Leonella*, ms. in Cagli, Chapter Archive (= ACC), c. XX, n. 115, fold. A, fol. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Franceschini, *I Montefeltro*, cit., p. 26.





therefore be the forefather of the Brancaleonis of Castel Durante (nowadays Urbania)<sup>24</sup>; from this moment onwards, Alberico's and Gentile's interests, linked to the defence of their possessions, began to diverge. Città di Castello, now closely tied to the Montefeltros, lost importance for Alberico, whose estates were around Castel delle Ripe, in the heart of Urbino's countryside and representing the main object of the counts of Montefeltro's appetite. Thus, in 1240, Città di Castello's mayor asked Alberico of Brancaleone to pay an annual tax of 2 sols of *denarii* for the inhabitants of Castel delle Ripe. Alberico replied that he was ready to pay but lamented that Città di Castello did not correctly comply with the agreements he undertook with the town. The men of Castel delle Ripe, then, argued that they were not able to pay the extra 16 *denarii* per family imposed on them by Città di Castello, because they were enlisted in the army of Frederick II<sup>25</sup>.

Gentile, who inherited Piobbico and the Rocca, had a different attitude towards the ancient ally. Different was also his successors' attitude. On 13 August 1232, Gentile was already mentioned in an act drawn up *in castro Plobici*: in this act Zugno of the late Baronzio granted «donatione inter vivos mere, pure et absolute et inrevocabiliter vobis dominus Gentil(i) olim Brancaleonis et domine Risabelle tue coniux several plots of land located in colle Accinelli, in plani de Clusa, iusta flumen Bescubii, and in loco qui dicitur Scaelle, iusta flumen Bescubii», all of which were in the territory of Piobbico. Zugno promised «sub dominatione vestra stare et morare» and to pay 12 Ravenna *denarii*, every year, «pro mea persona et rebus, quas ad vob(is) recepisse confiteor» (fig. 1.1)<sup>26</sup>.

Gentile's will, written at the family home of the Rocca on 8 September 1235, shows which estates he owned: after various cash bequests to his nephews Brancaleone and Sabuardo, sons of his sister Comitissa, and to his daughters Gertrude, Beatrice, Sasdre and Comitissa, he provided his wife Isabella with the usufruct of his entire patrimony and with the guardianship of their children. Gentile then listed all his possessions «in castris Peccorari, Plubici et eorum curtis a Turre de Abbatia usque ad Roccam et a summatibus montis Neronis et Montis Equi intus». His heirs were his sons, who inherited his patrimony «in equali parte: donnum Guidonem, donnum Ugolinum, Bellambrancam, Rainutium, Dadeum, Montemfeltranum et Contutium cum prefato postumo, si habuerit uxor» (fig. 1.2)<sup>27</sup>. It should be noted that, in

<sup>24</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 122-131.

<sup>25</sup> Muzi, *Memorie civili di Città di Castello*, cit., II, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 3; Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 65-67, n. II.

<sup>27</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 4; Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il*



Fig. 1.2. BUU, FA, Fondo Brancaleoni, b. 15, parch. n. 4 (1235 settembre 8).

1235, Gentile's family also owned the Pecorari castle (in its entirety or at least a portion of it), given that, in 1217, Ranuccio Brancaleoni had received the half of it. Gentile's properties extended «a Turre de Abbatia usque ad Roccam» and coincided with the current territory of the municipality of Piobbico. Torre dell'Abbazia was an outpost of the Benedictine monastery of San Cristoforo of Ponte: the wage receipts of the town of Rimini drawn up by Buonconte of Montefeltro on 2 December 1216,<sup>28</sup> the names of the foot soldiers *de Ripis, de Belmonte, de Proversi* appear together with those of four *de Pecoraris* and three *de Turre Abadie*. Torre dell'Abbazia was the north-western boundary of the Brancaleonis of Piobbico's properties.

Some comments could be made on the names of Gentile's children: first of all, the title *donnum* that precedes Guido's and Ugolino's names, probably the older children, indicates that, at that time, they were both adults and clergymen; the names of *Contutium* (perhaps a nickname) and *Comitissa* clearly show the aspiration to the formal recognition of a power he already exercised de facto; the reference to a possible posthumous son is due to the fact that, at the time of the drawing of his testament, Filippo was not yet born. Filippo was the last-born son and appears in later documents together with his brothers Bellabranca and Montefeltrano. The name of the latter can only refer to Montefeltrano, father of Buonconte and Taddeo, and further highlights Gentile's friendly relations with the Montefeltros. Gentile's wife, *domina* Isabella, was born to the noble family of the Acquavivas from Cagli<sup>29</sup>: this further testifies to how the Brancaleonis were already deeply inserted into the social fabric of the rural nobility, and were able of contracting marriages with families of their own rank.

On 2 January 1236, a few months after the making of his will, Gentile was already dead, and the reins of the family had been handed over to Bellabranca: «Bellabranca filius quondam domini Gentilis Brancaleonis» received «pro se et fratribus suis» the promise of vassalage of Gianni of Tulla, to whom he renewed the concession of half a vineyard and a farm located *in Cardella* (fig. 1.3)<sup>30</sup>. On 14 August 1236, Alberico, prior of Cagli cathedral chapter's canons, in the presence of the brethren and the archpriest of the Acinelli parish, granted the right of emphyteusis to Bellabranca Brancaleoni over the rectory's possessions held by Ranuccio of Piccolo, Martino of Benno and many others. By means of this right, Bellabranca could claim

*dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 68-72, n. III.

<sup>28</sup> Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, cit., I, pp. 8-11.

<sup>29</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 5; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 72-74, n. IV.



their due services «et cum omnibus servitiis ex his debitis»<sup>31</sup>. Among the rectory's properties granted in emphyteusis there were: a plot of land «in loco qui dicitur Pratale», half «arcis Rochette pro indiviso», a land «in loco qui dicitur Vallis Canonica» and another plot «in loco qui dicitur Sanctum Marianum». Bellabranca committed himself to pay 2 Ravenna's sols per year «pro pensione et pensionis nomine» to the rectory of Cagli on the day of the feast of Saint Mary (in August), and to give up every right of patronage on the Acinelli parish and on the church of San Benedetto. By receiving the investiture also on behalf of his brothers who were still minors and under their mother's tutelage, Bellabranca pointed out: «Fratres mei, qui steterint in podere et ad quos devenerint res supradicte eo tempore quo fuerint in etate facient instrumentum tam pensionis solvende predictarum rerum scilicet duo solidos»<sup>32</sup>. On 22 August 1262, Cagli cathedral chapter's canons, presided by the prior Blanco, confirmed to the brothers Bellabranca, Filippo and Montefeltrano the concession of the 1236 estates and also added a «tenimentum olim de Berardellis, situm in curte Acinelli, in pharophia Sancti Simeonis in valle Acinelli, ... unam petiam terre cum silva sitam in dicta curte et pharophia in loco de Spugna, ... unam petiam terre in dicta curte et pharophia in colle de Bernardis e altre proprietà poste in loco condam Vignalis ... et in loco vallis dicti Cavalarii»<sup>33</sup>. The three brothers again declared to give up the patronage they enjoyed over the parish church of San Simeone of the Acinelli and on the church of San Benedetto (or San Lorenzo of the Rocca).

In my opinion, with regard to these concessions of emphyteusis, the previous historiography has missed a detail<sup>34</sup>. The investiture act of half of the Rocca, made in 1236, is not completed for the other half by that of 1262: both acts mention half of the Rocca *pro indiviso*, and this point suggests that the Brancaleonis shared the property with the rectory, but the rectory gave its entire management to the Brancaleonis upon the payment of a fee. The indivisibility of the Rocca is probably due to the impervious nature of its territory and to the consequent difficulty in defining its precise boundaries. Indeed, the other assets listed in the act were lands located in more accessible locations between Piobbico and the Rocca: these were well-defined properties of the rectory, and their boundaries were clearly indicated.

<sup>31</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 74-79, n. V.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 9; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 94-100, n. XII.

<sup>34</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 48; P. Palazzini, *Storia di un feudo ecclesiastico, dei suoi signori e dei suoi statuti*, in «Studia Picena», XVIII, 1948, p. 129.



The 1262 act, therefore, is nothing but a confirmation, already provided by that of 1236, because, at that time, Montefeltrano and Filippo were still minors. It should also be noted that, contrary to what happened in 1236, the renunciation of the patronage over the parish of San Simeone of the Acinelli and the church of San Benedetto was not included in the act confirming the investiture. The analysis of the words used in this act of renunciation allows to infer that there was a dispute over the appurtenances in question, in which Ugone, bishop of Urbino, had intervened as an arbitrator. His judgement was not completely impartial, since the Acinelli parish was separated from Urbino's diocese only by the Candigliano river<sup>35</sup>, and Ugone could have been interested in ensuring the patronage over a church of Cagli's diocese to a family that already held similar privileges in its jurisdiction.

In the following decades, Bellabranca led the family, granted various emphyteusis (fig. 1.4)<sup>36</sup>, signed a contract of exchange with the hospital of San Florido of Città di Castello<sup>37</sup>, dealt with every aspect concerning the management of the Brancaleonis' territories, and actively participated in the political life of the nearby town of Cagli: he thus acquired a prominent role within and outside the family. Bellabranca carried out his political activities in the town of Cagli in the crucial years between the defeat of Frederick II of Swabia in Parma (1248) and that of Manfredi in Benevento (1266): in 1248, together with Ugolino Manente of the Acquavivas, he was in charge of settling the alliance between Cagli and Gubbio; the following year he became Podesta of Cagli, and also held this office in 1264<sup>38</sup>.

The importance gained by Bellabranca within his family, the way he managed the Brancaleonis' goods, evident in a contract of emphyteusis of 1240<sup>39</sup>, in which, while acting also on behalf of the brothers, he spoke in first person, and, in 1267, the emancipation of his eldest son, Trasmondo, might have awoken the jealousies and hostilities of Bellabranca's brothers, and soon

<sup>35</sup> G. Palazzini, *Le chiese di Piobbico*, Roma, Centro Ut unum sint, 1980, p. 54; Bricchi, *Delli annali della città di Cagli*, cit., p. 84.

<sup>36</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parchs nn. 6, 7, 8; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 79-81, n. VI, pp. 82 ff., n. VIII.

<sup>37</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 83-87, nn. IX e X.

<sup>38</sup> Bricchi, *Delli annali della città di Cagli*, cit., p. 106; Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 177 ff. On relations between the Brancaleonis and the town of Cagli, cf. Remedìa, *I rapporti tra Comune e la piccola nobiltà rurale nel nascente Stato di Urbino: Cagli e i Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, cit., pp. 349-369.

<sup>39</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., p. 81, n. VII.





led to a division of the family's assets. On 3 December 1274, by means of the arbitration carried out by their brother Ranuccio, who referred to himself as *canonicus Feretranus*, three separate documents settled every question among the Brancaleoni brothers (figs. 1.5-1.7)<sup>40</sup>. The first document settled the dispute on the 100-lira dowry that Bellabranca had granted to his daughter Beatrice, by drawing the money from the family wealth; with the second document, Bellabranca gave to his brothers Filippo and Montefeltrano the money he had managed as head of the family; finally, in the third document, Bellabranca divided into three parts, one for each brother, the family goods, which up to that time he had autonomously managed. From this last document, we infer that the dominions in question were not limited to Piobbico and the Rocca and that this noble family ruled over a much wider area: Bellabranca handed over to his brothers «pro tertia parte, omne ius et actionem, realem et personalem, utilem et directam» the movable and immovable goods located in the towns of Urbino, Pesaro, Fossombrone, Cagli, Gubbio, Città di Castello and in their districts together with the possessions included in the Massa Trabaria<sup>41</sup>. This testifies to a large patrimony, which was not evident in Gentile's will. It might suggest that it was presumably accumulated by the skilful management of Bellabranca, who, alongside his political activity, carried out what at the time was the real lucrative occupation: military activity. In this regard, even though we don't know on which basis, Bricchi defines Bellabranca as «noble and brave warrior»<sup>42</sup>. If Bellabranca was a Ghibelline and a military man, we can reasonably hypothesise some links with the paladins of the Ghibellinism in the area between Marche, Umbria and Romagna: the Montefeltros. Supporters of Frederick II and then of Manfredi since the very beginning, they were sanctioned several times by the pope since the time of Innocent IV. The legate of the Marca, appointed by the pro-Anjou Urban IV, condemned their conduct as well. Then, in 1265, Cagli was won again by the Ghibelline alignment, thus ensuring, alongside the possession of Fossombrone and Urbino, the dominion over the Flaminia and the roads that from the Romagna and the Marche led to the upper Tiber valley. This aimed at creating a vast defensive anti-ecclesiastical and anti-Anjou zone<sup>43</sup>. The Brancaleonis' territories served as a hinge between Cagli,

<sup>40</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parchs nn. 15, 16, 17; Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 111-117, nn. XVI, XVII, XVIII.

<sup>41</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 17; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., pp. 115-117, n. XVIII.

<sup>42</sup> Bricchi, *Delli annali della città di Cagli*, cit., p. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Franceschini, *I Montefeltro*, cit., p. 100.

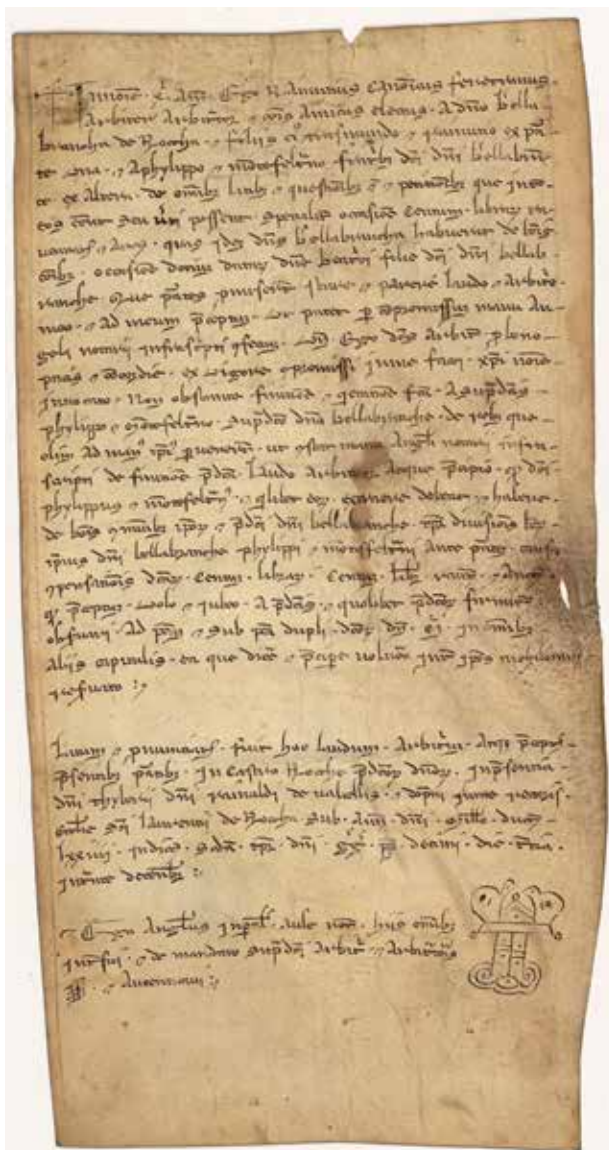


Fig. 1.6. BUU, FA, Fondo Brancaleoni, b. 15, parch. n. 16 (1274 dicembre 3).

Urbino and Città di Castello, and were hardly excluded from this Ghibelline mobilisation, at least as long as they were ruled by Bellabranca.

After 1274, Gentile's sons separated and gave origin to two distinct branches with their respective territorial appurtenances: Bellabranca, with his sons Trasmondo and Ranuccio, took the Rocca; Montefeltrano and Filippo obtained Piobbico, while for the Pecorari we find, in 1270, «dominus Rainerius olim domini Alberici»<sup>44</sup> and, in 1288, «Ranutius domini Raignerii de Pecorariis»<sup>45</sup>. As Bellabranca was the first-born and most affluent of the three heirs, his choice of the Rocca seems to indicate that, among Gentile's goods, this was the most important part and the original core of the Brancaleonis' Signoria; indeed, the oldest news regarding the family is about the investiture of the Rocca, and dates back to 1107, as reported by Bricchi<sup>46</sup>. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the concessions made by the Chapter of Cagli in 1236 and 1262 mentioned half of the Rocca pro indiviso, referring to a property the Chapter had in common with the Brancaleonis<sup>47</sup>. When dividing the patrimony with his brothers, Bellabranca kept the family symbol for himself. This was located a few kilometres from Cagli and ensured the Brancaleonis' control over its political life, as shown by the raids carried out by Trasmondo and by his son Puccio in 1287, and by Filippuccio and Pazzo in 1318 alongside the local Ghibellines<sup>48</sup>.

The joint domination of Piobbico did not prevent Filippo and Montefeltrano from acquiring well-defined and separate allodial properties: this is shown by an exchange agreement dated 14 June 1280, of which there is a copy dated 1308 (fig. 1.8)<sup>49</sup>. Filippo «dedit, tradidit, permutavit iure proprio

<sup>44</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 14; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 109 ff, n. XV.

<sup>45</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 120 ff, n. XXI.

<sup>46</sup> Bricchi, *Delli annali della città di Cagli*, cit., pp. 41 ff.

<sup>47</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parchs nn. 5 e 9; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 72-74, n. IV, pp. 94-100, n. XII.

<sup>48</sup> Remedina, *I rapporti tra Comune e la piccola nobiltà rurale nel nascente Stato di Urbino: Cagli e i Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, cit., pp. 353, 355, 356.

<sup>49</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 18. Other than this document, the Brancaleonis' diplomatic archive in Urbino holds fifty-two documents out of fifty-nine parchments regarding the fourteenth century (b. 15, parchs nn. 46-50; b. 16, parchs nn. 51-100). Fifty-four of these parchments are original documents, while notarial copies are three. There are also three original acts, which survived in two separate copies. Almost all the documents are unpublished, thus recording a trend in contrast with thirteenth-century parchments, which were published since the end of the eighteenth century. Most of these are private documents. Only one of them is a document issued by a public authority, and precisely pontifical (b. 16, parch. n. 68). There is also a small group of documents that cannot

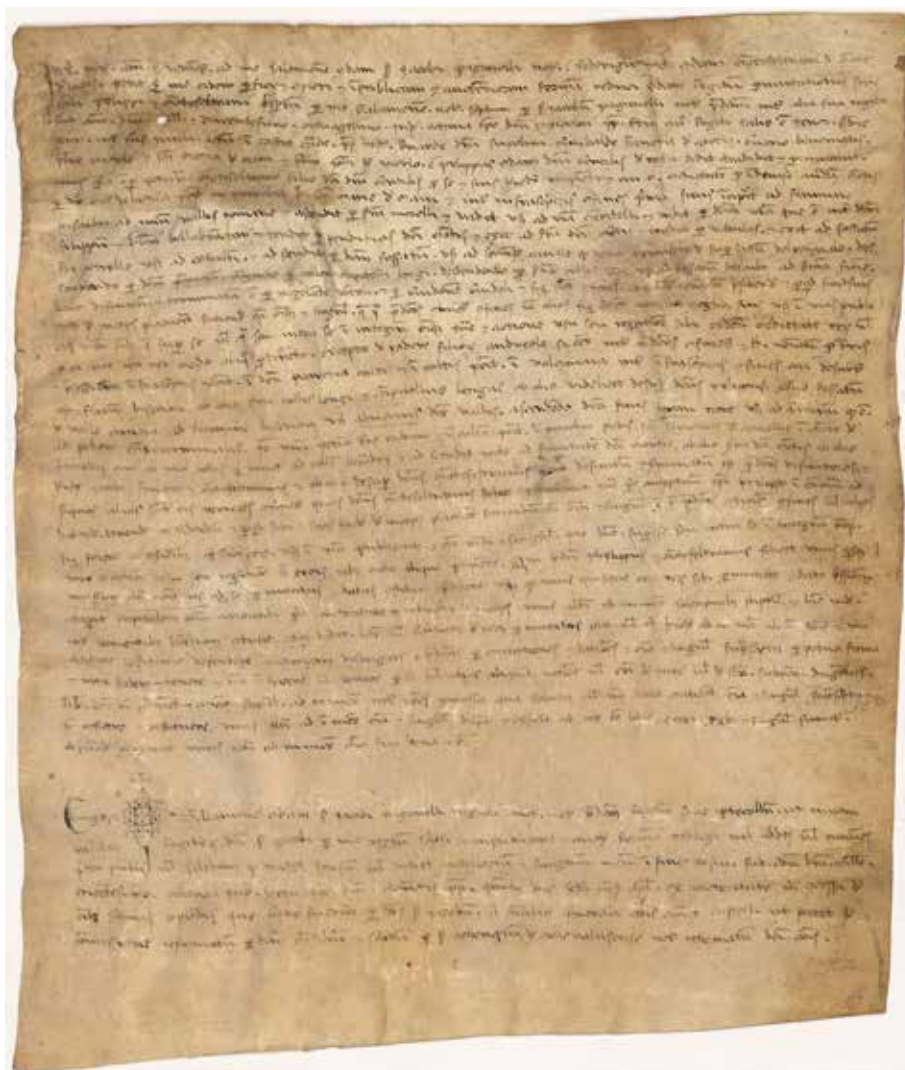


Fig. 1.8. BUU, FA, Fondo Brancaleoni, b. 15, parch. n. 17 (1280 giugno 14).

in perpetuum Montifeltrano filio dicti domini Gentilis... medietatem pro indeviso cuiusdam montis, qui dicitur 'Mons de la Casa', posit(i) in parochia ecclesie Sancte Marie de Mavi». In return, Montefeltrano exchanged with Filippo lands and possessions located «in dicta parochia, ... in Valcimaia», and «unam petiam terre, cultam et incultam, positam in parochia plebis Sancti Simeonis de Accinellis, in monte de Acinellis». The land handed over by Filippo was, therefore, a «mons qui dicitur 'Mons de la Casa'»: it was a steep slope, a vertical rise of 700 metres above the bed of the Biscubio river close to the Mount Nerone, of which it formed an appendix, detached on one side from the Roman Valley and on the other from the Canale Valley, where the Rio Petrello flowed, now known as the ditch of Saint Mary. The toponym «Mons de la Casa» derived from the fact that a fortress was built there, and was probably the first residence of the Brancaleonis. Today, only ruins remain, so that the place, is now called «Muracci». The roughness of the place, almost inaccessible and protected by natural defences, seems to suggest a fairly ancient origin of the building, perhaps dating back to the period of the invasions and raids of the early Middle Ages: in the thirteenth century, Mondelacasa, together with the Rocca, was the main residence of the Brancaleonis<sup>50</sup>, as shown by documents such as a 1284 contract of emphyteusis and a 1288 power of attorney drawn up «in castro Montis Case»<sup>51</sup>. It is quite unlikely that the castle had been built *ex novo* at the end of the thirteenth century, especially because, within a few decades, Montefeltrano's sons would move permanently to Piobbico, starting to build up their most famous residence. Furthermore, Filippo handed over

be classified in the two categories of public and private documents, since they are issued by minor authorities, which have resorted to notaries: if considering the authority that issued the document, even in the absence of particular chancery formulas and solemnities, some could be considered as semi-public documents. Among these, document n. 59, a *consilium* of Ugolino, bishop of Perugia is noteworthy. Documents nn. 65, 78 and 93, which were promulgated by municipal magistrates, are interesting as well. Among private documents, the kind of contract that we find more often is the concession or renewal of emphyteusis lasting three generations, and showed that many concessionaires were required to pay an entry fee and, then, a small annual fee, mainly in cash, even though from the mid-fourteenth century a fee in nature also began to appear. Contracts of sale are instead only six, there are five wills, four powers of attorney, two agistments according to the type of *venditio pro soccita in medietate*, and, finally, a contract of division of goods, from an *instrumentum dationis in solutum*, and a series of agreements and acts between people.

<sup>50</sup> The Brancaleonis, who descended from Montefeltrano, were called «nobiles de Brancaleonibus de Mondelacasa» (Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, cit., II, p. 302).

<sup>51</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. nn. 19, 21; in Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobbico*, cit., p. 118, n. XIX, pp. 119 ff., n. XX.

half of Mondelacasa lands to his brother, making him, in practice, owner of the whole hill, since it is quite certain that the other half already belonged to Montefeltrano. The reasons for the exchange must probably be sought in the fact that Filippo did not married or had no children, so he preferred to own a more profitable land like that of the Acinelli, which after his death would surely be returned to Montefeltrano's heirs. The document is also interesting for some details that seem to indicate a dominion by the lords of Piobbico over the Carda: the act is drawn up *in castro Carde* in the presence of Giovanni, presbyter of Saint Christopher of Virlo's church, belonging to the jurisdiction of the same castle, and of a certain Bernardo *domini Supolini*. The act was made during the frantic years that followed the battle of Tagliacozzo (1268), when the Ghibelline cause in the Marche was taken up by Guido da Montefeltro against Malatesta Malatesti, supporter of the Church and of King Charles of Anjou<sup>52</sup>.

In these years, discord tore apart many families, including the Brancaleonis. Montefeltrano and Filippo might have joined the Guelph faction, because of the hatred towards their brother Bellabranca and his excessive power. Consequently, Montefeltrano and Filippo were deprived of the citizenship of Città di Castello and, only on 30 November 1282, were again re-instated by the Podesta Aghinolfo, count of Romena, by virtue of their merits towards the *commune*. In reporting these events, Muzi<sup>53</sup> wrote about the nobles Montefeltrano and Filippo of the Carda, supporting the hypothesis that they held a Signoria over the castle, which had already been given in emphyteusis by the bishop of Città di Castello to Cardinal Ottaviano of the Ubaldinis. After Ottaviano of the Ubaldinis' death († 1272), the Carda had been entrusted to Brancaleone Guelfucci, thus triggering Tano Ubaldini's reaction. The latter, together with Bellabranca, reoccupied the castles of Montevicino and the Carda in 1278. According to Tarducci<sup>54</sup>, in such a context, Filippo and Montefeltrano conspired against their brother Bellabranca, trying to take possession of the recently recovered Carda. Tarducci also maintained that the lords of Piobbico failed, and were also put on trial, but the act of 14 June 1280 seems to reopen the question and support the idea of a domination, albeit temporary, by Filippo and Montefeltrano over the Carda. This happened just twenty years after a fruitful exchange of property between the Brancaleonis and the

<sup>52</sup> A. Falcioni, *Malatesta (de Malatestis) Malatesta*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 68, Roma, G. Treccani, 2007, p. 69.

<sup>53</sup> Muzi, *Memorie civili di Città di Castello*, cit., II, p. 78.

<sup>54</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 51 ff.

hospital of San Florido of Città di Castello. Indeed, on 30 August 1261<sup>55</sup>, the hospital's rector *dominus Guido de Velierbano* with the consent of the other canons granted «nomine cambii sive permutationis... domino Iacobo Paganelli iudici, procuratori domini Bellabranca et Philippi... medietatem pro indiviso totius poderis sive tenimenti positi in valle Acinelli, in parochia plebis Sancti Simeonis, quod Martinus Cobelli habuit et tenuit in dicto loco pro hospitali dicto cum suis vocabulis et finibus ubicunque reperitur de ipso». The rector then declared that he had received from the Brancaleonis' procurator «pro permutatione unius petie terre posite in valle Acinelli». The valley of the Acinelli was again a longed-for territory, largely subject to ecclesiastical bodies, such as the rectory of Cagli and now to the hospital of Città di Castello, which also the Brancaleonis aspired to own. Based upon this contract, the Brancaleonis obtained «omnia iura et actiones, rationes et persecutiones reales et personales, utiles et directas et omnes alias que... ipsum hospitale habet vel habere posset versus dictum Martinum et filios cum personis eorum ex quocunque iure vel causa et cum hiis omnibus»: this confirms how many farmers were tied to the land and in fact reduced to a servile condition. Finally, with another act, drawn up at the cloister of the rectory of Città di Castello on the same day (30 August 1261)<sup>56</sup>, the canons of this town granted to Giacomo Paganelli, Bellabranca's and Filippo's procurator, the remaining half, *pro indiviso*, of the hospital's land held by Martino Cobelli.

Disagreements between the two branches of Gentile's family continued after the death of Bellabranca, in 1286: his son Trasmondo also imprisoned his uncle Filippo to oblige him to renounce every right on the estates of the Rocca (fig. 1.9)<sup>57</sup>, also on behalf of his brother Montefeltrano of whom he had been appointed procurator on 30 August 1288<sup>58</sup>. These hostile acts did not prevent a fight against the town of Cagli: it was carried out together with the cathedral chapter and aimed at balancing out the aristocratic forces of the countryside and at creating a real *commune*. Thus, while renewing the land register of its territory, Cagli claimed that also the Brancaleonis' land in Piobbico and in the Rocca were to be included, and taxes were to be paid. In 1287, the procurator Guidarello Clerici from Piobbico<sup>59</sup> appealed to Mondello of Guido, general

<sup>55</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 83-85, n. IX: the text reports «die secundo exeunte agosto», Torelli has mistakenly read 2 August.

<sup>56</sup> Torelli, *Documenti che riguardano il dominio dell'antichissima famiglia Brancaleoni della Rocca e del Piobico*, cit., pp. 86 ff., n. X.

<sup>57</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 21.

<sup>58</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 319 ff.

<sup>59</sup> BUU, FA, *Fondo Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 20.



Handwritten text in a medieval script, likely a legal document or contract, written on parchment. The text is dense and covers most of the page. At the bottom, there is a signature and a date: "Ego... 1288 agosto 3." followed by a decorative flourish.

Fig. 1.9. BUU, FA, Fondo Brancaleoni, b. 15, parch. n. 21 (1288 agosto 3).

judge of the Marca, and argued that the enterprise of the town of Cagli was directed against «antiquam libertatem et consuetudinem ipsorum»<sup>60</sup>. It is evident that the *nobiles viri* Brancaleoni could not yet invoke an imperial investiture to avoid Cagli's claims: they had only a customary power, which was exercised *de facto* and «per longum et longissimum tempus»<sup>61</sup>.

### The Brancaleonis' political strategies

In the transition from the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries, Urbino archival sources report that the Brancaleonis, Bellabranca's and Montefeltrano's sons, were included in the Montefeltros' strategies. From the time of Frederick II's death, the action of the Curia had gradually led the Brancaleonis of Castel Durante, the Olivis of Pian di Meleto and the Bernardinis of Sassocorvaro and Torre Abbazia to abandon the imperial faction. These families benefited from a remarkable political space during the attempt of breaking-up Urbino's ancient *comitatus*, implemented, above all, by Martin IV against the Montefeltros. Instead, during the crucial events of the fourteenth century, the Brancaleonis of Piobbico and the Rocca, like the Ubaldinis of the Carda, had always been at the side of the Counts of Urbino and were strictly linked to the Signoria established by Count Antonio after 1375. The Brancaleonis were thus projected into the broader chessboard of the Montefeltros' politics on a strictly pro-imperial position, with Guido first and then with Federico. This alliance strategically included the Tarlati from Pietramala, lords of Arezzo<sup>62</sup>, and the Antelminellis, lords of Lucca.

In the years between 1289 and 1293, Guido of Montefeltro was Podestà, Captain of the People and *de facto* lord of Pisa. He organised a standing army, the core of which was formed by Montefeltro's militias and linked to the count by an ancient and proven loyalty. In 1293, this army moved to the Ubaldinis' lands on the mountains of Città di Castello, and, with the help of supporters, took Cagli by surprise. Among the supporters of the Montefeltros' *pars*, there were the Brancaleonis of Piobbico and the Rocca. This is testified by the role they played in the political life of Cagli, and archival sources confirmed that the whole family was decidedly endorsing the Ghibelline faction in these years.

<sup>60</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 319.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>62</sup> On the Tarlati family's origins, see the well-documented study of G.P.G. Scharf, *La lenta ascesa di una famiglia signorile: i Tarlati di Pietramala prima del 1321*, in «Archivio storico italiano», 172, 2, 2014, pp. 203-248.

In 1287, Trasmondo of Bellabranca and his son Puccio, together with the Ghibelline faction, had already participated in the assault and destruction of Cagli and had been sanctioned by the general judge of the Marca with a fine of 300 pounds of gold, then reduced to 200<sup>63</sup>. In 1294, supported by the Ghibellines, Puccio took the castle of Montelabbate from the town of Cagli<sup>64</sup>. For about a decade, the jurisdiction over this castle alternated between the municipality of Cagli and Puccio Brancaleoni. It seems that, in 1299, Puccio Brancaleoni won Montelabbate back with the help of Galasso of Montefeltro<sup>65</sup>. The intervention of the Counts of Urbino suggests that they aspired to extend their rule over Cagli by entering into alliances with aristocratic families.

Relations between the Brancaleonis and the Montefeltros became closer when Federico of Montefeltro, following his father Guido's return to obey to the Church and the consequent annexation of Urbino to the papal domains, tried to reobtain an active political role beyond the mere *custodia civitatis*, which Boniface VIII had already granted to the Montefeltros. In these years, starting from Federico of Montefeltrano, who belonged to the branch of Piobbico, the Brancaleonis played a significant role in supporting the Montefeltros: they served in political offices in areas, which were crucial for the power of the Counts of Urbino. Federico of Montefeltrano became Podesta of Cagli in 1301, 1303, 1306; Podesta of Pisa in 1320, Captain of the People in 1336<sup>66</sup>. In Pisa, similar offices were also held by his brother Filippo in 1324, 1325 and 1332<sup>67</sup>; by his son Montefeltrano in 1335, 1342 and 1348<sup>68</sup> and his grandson Armano in 1338 and 1356<sup>69</sup>. The offices of Podesta and Captain of the People in towns such as Pisa were key to ensure the Montefeltros' and the Ghibellines' political influence in central Italy: this point also highlights the prestige acquired by the Brancaleonis as retainers of the Counts of Urbino.

In 1307, Puccio of Trasmondo, who belonged to the branch of the Rocca, received a diploma of familiarity from Cardinal Napoleone Orsini,

<sup>63</sup> G. Mei, *Catalogo delle pergamene originali degli Archivi di Cagli dall'anno 1285 all'anno 1292*, Cagli, Tip. Balloni, 1889, pp. 30 ff.

<sup>64</sup> F. Bricchi, *Delli annali della città di Cagli*, In Urbino, apud Aloysium Ghisonum impressorem cam. & archiepiscopalem, 1641, p. 163; *Memorie della città di Cagli e de principi suoi dominanti raccolte e descritte in compendio da Antonio Gucci suo cittadino*, in Cagli, Municipal Library, ms. (sec. XVII). I, fol. 293.

<sup>65</sup> *Memorie della città di Cagli e de principi suoi dominanti raccolte e descritte in compendio da Antonio Gucci suo cittadino*, cit., I, f. 83.

<sup>66</sup> A. Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, Cagli, Tip. Balloni, 1897, p. 76.

<sup>67</sup> *Ivi*, p. 209.

<sup>68</sup> *Ivi*, p. 77.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*, p. 210.

legate of Clement V in Italy<sup>70</sup>. This grant by a prelate, who openly sought to favour the Italian Ghibellines and would allow Federico of Montefeltro, the «beloved son», to get into Clement V's graces, leaves no doubt about the Brancaleonis' conduct. The following year, Puccio was Podesta of Jesi. He distinguished himself in the fight against the Guelph Ancona for the possession of the castle of Buscareto, and was supported by the arms of Count Federico<sup>71</sup>. After the transfer of the papal court to Avignon, subject territories had strongly loosened their obedience to the Holy See. Clement V had been relatively tolerant towards this trend and towards Counts Federico and Speranza of Montefeltro, who were among its most fervent promoters. His successor John XXII, instead, committed himself against those who illegally held the Church's lands in the Marca Anconetana, in the Massa Trabaria, in the town and in the countryside of Urbino. Since the summer of 1313, Florence promoted a vast Guelph alliance of Umbrian towns, such as Perugia, Assisi, Spoleto, Gubbio, Camerino, Foligno and Cagli. In 1317, Federico took over Cagli, a key position for the control of the Flaminia, but then handed the town with its countryside back to ecclesiastical officials: John XXII praised this act and, at the end of that year, wrote a letter to Federico to thank him<sup>72</sup>.

However, agreements between the Montefeltros and Amelio, rector of the Marca and provost of the monastery of Belmonte, concerning Urbino's status proved to be inadequate for both contractors: this led to revolts, which broke out with considerable intensity throughout the Marca in the years between 1318 and 1319. Regardless of the Pope's warnings, Federico, together with his son Guido, Puccio of Bellabranca, Federico, Pazzo and Filippo from Mondelacasa reoccupied the town of Cagli, in which Cante of the Gabriellis of Gubbio was serving as Podesta for the Church. Federico incited all the Marca, planning to extend the rebellion also to Umbria, where Assisi and Spoleto passed into the hands of the Ghibellines<sup>73</sup>. It should be noted that the head of Assisi's Ghibellines was Muzio of Francesco, who was probably a relative of the Brancaleonis of Piobbico, since archival sources identify his father Francesco with Contuccio, who was named in Gentile's will. The Brancaleonis' participation in the events of Cagli between 1318 and 1319 is indisputable; indeed, in his testament of 1327, Pazzo arranged the return of the illegitimately detained goods, and

<sup>70</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 357 ff.

<sup>71</sup> *Ivi*, p. 186.

<sup>72</sup> G. Franceschini, *I Montefeltro*, Varese, Dall'Oglio, 1970, p. 194.

<sup>73</sup> *Memorie della città di Cagli e de' principi suoi dominanti raccolte e descritte in compendio da Antonio Gucci suo cittadino*, cit., II, fol. 170.

asked the notary to write: «iussit, voluit et reliquid satisfieri partem eidem contingentem de pane et vino que ipse, curo dictis suis fratribus et cum aliis qui curo eis erant, comederunt in civitate Calii tempore quo Gebellini ipsam acceperunt Gelfis»<sup>74</sup>.

On 1 October 1320, Federico, Guido and Speranza of Montefeltro were condemned as rebels, heretics and idolaters, and excommunicated. In that same year, Federico Brancaleoni took on the role of Captain of the People and Podesta of Pisa on behalf of Castruccio of the Antelminellis. In these difficult years, the Brancaleonis were loyal to Count Federico, so much so that Sansovino wrote that, after the barbaric killing of Federico and Guido, the count's younger sons were rescued and protected by the Brancaleonis, lords of Piobbico. We are not able to support this information with any evidence, but we have the act with which the friar Lorenzo from Mondaino, the person who wrote the sentence against Federico, absolved Nicolò of Puccio Brancaleoni of the Rocca. Nicolò was prosecuted «quod dicebatur ipsum post sententiam latam contra Fredericum condam Domini Guidonis de Monte Feretro hereticum et dapnatum de heretica pravitate dicto Frederico heretico dedisse auxilium, consilium et favorem»<sup>75</sup>. This acquittal was issued on 30 November 1322, seven months after Federico's death, and made no mention to the presumed hospitality given to the count's children; it indicates a precise intervention of the Brancaleonis in favour of the Montefeltros, but, as it was granted with a certain rapidity, it could testify that, after their killing, this family did no longer represent a threat for the Church. It should also be noted that this family had always sought the Church's favour, albeit from a Ghibelline position.

In 1318, after the deaths of their father (1296) and of their uncle Filippo without any heir (1308), Montefeltrano's sons divided the family's patrimony: Federico and Filippo took the castle of the Pecoraris; Pazzo and Nello obtained Piobbico; Federico and Nello then exchanged their portions. They all continued to live together in their common house of Piobbico. The fifth brother, Ugo, a priest, was not included in the division, but, after having claimed his rights, was then allowed to inherit. The following year, a new agreement provided him with the fifth part of the inheritance, which was later given to Federico in exchange for a mill and two plots of land<sup>76</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 40.

<sup>75</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 359.

<sup>76</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parchs nn. 36 (a) and (b), 37, 38.

## Gentile Brancaleoni's lineage and its networks of alliances

In the fourteenth century, the Brancaleoni family, originating from Brancaleone's son Gentile, consisted of three branches with three distinct dominions; the Rocca, Piobbico and the Pecorari, which, due to the limited territorial extension and the close family ties that united them, were in fact managed as one property both towards their relations with the Montefeltros and towards the broader political events of the century.

In 1332, Nicolò of the Brancaleonis of the Rocca and Montefeltrano, son of Federico of the Brancaleonis of Piobbico, together with some other Ghibellines, attacked the Benedictine abbey of San Pietro of Massa and usurped its goods: for this act, the rector of the Marca, Gerio of Arezzo, condemned them to pay 1,000 liras<sup>77</sup>. Montefeltrano of Federico might have stood out in quite a different kind of military enterprises if in an act of purchase dated 22 August 1342, he was mentioned as *egregius miles* (fig. 2.1)<sup>78</sup>. Among the three times Montefeltrano served as Podesta in Pisa, it is noteworthy his 1342 office. During this office, Count Nolfo of Montefeltro led the Pisan troops in the conflict that Luchino Visconti, lord of Milan, had triggered against Florence to conquer Lucca after the death of Castruccio of the Antelminellis.

After the death of Pazzo († 1327), Piobbico was ruled by Federico and Pazzo's widow, Madina, daughter of a nobleman from Corinaldo. Madina was also entrusted with the management of the family assets on behalf of his sons Paolino and Monaldo. The joint government over the *castrum Publici* did not prevent Federico and Pazzo's sons from having well-defined and separate allodial properties: among various documents supporting this fact, there is an act of sale dated 21 June 1333 and survived in a notarised copy dated ten years later. This document reports that Federico purchased, for one thousand and six hundred liras of Ravenna and Ancona coins, several estates placed in Urbino's *comitatus* from a certain Cinzia of *quondam Cecco domini Bovis* from Frontino<sup>79</sup>. Moreover, another document dated 21 June 1335 confirms this point: with a «contractus divisionis terrarum pensionariarum, signed in castro Piobici, in caminata nobilis viri Federigutii», the three co-owners, in the presence of Madina, decided to divide the Signoria's lands over which they enjoyed the right to collect fees<sup>80</sup>. This *instrumentum* of division, yet

<sup>77</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 77.

<sup>78</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 64.

<sup>79</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 57.

<sup>80</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 59.



Fig. 2.1. BUU, FA, Fondo Brancaleoni, b. 16, parch. n. 64 (1342 agosto 22).

another in the century-old history of the Brancaleoni family, had become necessary in order to reaffirm and guarantee its dominions over this area, especially after the doubts about patrimonial legitimacy that the Pecorari co-owners raised less than a year earlier. Indeed, in 1334, Armanno of the Pecorari had openly lined up against his relatives of Piobbico, claiming a new division, «equalibus portionibus», of the properties owned by Father Ugo. In particular, he referred to those estates existing «in castro Piobici et eius curia», and also asked for the payment of duties and taxes by those of Piobbico who had assets located in the Pecorari area. To resolve the issue, which made several *dubia* to emerge, the two parties decided to resort to the *consilium* of Ugolino, bishop of Perugia<sup>81</sup>. He was an expert on Justinian's Code and Digest, and endorsed the co-owners of Piobbico's position: their point relied on the 1318 *instrumentum*, by which Montefeltrano's sons split up their properties. However, the dispute was not yet settled: in 1355, Monaldo and Federico asked to the *commune* of Cagli for a copy of Father Ugo's will, that is, the document on which the Pecorari co-owners based their claims in 1334<sup>82</sup>. As can be read from the document, the city council, gathered in the *commune's* town hall «ad sonum campane vocemque preconis» discussed the request. The final vote, held according to the ballot system with black and white *fabe*, granted a very large majority in favour of the Brancaleonis of Piobbico, who then obtained permission to have a notary of their choice to copy Father Ugo's will. This was to prove the rights granted by the testator to his brothers Pazzo and Federico. We do not know if this copy was ever made; subsequent documents do not mention it, nor they attest to the emergence of further discord between the two families, which, beyond their patrimonial disputes, retained friendly relations. The presence of Filippuccio and Armanno in Piobbico in 1343 confirmed the good relationship existing between the two families; Filippuccio and Armanno were among the witnesses of the *instrumentum* with which Monaldo and Paolino of Pazzo ceded *in solutum* to their mother Madina «unum palatium positum in Castro Plobici... cum terreno,

<sup>81</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 58.

<sup>82</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 75: «Coram vobis magnifico viro Ghino marchioni de Petriolo honorabili potestate civitatis Sancti Angeli Papalis, nec non dominis prioribus, camerariis artium et consilio populi dicte civitatis, supplicant Monaldus et Federigus de Mondelacasa quatenus vobis placeat dare et concedere licentiam, auctoritatem et potestatem ser Vanni Agure notario de dicta civitate copiandi et publicandi contractus, rogita sive protocolla condam Iacobi magistri Dominici sartoris de Castiglione Sancti Bartoli et specialiter contractum, rogatum seu protocollum scriptum in quaternis sive libris dicti notarii et factum per venerabilem virum condam dompnum Ugonem Montisfeltrani de Mondelacasa de certis iuribus datis et concessis per dictum dompnum Ugonem in bonis suis condam domino Federigo et Pacço fratribus de Mondelacasa, prout et sicut in dictis quaternis et libris continetur».



quod est inter ipsum palatium et domum novam predictorum Paulini et Monaldi»<sup>83</sup>.

The power vacuum that followed the death of Federico I of Montefeltro († 1322) allowed the bishop of Arezzo, Guido Tarlati from Pietramala, to create his own Signoria after occupying Mercatello and Cagli, two towns located at the beginning of the Metauro and Candigliano valleys. There are no documents confirming his direct dominion on the Brancaleonis' territories, but, undoubtedly, the presence of such a powerful neighbour, who also enabled Count Speranza of Montefeltro and his relative Nolfo to return to Urbino in 1323, strongly conditioned the life of these small feudal Signorie.

On 26 February 1334, Jacopo from Bibbiena, judge and vicar «magnifici et potentis militis domini Tarlati de Petramala», lord of Cagli and his *comitatus*, imposed on Nicolò Brancaleoni of the Rocca to «solvere datia pro bonis acquisitis et non pro patrimonio antiquo, secundum provisionem hactenus factam per dominos Antianos»<sup>84</sup>. Fifty years earlier, the Brancaleonis, who at that time were in a much more stronger position, had decisively rejected any attempt at taxation, implemented by the municipality of Cagli. In 1342, also the Brancaleonis of Piobbico sent their procurator to the Podesta of Cagli, Orlando Perugini, to prevent some of their lands from being registered and subjected to taxation. The Podesta, having heard the six experts he had appointed to verify the reasons for the claim, ordered that the Brancaleonis were exempt from all taxes<sup>85</sup>.

But, at that point, the Pietramalas' power had declined after having been defeated by the Montefeltros, who, thanks to John of Bohemia, returned close to the Curia and became allies of Florence and Perugia. The small feudal lords such as the Ubaldinis, the Faggiolas and the Brancaleonis regained freedom of action and this new context allowed the Montefeltros' Signoria to reobtain its strong position. This Signoria took advantage in the mountainous area of the Candigliano river, even though Cagli from being under the rule of Arezzo's Ghibellines fell into the hands of Perugia: by virtue of the ties they always had in that region with the Ubaldinis, the Mastinellis and the Brancaleonis of the Rocca and of Piobbico, the counts of Montefeltro renounced the possession of the town of Cagli. On 23 May 1353, indeed, the brothers Nolfo, Enrico and Feltrano of Montefeltro ratified the peace, after the treaty of Sarzana between the archbishop and lord of Milan Giovanni Visconti and Florence, together with its allies and

<sup>83</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 65.

<sup>84</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 361-363.

<sup>85</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 63.

the towns of Urbino, San Leo and Cagli<sup>86</sup>. By acquiring Cagli, the lords of Urbino were entrusted with the legacy of the ancient Pentapoli Annonaria, which implied the control of a road junction that from the upper valley of the rivers Marecchia, Metauro and Candigliano, entered the upper valley of the Tiber.

The advent of Cardinal Egidio Albornoz as legate of the Holy See in Italy, led the Counts of Montefeltro to redefine their ambitions. After the death of Archbishop Giovanni Visconti and supported by Florence, Albornoz engaged in a tough fight against those who rebelled against the Church in central Italy and were now deprived of Visconti's protection. The legate's victory against the Prefettis of Vico and the support of the Brancaleonis of Castel Durante and that of other minor lords of the Church's lands led also the Montefeltros to bend to Albornoz. The bishop of Urbino Francesco Brancaleoni of the Rocca stood out: he sided with the legate, in sharp disagreement with the counts, who were accused of holding Urbino «tyrampnice et sine titulo» and of favouring those under the bishopric emphyteuses. He had taken refuge in the legate's Curia, without being able to occupy his seat until 1355, and, on 20 June, was present in Gubbio when the brothers Nolfo and Enrico of Montefeltro subjected to Albornoz<sup>87</sup>. We do not know if other members of the Brancaleoni family shared the intransigent positions of Urbino's bishop, but they complied with the new situation. On 9 June 1358, the apostolic treasurer noted that he had paid 2 florins to the nuncio, sent not only to Urbino and to Castel Durante but also «ad Cardam et Mondelacasam, cum literis Domini Legati directis... comitibus de Urbino, Domino Brancalioni de Durante, Domino Hermanno de Monte la chasa et Gerio Tani de Ubaldinis»<sup>88</sup>. Armano of Nello, belonging to the Pecorari branch<sup>89</sup>, who in his will of 6 September 1383 was referred to as *nobilis milix*<sup>90</sup>, seems to represent the entire Brancaleoni family of Mondelacasa. In particular, in 1356, he became Captain of the People in Pisa, the last of the long series of offices held in the Tuscan city by members of the Brancaleoni family in the fourteenth century.

In 1359, a member of the Brancaleoni family – perhaps Gerio of

<sup>86</sup> G. Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, I-II, Urbino, Argalia ed., 1982, I, p. 245.

<sup>87</sup> *Ivi*, p. 175.

<sup>88</sup> G. Franceschini, *I Brancaleoni di Castel Durante e tre prelati marchigiani alleati di Gian Galeazzo Visconti*, in «Atti e memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche», VII, IV, 1949, p. 94.

<sup>89</sup> A. Falcioni, *Il testamento di Orlandina Brancaleoni moglie di Nicolò di Montefeltro*, in «Accademia Raffaello. Atti e studi», 2, 2009, pp. 21 ff.

<sup>90</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 88.

Federico, but documents disagree in this regard<sup>91</sup> – was called to take part in a triumvirate with the task of pacifying the town of Cagli, tormented by yet another conflict. It is significant that two members of families, such as the Brancaleonis of Piobbico and the Ubaldinis, traditionally linked to the Montefeltros, participated in the triumvirate in that very year in which the cardinal legate conferred to Counts Nolfo, Enrico and Feltrano of Montefeltro the *custodia civitatis* of Cagli<sup>92</sup>.

After the death of Cardinal Albornoz in 1367 and the appointment of Anglico of Grimoard, brother of Pope Urban V, as the new legate for the Church's lands, the Montefeltro family, facing the activism of Bernabò Visconti and the rebellion of Perugia, split in two factions with two precise orientations: on the one hand, the moderates, headed by Count Paolo, were close to the legate and reaffirmed their loyalty to the Church; on the other hand, the youngest and most brave members, led by Antonio, son of Federico Novello, deserted the ecclesiastical side, after having already secretly been in contact with the enemy. In this context, Count Antonio attempted to occupy Urbino, but failed; the town, then, was taken by Pandolfo Malatesti, with the Church's militias, and passed completely under ecclesiastical rule<sup>93</sup>. On 31 March 1370, Urban V thanked the Brancaleonis of Piobbico, Pandolfo Malatesti and the rector of Massa Trabaria for the services rendered to the Church<sup>94</sup>. We are not able to provide further details of the role performed by the Brancaleonis, but it is quite likely that they chose to obey to the Church in the fight against Perugia and other rebels, who repeatedly beset the countryside of Cagli, Urbino and Gubbio and perhaps even their lands. This choice could also have been made because, at that time, Città di Castello with Branca of the Guelfucci re-entered into the ecclesiastical sphere and the older generation of the Montefeltro family abided by the commitments made.

After 1375, when Count Antonio took advantage of the propitious moment and recovered Urbino, the Brancaleonis had a very different attitude. Florence signed a five-year alliance with Bernabò Visconti: it provided that if the lands or towns of the Church had rebelled or been declared free, they had the right to remain such and to join the League, assuming its burdens

<sup>91</sup> Nicolò of Puccio Brancaleoni of the Rocca and the Spaniard Gondislavo Oderigi are mentioned, too; cfr. Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 80 ff.

<sup>92</sup> Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, cit., I, pp. 201 ff.

<sup>93</sup> A. Falcioni, *Malatesta (de Malatestis) Pandolfo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 68, Roma, G. Treccani, 2007, p. 88.

<sup>94</sup> Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, cit., I, p. 290.

and benefits. Within a few months, a turmoil affected the Church State which seemed to disintegrate. On 4 December, Città di Castello rebelled, and, on 19 December, Urbino, Cagli, Castel Durante, Sant'Angelo in Vado, Mercatello and the whole Massa Trabaria claimed freedom: on 21 December 1375, Antonio of Montefeltro was acclaimed lord by the people of Urbino. On 1 February 1376, Count Antonio joined the Florentine-Visconti League, allowing his territories to re-enter into the Italian political scene. The Count became the natural leader of a system of minor Signorie, which included the Faggiolas, the counts of Carpegna, the Chiavellis of Fabriano, the Attis of Sassoferrato, the Paganellis of Montalboddo, the lords of Matelica, of San Severino, of Jesi, of Rocca Contrada, and the Brancaleonis of Piobbico, of the Rocca and of the Pecoraris<sup>95</sup>. From this moment onwards, the Brancaleonis, who in private acts continued to manage their properties according to the typical feudal dynamics, were included in the power system of the Counts of Urbino, holders of just nominal political power and definitively reduced to the rank of small rural nobility even if always mentioned as adherents in the most important political documents of these years.

On 21 March 1380, thanks to the mediation of Perugia, Count Antonio and his bitter enemy Galeotto Malatesti<sup>96</sup>, who supported the Brancaleonis of Castel Durante in order to hamper the territorial continuity of the lord of Urbino and his allies on the upper river Metauro, stipulated a truce in which «Franciscus Nicolai de Branchaleonibus de Roccha, Nicholaus et Antonius de Branchaleonibus de Plobico, dominus Hermannus de Branchaleonibus de Pecorariis»<sup>97</sup> participated as subjects, connected, adherents or «recomendati».

After the ten-year alliance with Florence, the Montefeltros were drawn into the circle of the Viscontis' policy. This followed the appointment of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the designated heir of Archbishop Giovanni's strategy in central Italy, as lord of Milan in 1385. The Montefeltros won Gubbio in 1384, and, then, helped by the *Comte de Vertus*, conquered Cantiano, enclave in the hands of Francesco Gabrielli, an ally of Florence and the Malatestis, who threatened the possession of Gubbio itself. The Malatestis, Città di Castello, the Counts of Montedoglio, the Brancaleonis of Castel Durante, Bartolomeo of Pietramala and the communities of Gualdo and Fossato - always hostile to Gubbio - were all sided with Florence. Count Antonio of Montefeltro was, instead, supported by the Paganellis

<sup>95</sup> *Ivi*, p. 302.

<sup>96</sup> Falcioni, *Malatesta (de Malatestis) Galeotto*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, cit., p. 44.

<sup>97</sup> Franceschini, *Documenti e registri per servire alla storia dello Stato d'Urbino e dei conti di Montefeltro*, cit., II, p. 53.

from Montalboddo, the lords of Buscareto, of Monteveccio and of Jesi, the Ubaldinis of the Carda and the Brancaleonis of Piobbico. This emerges from the peace treaty signed between the *commune* of Florence and Count Antonio of Montefeltro on 18 July 1385. The «nobiles de Brancaleonibus de Mondellacasa sive de Piobico, Guido Francisci de Brancaleonibus de Roccha, castrum Pecorarium... adherentes et sequaces in dicta guerra dicti comitis Antonii et qui sibi ut asseritur dederunt auxilium et favorem cum omnibus ipsorum sequacium et adherentium terris, locis, hominibus, personis et favoribus predictis»<sup>98</sup> are included in the treaty. Yet on 18 May 1389, the «nobiles viri Nicolaus et Antonius de Brancaleonis de Plobico, nobilis vir Guido de Brancaleonibus de Larochea, castrum Pecorarium»<sup>99</sup> are mentioned among Antonio of Montefeltro's adherents. Through this act, Antonio of Montefeltro appointed the noble Sergio Vanni of Urbino as his procurator to enter into a league between the *Comte de Vertus* and the central Italy states. After the 1392 peace of Genoa with which the Count of Urbino definitively linked himself to the lord of Milan, all Brancaleonis' branches were among the allies of the Montefeltros. In 1398, that is, at the time of the ratification of the Venice truce between the Duke of Milan and Florence, the Brancaleonis were still allied with the Montefeltros<sup>100</sup>.

Although as adherents of Count Antonio, the Brancaleonis gravitated into the orbit of the lord of Milan, nonetheless, they maintained good relations with their neighbours, who were active in other alliances: for example, this can be inferred from a letter sent by Guido Brancaleoni of the Rocca, in 1402, and addressed to the priors of Città di Castello, asking to allow his son, abbot of the abbey of San Benedetto of Valbuscosa, to take the good's proceeds out of the territory<sup>101</sup>. Moreover, in the years 1329-1410, they had ordinary and peaceful relationships with Perugia's municipal authorities<sup>102</sup>: indeed, in 1384, Venanzio of Simone, judge and collateral kinsman of Michele from Volterra, Perugia's Captain of the *commune* and Captain of the People, as well as judge for transcriptions of testaments, codicils and other last wills, accepted the request made by Antonio of *quondam* Monaldo Brancaleoni to have his aunt Francia's testament included in the books and records of the *commune* of Perugia.

Throughout the fourteenth century, the Brancaleonis took part in the progressive ascent of the Ubaldini family. The Ubaldinis acquired the castles

<sup>98</sup> *Ivi*, p. 302.

<sup>99</sup> *Ivi*, p. 145.

<sup>100</sup> *Ivi*, p. 252.

<sup>101</sup> Franceschini, *I Brancaleoni di Castel Durante e tre prelati marchigiani alleati di Gian Galeazzo Visconti*, cit., p. 106.

<sup>102</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 87.

of the Carda of Montevicino in the last decades of the thirteenth century, and played an important strategic role in favour of the Montefeltros in the Apennines up to Città di Castello. Relations between the Brancaleoni and Ubaldini families, both included in the alliance system of the counts of Urbino, appeared to be substantially friendly, as shown by the marriages between Tòdesca, daughter of Nicolò of the Brancaleonis of the Rocca, with Antonio of Baldinaccio Ubaldini of the Carda<sup>103</sup>, and between Antonio Brancaleoni, son of Monaldo of Piobbico, with Giovanna Ubaldini of the Carda<sup>104</sup>. Some disagreement between the two neighbours seems to emerge from an act of 1402 (fig. 2.2)<sup>105</sup>: Baldinaccio of Andrea Ubaldini and Antonio of Monaldo Brancaleoni made some arrangements regarding the dowry for the marriage between two of their vassals, Antonia of Matteo and Landuzzo of Pietro Saverio, and established that the hundred florins bestowed for the dowry were to be used to purchase free land, that is, not subject to the Brancaleonis, therefore in the Ubaldinis' area or elsewhere.

Marriage was a way to create solidarity and social cohesion among noble families and had been much practiced by the Brancaleonis since the time of the first survived documents: Gentile married Isabella of the Acquavivas of Cagli, Trasmondo of Bellabranca married Guglielmina of the Mastinis of Cagli<sup>106</sup>, Federico of Montefeltrano married Bernabea of count Simone della Genga<sup>107</sup>; Antonio of Monaldo in his first marriage got married to Emfeligia of the Gabriellis of Gubbio<sup>108</sup>. Despite being rarely documented in archival sources, marriages of not first-born daughters, too, contributed to strengthen the ties with noble families of Cagli's countryside such as the Siccardis and the Mastinis.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the Brancaleonis of Piobbico were led by Monaldo Pazzo's eldest son, and by Gerio of Federico; while, after Nello's premature death, the Brancaleonis of the Pecorari were led by his son Armanno († 1384), who appears to be the sole and last heir, since his uncle Filippo's descendants were no longer mentioned in documents drawn up after 1338<sup>109</sup>. Therefore, the lords of Piobbico were the only surviving descendants of Montefeltrano. Pazzo's sons and wife, as well as Federicuccio and his successors were widely mentioned in documents of the

<sup>103</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 189.

<sup>104</sup> *Ivi*, p. 82.

<sup>105</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 96.

<sup>106</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 180.

<sup>107</sup> *Ivi*, p. 77.

<sup>108</sup> *Ivi*, p. 82.

<sup>109</sup> Filippo moved to Mercatello, giving origin to the Brancaleonis of that area (cf. Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 209).

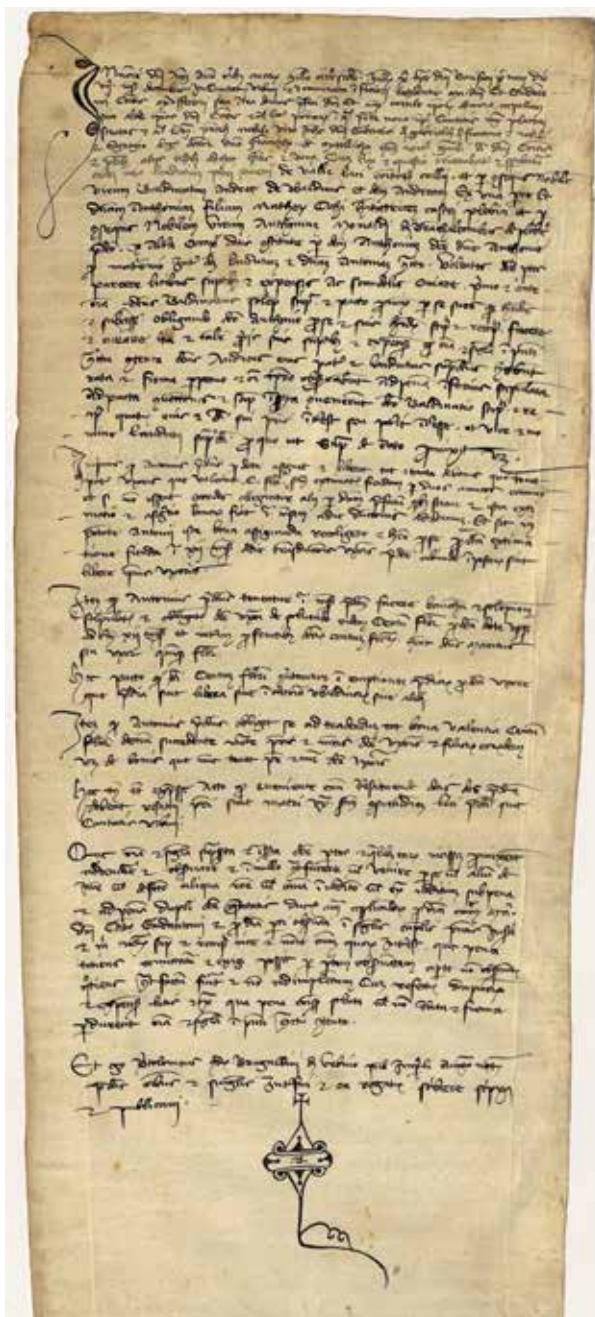


Fig. 2.2. BUU, FA, Fondo Brancaleoni, b. 16, parch. n. 96 (1402 dicembre 7).

time. The last mention of Federicuccio dates back to 1355 when, together with his nephews, appealed to the Podesta of Cagli to obtain permission to copy the will of his brother Father Ugo<sup>110</sup>. His heirs were Montefeltrano and Gerio, who were born from «Bernabea, figlia del conte Simone della Genga»<sup>111</sup>. Montefeltrano, also known as Feltrano or Feltruccio, was among the Ghibellines who invaded the abbey of Massa in 1332, usurping its assets<sup>112</sup>. Information about Gerio are scarce, too: in addition to his probable participation in the triumvirate chosen to pacify the town of Cagli in 1359, we only know that he died before 1366. In that year, indeed, an act of renewal of emphyteusis stipulated by Gerio's wife, Latina, as guardian of her grandchildren, Nicolò, Feltrano and Gerio, who were still minors, used the words «uxor condam nobilis viri Geri»<sup>113</sup>. The three pupils were Federicuccio's heirs - the only son of Latina and Gerio, who, at that time, was dead, too. Nicolò, Feltrano and Gerio were born from the marriage with Todesca of Nicolò of Puccio Brancaleoni of Bellabranca's line, who then married with Antonio of Baldinaccio of the Ubaldinis of the Carda. Only very few information remains of them: Nicolò<sup>114</sup> had three sons: Giovanni, who perpetuated the dominion over Piobbico, Federico and Filippo. Filippo was the father of Feltrano from whom another family branch originated, that is, the branch of the Brancaleonis known as 'Feltrani'<sup>115</sup>.

As for Pazzo's children, on 24 July 1348, the day of the drawing up of his wife Madina's will, only two of their five daughters, Francia and Lena<sup>116</sup>, and both their sons and universal heirs, Monaldo and Paolino, were still alive. Pazzo's sons had obtained the part of the Signoria of Piobbico which

<sup>110</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 75.

<sup>111</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 77.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*: among these, there were also three Ghibellines from Cagli and one of the Brancaleonis of the Rocca; this action was followed by a lawsuit initiated by the rector of the Marca, Gerio of Arezzo, and a condemnation to pay a thousand *liras*.

<sup>113</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 81.

<sup>114</sup> Nicolò is mentioned in Francia of Pazzo Brancaleoni's will (1383) and in a subsequent *rattificatio et procuratio* (1384); cf. BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parchs nn. 87, 90.

<sup>115</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 83-84.

<sup>116</sup> In Madina's will, Isa and Lagia are not mentioned; nor any reference is made to any heir from them. This might suggest that they were already dead and unmarried. Their deaths could have happened after 1327, because the two are included in the will of their father Pazzo. The other daughter Vanna, instead, is surely dead because Madina's will clearly refers to her children and heirs: «item reliquid filiis et heredibus condam Vanne filie sue. L. libras ravennatum». Vanna, too, died after 1327 because she was still mentioned in Pazzo's testament. With regard to Lena and Francia, Madina bequeathed fifty Ravenna's *liras* to each of them: «item reliquid domine Lene et domine Francie filiabus suis. L. libras ravennatum pro qualibet». On the testaments of Pazzo and Madina, see BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 15, parch. n. 40; b. 16, parch. n. 71.



belonged to their father. This happened only after a period of government carried out by their mother Madina in her role of her sons' guardian, given that at the death of their father, Monaldo and Paolino were still very young.

Paolino, who, as Tarducci reports<sup>117</sup>, «visse celibe», joined his brother Monaldo in the management of the Signoria until at least 1343, when they still appeared together in the *instrumentum* with which they handed over to their mother Madina a palace located in the castle of Piobbico, with eight feet of land, in payment of a thousand and one hundred Ravenna's *liras* owed to her for her dowry and for the legacy Pazzo made in her favour in his will<sup>118</sup>. Two years later, Paolino was in Gubbio<sup>119</sup>, in what was supposed to be only one of his frequent and deliberate absences from Piobbico, so much so that, in 1348, Madina mentioned him together with her brother Monaldo as her heir in her testament, but inserted a specific coercive clause: «Paolinum et Munaldum filios suos sibi heredes instituit sub hac conditione, quod dictus Paolinus teneatur habitare et stare in castro Plobici in domo condam patris suis<sup>120</sup> et a patria se non absentare pro moram contraendo, quod si non fecerit non habeat de bonis et dotibus suis nisi.L. libras ravennatum»<sup>121</sup>. As a consequence of this clause, on 14 August of that same year, Paolino was in his ancestors' castle: this is documented by his second testament drawn up precisely «in castro Plobici, in domo Paulini et Munaldi»<sup>122</sup>. His choice seemed to be definitive because he decided to be buried in the hermitage of Morimondo, while in his first will – which was drawn up two years earlier in Gubbio – the place of his burial was linked to the possibility «quod moriretur in dicta terra»<sup>123</sup>.

Unlike his brother, Monaldo chose a decidedly more stable life. Pazzo Brancaleoni's son was exclusively engaged in the management of family

<sup>117</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 75.

<sup>118</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 65.

<sup>119</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 66: we don't know the real reason of Paolino's presence in the Umbrian town, but the parchment defines him as *domicellus*, a term which could imply a public office: indeed, this word was often used to refer to a member of Podesta's retinue or *familia*.

<sup>120</sup> So is written in the document.

<sup>121</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 71.

<sup>122</sup> D. Bischì, *Di alcuni testamenti dei Brancaleoni di Piobbico*, in «Atti e memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche», 92, 1987, p. 277. This second will is held in ACC, Parchments, n. 82. For the register, cf. G. Palazzini, *Pergamene e carte dell'Archivio del Capitolo Cattedrale di Cagli*, in «Studia Picena», XXXII, 1964, p. 20.

<sup>123</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 67. In this will, as in the second one, Paolino provides that his brother Monaldo be his only heir. In the first will, Paolino also mentioned a sealed writing - for which, however, we have no subsequent reference - delivered to Father Maffeo *Gratie*, rector of the church of Santo Stefano of Finocchietto, with the order that after his death both the latter and Monaldo gave effect to what was contained therein.

assets<sup>124</sup>, and documents show that he was continuously in Piobbico until 1364<sup>125</sup>, when he appeared for the last time in an act of emphyteusis renewal for a piece of land located in the parish of Santo Stefano of Finocchieto. His wife was a certain Isolda, cited in his mother Madina's will – once again an invaluable source of information about the Brancaleoni family: Madina bequeathed to his son Monaldo a legacy of fifty florins, which belonged to Isolda for her dowry. The couple had five children – Antonio, Pietro, Francesco, Caterina and Madina<sup>126</sup> –, among whom only the first-born is widely present in archival documents. In fact, it was Antonio who assumed the leadership of the Signoria after his father's death, which presumably happened before 1375<sup>127</sup>: on 20 September of that year, an act of sale concerning a piece of vineyard located in the Curia of the Rocca, precisely in *Aqua Negra*, referred to him as the son «condam nobilis viri Monaldi de Branchalionibus de Mondelachassa»<sup>128</sup>.

After having obtained the paternal inheritance, in 1384, Antonio Brancaleoni also inherited the patrimony of his aunt Francia<sup>129</sup>, who survived all her brothers. Antonio continued to live in Piobbico, and, there, in 1375, he built a church and a hospital dedicated to the eponymous saint, in thanksgiving for a miraculous healing<sup>130</sup>. Notarial sources depicted him as an extremely active person, above all engaged in the consolidation of his own position through a dense network of economic relations: Monaldo Brancaleoni's heir granted emphyteusis on the land he owned<sup>131</sup>; entered into agistment contracts<sup>132</sup>; ran business on behalf of his first wife Emfeligia, who belonged to the powerful Gabrielli family of Gubbio<sup>133</sup>.

<sup>124</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parchs nn. 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80.

<sup>125</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 80.

<sup>126</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 80.

<sup>127</sup> Tarducci assumes that the Signoria led by Antonio began in 1374. He supports this assumption because Monaldo's testament - which had not survived - dated back to 14 May 1374, and, presumably, he died in that year; cfr. Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 80, n. 2.

<sup>128</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 82.

<sup>129</sup> *Ivi*, parch. n. 87.

<sup>130</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., pp. 81-82; Palazzini, *Le chiese di Piobbico*, cit., p. 47. In 1383, his aunt Francia left by will a bed to this hospital, «videlicet cum uno pare linteaminum, cum una cultra, cum una cultrice et cum uno cervicale»; cfr. BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 87.

<sup>131</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parchs nn. 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100.

<sup>132</sup> *Ivi*, parchs nn. 84, 85. The second parchment is significant as the municipal siege of the castle of Piobbico is mentioned for the first time: the act is drawn up «iusta domum comunis castri Piobici»; on this point, see F.V. Lombardi, *L'origine delle sedi comunali medievali nelle alte Marche*, in «Atti e memorie della Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche», 103, 1998, p. 430.

<sup>133</sup> BUU, FA, *Pergamene Brancaleoni*, b. 16, parch. n. 90.

Even during the rule of Antonio of Monaldo (1374-1437), skirmishes with the third branch, that of the Brancaleonis of the Rocca, still persisted. These, however, did not compromise the substantial stability within the family. In 1380, Count Antonio of Montefeltro was asked to settle a dispute for the exploitation of the pastures in an area on the Mount Nerone called the Valley, which the lords of Piobbico and the Rocca claimed as an ancient and continuous possession<sup>134</sup>. In the following years, we know about a duel between Trasmondo Novello of the Rocca, Guido Brancaleoni's son, and Antonio of Piobbico «in territorio magnifici domini Paoli de Ursinis»<sup>135</sup>: the outcome of this duel is unknown, but, given that both contenders continued to live for a long time after, we can assume it went no further than the preliminaries.

After the death of Count Antonio of Montefeltro († 1404), relations between his successors Guidantonio and Federico of Montefeltro and the Brancaleonis were substantially unchanged: in addition to being part of their armies, the lords of Piobbico and the Rocca, together with the Ubaldinis and the Gabriellis of Gubbio, were mentioned as adherents of Count Federico, in an alliance treaty with Florence, ratified on 23 December 1444, five months after the rise to power of the new lord of Urbino<sup>136</sup>. In the second half of the fifteenth century we continue to find offspring of the Brancaleonis in the armies organised by Duke Federico of Montefeltro<sup>137</sup>, thus testifying to a centuries-old friendship, widely attested by the precious Urbino documents.

<sup>134</sup> Tarducci, *Piobbico e i Brancaleoni, memorie storiche*, cit., p. 190.

<sup>135</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 363-365.

<sup>136</sup> Franceschini, *I Montefeltro*, p. 444.

<sup>137</sup> W. Tommasoli, *La vita di Federico da Montefeltro*, Urbino, Argalia 1978, p. 87; A.K. Isaacs, *Condottieri, stati e territori nell'Italia centrale*, in G. Cerboni Baiardi, G. Chittolini, P. Floriani (edited by), *Federico di Montefeltro. Lo Stato, le arti, la cultura*, I, Roma, Bulzoni, 1986, p. 42.

