



# ALERAMO

## BETWEEN HISTORY AND LEGEND

Aleramo and Adelasia are persons who really existed and many episodes of their lives are part of the history of the high middle ages; through the thousand years which have since passed the facts have become woven into a legend by the imagination of generations of story-tellers.

It begins far away under pale Saxon skies and end with the protagonists in the sunny Italian countryside.

...It starts in the early 900s. Guglielmo, a noble Frank without children, a descendent of Vitichingo and in the service of Emperor Guido decided to go to Italy with his spouse as a pilgrim at a time when she was showing the first signs of pregnancy.

In 904 as soon as he saw his prayers answered he prepared horses for himself and his consort and set out for Rome.

When the little group reached Sezzè near Acqui Guglielmo's spouse was gripped by labour pains and found warm hospitality among the lords of the place, who asked for the child born in their house to be called 'Aleramo', meaning "joy for the happy event".

Guglielmo and his spouse were happy to acquiesce.

Leaving the child in swadd-

ling clothes with the noble lords of the castle and in the care of a nordic nurse they set forth their journey.

However, the destiny of the small Aleramo was to prove sad, as he was never to know the smile and tenderness of his mother, nor the manly upbringing of his father, as both were killed by bandits on their return from Rome.

A few years later the nurse who had brought him up in his native tongue also died.

Nevertheless Aleramo was fortunate in finding care and affection in the people around him. Thus he grew up in the castle of Sezzè among good-natured, fine, strong people of noble character until, full of youthful boldness, he became a squire and was called to the court of Ottone I.

During the siege of Brescia, where a rebellion had broken out, the Emperor called him into his presence, having heard of the valorous exploits of its young subject and asked him where he was from. Aleramo replied with pride: "Germanic by blood, but Lombard by nationality and up-bringing."

Aleramo became favoured as a knight of the sovereign and served him and his family at the table.

Adelasia, the Emperor's

favourite daughter, was very beautiful...

The two soon fell deeply in love but were opposed by the Emperor, who had promised her in marriage to another prince. One day Adelasia told the valet: "I will die unless you lead me to a place where we are out of danger, I cannot live without you" ... and Aleramo, full of passion but still in control of his reason, replied:

"...What are you saying, sweet lady? We can't go anywhere without being cut to pieces and killed. I care nothing about my own life, but can't bear thinking of you suffering this kind of fate."

But after brief resistance Aleramo yielded to the importunes of his beloved princess.

In the depth of night the couple fled on horseback to Pietra Ardena, a mountain above the upper Tanaro valley where Aleramo used to accompany his adoptive parents to hunt.

The journey was to prove long and full of danger. The Emperor's men were unleashed everywhere with the order to arrest the young lovers and crossed paths with them several times, but Aleramo and Adelasia managed to elude them. After facing dangers, exhaustion and difficulties on

an interminable journey which took them as far as the Ligurian coast they finally reached their journey's end on a high mountain where the fire of several charcoal burners had attracted their attention.

Aleramo was by now overcome with concern for his beloved's discomfort, tiredness and hunger and luckily he once again found good, generous people who took them in and gave them refreshment. The two fugitive lovers then found shelter in a cave which they chose for their dwelling.

Aleramo sold the horses and bought mules and implements used by the inhabitants of the Ligurian hinterland for cutting trees to produce timber for ship building and charcoal, which they sold in the surrounding villages. In a short time the young foreigner became a charcoal burner, while his young wife attended in their humble home serenely, soon to be gladdened by the birth of four children.

A monk in the nearby monastery was the only person to whom Aleramo revealed his identity and he had blessed their marriage, hoping the couple would soon enjoy better fortune.

They did not have to wait long.

The inhabitants of Brescia had once again rebelled against the Emperor and all his subject lords throughout the Italian kingdom enlisted soldiers to send to Ottone I's aid.

The bishop of Albenga also sent a squad of his men, among which were the cook of

the episcopal palace and his friend, a supplier of charcoal who came down to Albenga from the mountains and who used to lend a hand in the kitchen on these occasions. However he never told anybody who he was.

The cook's friend was Aleramo ...

However, pots and pans were not his favourite arms...

When the Brescians dared to venture forth beyond the city walls and attack the pavilion of their German sovereign, taking a young nephew of the king prisoner, Aleramo took off his dirty and torn clothes, threw down his kitchen implements, gripped an enormous sword and went charging and lashing out in all directions, defeating the terrible adversaries, setting them in flight and liberating the illustrious prisoner.

Who was the intrepid knight who carried out such acts of valour? The Emperor asked the bishop of Albenga to send him into his presence. However, Aleramo, who had once again put on his dirty clothes blackened by smoke from the humble work in the kitchen declined, saying he was unworthy.

Nevertheless, he was unable to refuse a new request when, in disguise, he impressed the Emperor and Empress by his prowess during a jousting contest.

As a consequence the bishop of Albenga desired to know everything about Aleramo's history, and with appropriate

prudence referred the information to the sovereign.

Ottone I was by now placated from the fury caused by the old outrage and, allured by Aleramo's various deeds, pardoned daughter and son-in-law and at Ravenna on 21st March 967 bequeathed a standard with a white and red drape to his vassal as a sign of nobility, conferring on him and his descendents the title of marquess.

He also bequeathed him the territory he could traverse in three days on horseback in that mountainous region now known as Piedmont.

Mounting three fast horses in three days and riding through the night with all his might he covered all the roads in the vicinity of where the cities of Turin and Alessandria were to grow up, around Savona, Saluzzo and Monferrato.

In this way he set out the limits of his domain, the 'Marca Aleramica', a kingdom of its own comprising the land between the Po river and the Ligurian sea.

In addition to governing the lands in Piedmont and Liguria which were inherited from our protagonist and subsequently divided into various marquises, his descendents, the Aleramici, acquired further territories in other parts of Italy from Tuscany to Sicily.

Many became warriors, others men of letters, juriconsults, merchants or ship owners, while others dedicated themselves to agriculture and in particular, to caring for vines and wine-making.