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**Inequality in the Early Middle Ages: Distribution of
Wealth and Societal Changes in Lombard Northern Italy**

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Keywords: Inequality, Burial Goods, High Middle Ages, War, Lombard Kingdom

Text (max. 1,500 words)

This work studies the distribution of wealth in Lombard Italy using archaeological data. In recent years researchers have been able to produce detailed historical series for inequality since the XIV century, but the lack of documentary evidence has hindered the study of economic disparity in the Early Middle Ages. This work addresses this gap in the literature by using grave goods as a proxy for wealth. This study focuses on the Lombard cemetery of Sant'Albano Stura, the largest early medieval Lombard necropolis found in Italy, situated in Piedmont. The large number of graves found, as well as the large representations of grave containing no goods, suggest that the sample is representative of the entire community living in the area, not only of a small military elite.

This work produced two main contributions. The first one is methodological and consists in the use of a novel multifactor framework for evaluating grave goods using only data from the necropolis. We compare the results of this framework to the ones obtained using a more traditional system for estimating burial deposition value based on the plurality of grave good types in a tomb and find that the estimates are similar, but the multifactor model is more nuanced.

The main contribution is the production of estimates of wealth inequality for VII century Italy through the computation of Gini coefficients. Using "Index-Fossil" objects and horizontal stratigraphy, this work divides the necropolis in four sectors, each roughly correspondent with a phase of about twenty-five years. A reconstruction of hypothetical couples using three different possible match making criteria is used to produce a tentative estimate of household inequality.

The results are in line with other studies of wealth disparity in the Roman and Post-Roman world, and reveal a U-shaped trend over the VII century. Inequality steeply decreases in the first half of the century, while a gradual increase is observed in the second half. This work finds that this trend might be associated with broader political and economic trends occurring in the VII century Lombard Kingdom. In particular, the article finds evidence for the theory that in the early part of the century, plundering of neighbouring polities provided resources and avenues of social mobility for freemen who had the duty of serving in the army. The end of the phase of conquest of the peninsula close this revenue stream, determining the impoverishment of a large segment of the population and the social closure of the elite.

More broadly, this work provides new insights on the relationship between war and inequality and the economic effect of the severe depopulation of Italy in the VI century.

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