
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

(a) HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The almost six hundred years from the middle of the tenth century to the early sixteenth were marked in northern Italy by a series of momentous upheavals. In the tenth century, with the threat of Hungarian and Saracen incursions beginning to dissipate, the Ottonian kings and emperors embarked on an ambitious programme to establish centralised rule over both their German and Italian dominions. The death of the young Otto III (983–1002, emp. from 996) without heirs and the consequent uncertainty over the succession nevertheless stifled these plans and, despite occasional revivals, initiated a progressive weakening of imperial power in Italy. By the middle of the eleventh century, the followers of new religious movements such as the *Pataria* in Milan were vociferously supporting papal injunctions against simony and clerical marriage, which posed a direct challenge to episcopal authorities that constituted the basis of imperial power. With the ascent of Bruno of Eguisheim–Dagsburg to the pontificate as (St) Leo IX (1049–54), the desire for reform reached the highest level of the Roman Church.

In 1077, the escalating feud between the popes and the German kings and emperors over lay investiture and simony reached a dramatic climax in the confrontation between Pope Gregory VII (1073–85) and King Henry IV (1056–1106) at the castle of Canossa near Modena in Emilia–Romagna. Although neither the pope nor the king could claim a decisive victory, the struggle undermined imperial power. Henry managed to have himself crowned emperor in 1084, but only by anti-pope Clement III (1080–1100) rather than by Gregory or his legitimate successors Victor III (1086–7) and Urban II (1088–99). The progressive weakening of imperial power continued through the first half of the twelfth century, which Jones (1997, 337) characterised as ‘a virtual interregnum’. The power vacuum enabled burgeoning north Italian communes to exploit regalian rights without royal or imperial consent. This helped to accelerate both the rise of the communes in northern Italy and the transition from an essentially seigniorial to a more urban political system, with power often coalescing around the bishops of north Italian cities. The rural lords who survived the transition and even profited from it were above all those who managed to establish their power-base in a major city, for example the Visconti in Milan.

The religious fervour that sparked the reform of the Church also found an outlet beyond the shores of Italy in the Crusades, the series of military campaigns sanctioned by the Church to restore Christian control over the Holy Land. Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in November 1095 and the main force set sail on the Feast of the Assumption (15 August) in 1096. The crusaders ultimately established four Crusader States of Edessa (1098),

Antioch (1098), Jerusalem (1099) and Tripoli (1102/9). There were eight more major Crusades to the eastern Mediterranean (and North Africa) over the next two centuries as well as other Crusades in northern Europe, Iberia and the Balkans. The fall of Acre and the other remaining Christian outposts in the East to the Mamluks in 1291 effectively signalled the end of the Levantine Crusades, but the consequences of the Crusades were far reaching. The communities that Christian crusaders established in the East became important conduits of trade, and European merchants, especially Italians from maritime cities such as Genoa and Venice, continued to maintain commercial colonies in the Levant long after the fall of the Crusader States. Trade and increased contact with the East, much of it through Italy, not only brought new products to Europe but also facilitated the diffusion of culture, knowledge and technology.

While crusaders were waging holy wars in the East on behalf of the popes, the German kings and emperors set out to arrest the slow dissipation of their prerogatives. At Roncaglia (near Piacenza) in 1158, Emperor Frederick I sought to recover the imperial authority lost under his predecessors and to subordinate communal and seigniorial powers to the emperor. Above all, he stressed the essential inalienability of regalian rights, which communes and lords held only at the pleasure of the king or emperor by privilege in exchange for fealty, service or tribute. Frederick's attempt to reaffirm direct imperial authority nevertheless ultimately benefited the communes more than his own office. It led to the formation of the first anti-imperial Lombard League in 1167, then to Frederick's military defeat near Legnano in 1176, and finally to the Peace of Constance in 1183, by which north Italian cities won the right to maintain the privileges that they had been exercising before Roncaglia, which effectively confirmed their control over their own territories, while also compelling them to pledge to pay dues and to remain faithful to the emperor.

The death of Frederick's son Henry VI (1190–7, emp. 1191) from malaria and the ensuing struggle over succession to the throne further debilitated imperial authority and, in effect, resulted in another 'virtual interregnum' during the first two decades of the thirteenth century. Jones' assertion (1997, 339) that 'the empire was becoming an irrelevance [and] an intrusive nuisance' perhaps goes too far but effectively sums up Italian perceptions of the situation. The deaths of two of the main contenders for the throne, Henry's brother Philip of Swabia in 1208 and Otto IV of Brunswick in 1218 (who had been in conflict with the pope since 1211), paved the way for the succession of Henry's son Frederick II (1212/18–50, emp. 1220), who was already king of Sicily and south Italy. The prospect that Frederick might succeed in joining his Sicilian and south Italian kingdom to the three kingdoms – Germany, Italy, Burgundy – under the control of the Holy Roman Empire directly through the Papal States posed a serious threat to the popes and probably helps to explain why Popes Gregory IX (1227–41) and Innocent IV (1243–51) supported the Italian cities against the emperor and excommunicated Frederick on four separate occasions (1227, 1228, 1239, 1246).

Frederick's attempt to restore imperial authority again faced the resistance of another anti-imperial Lombard League. In 1237, Frederick's army defeated the troops of the Lombard League at Cortenuova near Bergamo, but the emperor failed to follow through on his success. He pursued a diplomatic course rather than a military one and thus lost an opportunity to achieve a potentially decisive victory over Milan, which was weakened and highly vulnerable in the aftermath of Cortenuova. In his last years, Frederick was engaged in a bitter struggle with Innocent IV, who encouraged German electors to support first Henry Raspe (d. 1247) in 1246 and then William II of Holland (d. 1256) as anti-kings of Germany over Frederick and his son Conrad IV (1228–54, king of Germany from 1237). Conrad succeeded Frederick upon his death in 1250 but

proved an ineffectual leader. Royal power in Italy entered a period of more than fifty years of total collapse.

The ensuing century proved crucial in determining the overall make-up of north-central Italy in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, particularly in political terms. The pattern of development differed from place to place, but was everywhere conditioned to some extent by the struggle between pro-papal Guelfs (from the Germ. *Welf*, a personal and family name of the dukes of Bavaria and Saxony) and pro-imperial Ghibellines (from the Germ. *Waiblingen*, an imperial court in possession of the Hohenstaufen dynasty). The so-called interregnum of 1254–73 and its aftermath in particular provided greater scope for the more or less unfettered development of communal institutions and urban lordships. It was also during this period that Venice and Genoa became the lords of Mediterranean trade and began a series of wars against each other for supremacy at sea. Merchant-bankers were taking an ever-growing role in communal governance, and some of the larger city-states began to evolve into regional or territorial states, thus provoking the pope to call wars against the most powerful and threatening of them (e.g. the so-called ‘Ferrara war’ against Venice, 1310–12, or the Crusade against Visconti Milan, 1323). The revolution in artistic representation, begun in Tuscany, also started to penetrate northern Italy, perhaps most visibly in Giotto di Bondone’s (1266/7–1337) spectacular *freschi* in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua.

In the meantime, the advent of Rudolph I of Habsburg as king of Germany (1273–91) ended the interregnum, but Rudolph was still too busy trying to consolidate his position north of the Alps to interfere much in Italian affairs. His successors, Adolph of Nassau (1292–8) and Albert I of Habsburg (1298–1308), remained similarly disengaged, but immediately upon his election as the new king, Henry VII of Luxembourg (1309–13, emp. 1312) was determined to be crowned emperor and to restore imperial power in Italy. By this time, the kingdoms of Sicily and Naples were divided between the Aragonese and the Angevins, respectively, while the popes had removed from Rome to Avignon. Henry thus posed nothing like the threat to the popes that Frederick II had nearly a century earlier. Already in the first months of Henry’s reign, Pope Clement V (1305–14) readily agreed to crown him emperor in Rome early in 1312.

Henry’s intentions to reinvigorate the empire held a certain appeal even in Italy, where the memories of Hohenstaufen ‘tyranny’ had largely faded and the immediate concern lay in calming the factional strife between the Guelfs and Ghibellines that had beleaguered many Italian cities for several decades. Confrontations between supporters of the opposing parties were often violent and typically resulted in the vanquished being disenfranchised, dispossessed and/or exiled. When Henry began his descent into Italy in October 1310, losers on both sides of the political divide looked to him to overturn the injustices inflicted upon them. Accordingly, Henry initially received a warm welcome in Italy, but traditionally Guelf cities soon turned against him and King Robert of Naples (1309–43) threw his considerable support behind the dissenters. Pope Clement also refused to crown Henry emperor as he had promised. In the event, three Ghibelline cardinals in Henry’s retinue performed the coronation in the Lateran in June 1312. Still not yet forty years old, Henry died of malaria at Buonconvento near Siena a little more than a year later and his programme to restore the empire fell apart. Dante nevertheless reserved high praise for him as the ‘lofty Henry, who will come to straighten out Italy before she is ready’ (*Paradiso* xxx.137–8).

Louis IV of Bavaria and Frederick the Handsome of Habsburg disputed the succession to the throne after Henry’s death, but it was Louis who emerged victorious after the battle of Mühldorf in 1322. Louis went on his own Italian campaign in 1327, but his aims were more modest than

those of Henry. He was crowned king of Italy in Milan at the end of May 1327 and then emperor in Rome by Senator and Capitano del Popolo Sciarra Colonna in January 1328. Pope John XXII (1316–34), who had supported Frederick of Habsburg against Louis, had already excommunicated Louis in 1324. After his coronation as emperor, Louis responded by declaring the pope deposed as a heretic and appointed a Spiritual Franciscan named Pietro Rainalducci as anti-pope Nicholas V (1328–30). Louis then abandoned Rome in August ahead of the contingents that Robert of Naples had sent there by land and sea to enforce the primacy of Pope John and to forestall any new attempt at the restoration of empire. Louis returned to Germany in 1329 and for the most part did not involve himself in Italian affairs thereafter. When Charles IV of Luxembourg (1346/7–78) went to Italy to be crowned in 1355, he did so under an earlier oath that he had made to Pope Clement VI (1342–52) only to assume the titles of king of Italy and emperor. In effect, he gave up any pretence to the use of his imperial prerogatives in Italy. He sojourned there once more in 1368–9, during which he met Pope Urban V (1362–70) at Viterbo, but made no attempt to restore the institutions of the empire.

The pace of demographic and economic expansion in northern Italy quickened appreciably during the twelfth century and reached a peak in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Only a few north Italian cities have any data at all from which to draw population estimates before 1250, but many cities probably doubled or tripled in size over the course of the thirteenth century and some might have even quadrupled. By 1300, Milan certainly and probably Venice and Genoa had more than 100,000 inhabitants, while Brescia, Cremona and Verona all had populations approaching 50,000 in the early fourteenth century. The growth of large urban centres stimulated local economies, but the take-off of Italian international merchant-banking and maritime commerce was initially tied closely to the Champagne fairs and Levantine trade. To cope with the extraordinary growth in trade and international finance, both in volume and extent, Italians developed a variety of new business methods, including various kinds of partnerships, the bill of exchange, marine insurance and double-entry bookkeeping.

Demographic growth had begun to level off in many places before the Black Death of 1348–9 killed perhaps 40–50 per cent of the population, possibly even more in crowded cities but probably less in the countryside. Economic expansion likewise slowed during the second quarter of the fourteenth century, most notably with the failure, first, of Venetian banks in 1340–2 and then, more famously, of the major Florentine merchant-banking firms in 1342–6, which made it more difficult to obtain loans for entrepreneurial activity. The immediate consequences of the Black Death were devastating. Most work drew to a halt during the summer of 1348 when Italy experienced the worst of the contagion, violent crime and destitution rose, revenues from taxes plummeted, and agricultural land was abandoned. In most places, however, equilibrium if not recovery was achieved as soon as the death rate decreased in the autumn. Among the survivors, plague mortality even created opportunities for social mobility because it made labour scarce and thus raised the wages of most average workers. Population loss from the Black Death nevertheless continued for more than a half-century after the initial occurrence owing to subsequent outbreaks, and the population reached its nadir in most places only in the early fifteenth century.

Banking crises were as recurrent as the plague. Another crisis of international proportions occurred in the 1370s and further crises are documented in Venice during the fifteenth century. The crisis of the 1340s was especially severe, however, and the Black Death exacerbated the difficulties faced by the bankers who managed to survive it, not only because it radically altered

the environment for business, for example by decreasing the demand for commodities such as grain, but also because the mere rumour that a particular banker had taken ill was often enough to spark a panic among depositors and investors. The banking sector nevertheless recovered relatively quickly from this and other such dislocations. At least one of the major Florentine firms that collapsed during the crisis of the 1340s, the Bardi Company, even managed to spawn two new banking concerns within little more than a decade.

In the early fourteenth century, several major north Italian powers had embarked upon a policy of territorial expansion. The demographic collapse occasioned by the Black Death gave expansionism fresh impetus by eroding the tax-base especially of the larger city-states and bringing them under increasing fiscal pressure. In Milan, the expansion of the territorial state reached its height under Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1385–1402, duke 1395), who not only subjugated nearly all of Lombardy but also, with the object of establishing a new Italian kingdom, extended his dominion to Verona, Feltre and Padua in the Veneto, to Pisa and Siena in Tuscany, and to Perugia in Umbria. The territorial expansion of Venice was initially limited to the eastern shores of the Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean, but the Venetians began to expand on the *Terraferma* towards the end of the fourteenth century, definitively taking Treviso in 1389, Rovigo in 1395, Feltre and Vicenza in 1404, Verona and Padua in 1405, Aquileia in 1420, Brescia in 1426 and Bergamo in 1428. Venetian expansion on the mainland frequently brought Venice into conflict with Milan, but the main Italian powers negotiated the Peace of Lodi in 1454 to avert such territorial struggle. The treaty established the frontier between the Milanese and Venetian states along the river Adda, conferred formal recognition on Francesco Sforza as duke of Milan, and ushered in forty years of stability in north-central Italy. (See Map 1.) The Genoese, like the Venetians, established a number of outposts in the eastern Mediterranean and also on the Tyrrhenian islands of Corsica and Sardinia, but geography and local politics conspired to frustrate their territorial aspirations on the mainland, at least beyond the coastal regions. Genoese rulers in fact often turned their city over to foreign powers such as the dukes of Milan or the kings of France to prevent the government from falling into the hands of local adversaries. On the northern side of the Ligurian Apennines, the counts and dukes of Savoy were the dominant territorial power, while the marquises of Montferrat and Saluzzo controlled much smaller dominions. The most prominent foreign rulers in the region were the Milanese and the French.

While the origins of Italian Renaissance art lay mostly in Tuscany in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, several north Italian cities, especially Venice and Milan, emerged as major centres of artistic production in the fifteenth century. Jacopo Bellini of Venice (c. 1400–70/1) was a follower of Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1370–c. 1427) and worked with him in Umbria before visiting Florence in 1423. When Bellini returned to Venice in 1424, he opened his own workshop and became one of the founders of the so-called Venetian School of painting. His sons Gentile (c. 1429–1507) and above all Giovanni (c. 1430–1516) were also prominent exponents of the Venetian School, while his son-in-law Andrea Mantegna of Padua (c. 1431–1506) was a famous painter in his own right. In the early sixteenth century, Giorgio da Castelfranco (Giorgione, 1478–1510) and Tiziano Vecellio (Titian, *ante* 1490–1576) were the dominant figures in Venetian painting. Such was the renown of Venice as an artistic centre that the German painter Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) twice visited the city, first in 1494–5 and again in 1505–7.

Milan was less important as a producer of talented painters than as a centre of art patronage, especially under the Sforza, where prominent artists such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) came



Map 1. North-central Italy at the Peace of Lodi, 1454

to work. Many of the more important Lombard artists, such as Giovanni Antonio Amadeo (1447–1522) and Benedetto Briosco (1460–1514), were actually from Pavia rather than Milan and are better known for their achievements in sculpture and architecture than in painting. The most famous Lombard painter of the early Italian Renaissance was probably Vincenzo Foppa (c. 1428–c. 1515), who was born near Brescia. Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis (c. 1455–c. 1508), who collaborated with Leonardo and engraved coin-dies in the mint of Milan, is perhaps the best known Milanese painter of the Renaissance.

In literature and learning, too, the Tuscans were in the forefront, but northern Italy also produced prodigious figures in these areas: Pietro Bembo (1470–1547) the Venetian poet (and cardinal) who advocated Tuscan as the basis for the Italian literary vernacular and wrote *Gli Asolani* (1505), Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529) the Lombard diplomat most famous for *Il cortegiano* (1508–28), and Girolamo Fracastoro (1478–1553) the Veronese physician who named the syphilis strain of venereal disease. Northern Italy also had some of Europe's earliest universities. Padua's famous university opened in 1222, Vercelli's in 1228 and Vicenza's had been founded in 1204. New universities were founded in Pavia in 1361, Turin in 1404 and Genoa in 1481. In the second half of the fifteenth century, Venice and Milan became important centres of printing alongside Florence and Rome.

Only in one area of Renaissance endeavour, travel and exploration, did the north Italians surpass the Tuscans. Marco Polo (1254–1324), the famous traveller who left an account of his experiences in Asia from 1271 to 1292 as an officer of the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan (1215–95), was of course a Venetian. More than a century and a half later, Niccolò de' Conti (c. 1395–1469) from

Chioggia near Venice travelled as widely in the East over some twenty-five years. The Venetian nobleman Alvise Cadamosto (c. 1426–83) travelled in sub-Saharan West Africa with the Genoese adventurers Antoniotto Usodimare (1416–c. 1461) and Antonio da Noli (c. 1419–c. 1497) and wrote what is perhaps the earliest account of the region. Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot, c. 1450–c. 1499) was a contemporary and rival of Cristoforo Colombo (Christopher Columbus, 1451–1506) and perhaps also, like Colombo, a native of Genoa. Caboto obtained Venetian citizenship in 1476 and traded widely in the Middle East in the 1480s, perhaps even journeying overland to Mecca as he later claimed. He went to England around 1495, settled in Bristol's Venetian community, and appears to have completed two voyages to the New World, reaching Newfoundland in 1497 and perhaps the Caribbean in 1499.

As for Colombo himself, although proudly Genoese by birth, he was probably more comfortable in Iberia where he ultimately found the necessary patronage to support his plan to search for a new route to the East Indies across the Atlantic. He arrived in Lisbon in 1479, married the daughter of a Portuguese nobleman (of Genoese origin), and moved to Spain around 1486, where he took a mistress of Basque extraction. He wrote mostly in Portuguese-inflected Spanish and occasionally in Latin; none of his extant writings are in Italian or Genoese. From 1482 to 1485, Colombo travelled and traded along the shores of West Africa, reaching the European settlement of Elmina on the coast of what is now Ghana. He moved to Spain only after Portugal, Genoa and Venice had turned down his appeals for support of his proposed voyage to the East Indies. After unsuccessfully petitioning Ferdinand II of Aragon (1452–1516, king of Castile 1474, Aragon 1479, Spain 1512) and Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504, queen 1474) for several years, Colombo finally won the monarchs' support in 1492. His expedition of three ships set sail from Spain in August and, after stopping briefly in the Canary Islands, reached an island in what is now the Bahamas in October, Cuba later in the month, and then Hispaniola (the Dominican Republic and Haiti) in December. He left the New World in January 1493, but made three more voyages to the Americas over the next decade. Ironically, the north Italians who made contact with the New World towards the end of the fifteenth century probably contributed to the decline in Italian pre-eminence in European commerce by shifting the focus of maritime trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic.

One other event of the fifteenth century also struck a blow to Italy's commercial interests in the Mediterranean, namely the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II (1432–81) in 1453, which signalled the collapse of the Byzantine Empire. The siege and then capture of the Byzantine capital was acutely felt throughout Christendom, but perhaps nowhere more so than in Italy. Pope Nicholas V (1447–55), as well as his successors Calixtus III (1455–8) and Pius II (1458–64), called for a Crusade against the Ottomans but to no avail. The one benefit of the fall of Byzantium for Italian culture was the influx of Greek refugee-scholars that invigorated the revival of Greek learning in Italy. Among the new arrivals were Janos Argyropoulos (1415–87) and his student Constantine Lascaris (1434–1501), the latter of whom became Greek tutor to the daughter of Duke Francesco Sforza of Milan (1450–66).

The fifteenth century ended in a series of conflicts often referred to as the Wars of Italy, which effectively stretched from the French descent into Italy in 1494 to the Habsburg–Valois treaties of Barcelona and Cambrai in 1529, but definitively concluded only with the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis thirty years later. King Charles VIII of France (1483–98) crossed the Alps into Italy in 1494, marched his army down the Italian peninsula, and conquered the kingdom of Naples from the Aragonese with scarcely a struggle in February 1495. King Ferdinand II (Ferrandino) of

Naples (1495–6) recovered the kingdom later in the same year, but in 1499, Charles's successor, Louis XII (1498–1515), successfully enforced his claims over Milan – his grandmother, Valentina, was daughter of Gian Galeazzo Visconti – and in 1500, eager to follow his predecessor's example by taking Naples, entered into a secret agreement with King Ferdinand II of Aragon to divide the kingdom. King Frederick III of Naples (1496–1501) surrendered to the French in September 1501, but by the end of the following year, the Aragonese were at war with the French. In May 1503, Ferdinand's troops occupied Naples, which effectively signalled the union of the kingdom with that of Aragonese Sicily and Sardinia. Louis formally accepted defeat in January 1504.

In the meantime, Giuliano della Rovere had ascended to the papacy as Julius II (1503–13). By 1508, he had become so alarmed by the expansion of Venice on the mainland in north-east Italy that he assembled an international coalition of powers to curb Venetian territorial ambitions. The so-called League of Cambrai included the pope, Louis XII of France, Emperor Maximilian I of Austria (1493–1519, emp. 1508), Ferdinand II of Aragon and Duke Alfonso I d'Este of Ferrara (1505–34). The League was initially successful thanks to the French victory at Agnadello and the surrender of Verona and Vicenza to the troops of Maximilian. In February 1510, the Venetian Senate was thus forced to accept the pope's harsh terms for peace, which entailed the restitution of Venetian territories in Romagna. The stalemate over Maximilian's ongoing siege of Padua and the consolidation of French territorial conquests in Lombardy nevertheless gave rise to fears over the expansion of French power in northern Italy and led to a new alliance between the pope and Venice. In 1512, Ferdinand II also turned against the French, but it was the intervention of Swiss soldiers that proved decisive in driving the French out of Lombardy and restoring the duchy of Milan to the Sforza dynasty in the person of Massimiliano.

When Charles of Habsburg succeeded first Ferdinand in 1516 and then Emperor Maximilian himself in 1519, he became both king of Spain and the Holy Roman Emperor, and accordingly regarded the duchies of Milan and Genoa as a land bridge between his German and Spanish dominions. King Francis I of France (1515–47), on the other hand, began to see his Italian possessions less as a luxury and more as a strategic necessity to avoid the Habsburg encirclement of his land frontiers. The wars over these territories reached a first climax in the battle of Pavia in 1525 in which Charles V pushed the French out of Lombardy and Genoa. By 1529, the French had been thoroughly defeated not only in northern Italy but also in Naples. Francis was left with no option but to sign the treaties of Barcelona and Cambrai, by which he again relinquished all claims to Italian territory. The Wars of Italy continued intermittently for another three decades, but with the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559, the French renounced all territorial ambitions in Italy, this time definitively. (See Map 2.)

(b) COINAGE

In the monetary history of Western Europe during the Middle Ages, north and central Italy served as a kind of laboratory where most of the features that later became common throughout Europe were first tested and adopted. The debasement of the penny (Lat. *denarius*, Ital. *denaro*) began here earlier than elsewhere and continued without any attempt to arrest the process through some sort of *renovatio monetarum*. The introduction of the silver groat (Lat. *grossus*, Ital. *grosso*), the gold ducat and the silver *testone* occurred first in northern Italy, and these new currencies were among the most successful coins of the Middle Ages. Northern Italy was also precocious in the development



Map 2. Northern Italy in Europe and the Mediterranean

of a purely civic coinage and, not surprisingly, it was in the vanguard in the technical and artistic development of the coinage, particularly with respect to seigniorial issues.

Despite the pioneering character of the coinage in northern Italy, which is duly recognised in general surveys on medieval European coinage and monetary history (e.g. Spufford 1988; Grierson 1991), few authors have analysed the coinage of this area on a broad regional basis. Apart from the pertinent sections of Cipolla's short history of Italian coinage (1975, 13–76), which focuses almost exclusively on the phenomenon of debasement (see below, p. 15), most general works either fail to take adequate account of the peculiar characteristics of the coined money (e.g. Tucci 1973) or else are aimed largely at the general public (Balbi de Caro 1993a; 1993b) or collectors (Cairola 1971). Other contributions have addressed only specific aspects of this history, for example monetary areas or the introduction of the *grosso* and/or gold coinage (see below). No one has grappled specifically with the reasons for the innovative character of the coinage in northern Italy, though Saccocci (2005a), in a different context, has pointed towards the relatively strong Byzantine influence in Italy as one possible explanation. Only the introductory surveys in the new handbook on Italian mints (*Zecche*) offer a wider view, albeit in the context of entries that focus mainly on individual mints.

The fact that the general evolution of the coinage in Italy on a broad regional or national basis has received so little attention is largely due to a deep-seated and well-known cultural and historical phenomenon, namely the overriding interest of most cultivated people in Italy, including coin collectors and amateur numismatists, in the history of their own native city. This peculiarly Italian variety of patriotism has its roots in the markedly urban character of Italian society during the Middle Ages and in the movement towards communal independence. Its effect on the study of the coinage has been especially profound, largely as a result of the way that collecting originally set the agenda for numismatic research. Because most Italian collectors were interested in collecting coins of their native city, most Italian authors have focused predominately on the coinage of a single city rather than on the coinages of larger areas.

The organisation of the monumental *Corpus Nummorum Italicorum* (henceforth *CNI*) indeed both reflects this view and serves to perpetuate it. The catalogue is arranged by regions according to the administrative subdivisions of twentieth-century Italy and then by individual mints in alphabetical order. For practical reasons, the present volume largely adheres to the organisational principles laid out in the *CNI* (see below), even though these principles do not always respect the historical development of the coinage and sometimes describe coins struck in the name of the same issuing authority in different volumes. This has had some unfortunate consequences for the trajectory of research on the coinage and monetary history of northern Italy, particularly in terms of the chronology of the coinage. It is not uncommon to find, for example, that numismatists have attributed coins of very similar type, style and standard, but of different mints, to different periods, though in fact they were contemporaneous or nearly contemporaneous issues.

The present volume is the first general survey to consider the coinage and monetary history of northern Italy on a broad regional basis, examining the coinage of each individual mint not only in its political and territorial setting but also in the context of the development of the other coinages in the wider region on the basis of direct comparison rather than through the sometimes-distorting prism of the literature. As a result of this approach, the authors have been able to present a completely revised and far more coherent picture of the coinage and monetary history of the region, correcting many long-standing misinterpretations, particularly with respect to attributions