

1 Urban Gardens and Gardeners

Growing your own food in early medieval Italy was both a necessity and a luxury. To feed a family, you needed land to grow things on. Sometimes you found that land in the ruins or abandoned lots next to you. And sometimes those ruins and that garden plot were prestigious and highly valued. Property documents from tenth-century Rome reveal a bustling city, living and working around its past. In 965, Leo, a priest of the church of SS. Quattro Coronati, located on the Caelian hill, and Helena, daughter of Petrus and Ursa, sold to Crescentius, son of Petrus:

a whole two-story house roofed with tiles,¹ with a courtyard in front of it, in which there is a pergola and a well and a marble stair. And also a large garden next to it and behind it. Wholly planted with vine. With different fruiting trees, and likewise the ruins² with use of water, and with all of the things pertaining to them, located in Rome, Regio 2, next to the *Decennias* [i.e. marshland in the southeast of the city]. And between the boundaries on two sides are public roads, one to the Porta Metrovia, the other to the Lateran Palace next to *Decennias*. On the third and fourth sides . . . and prepared ground of the monastery of the holy martyr of Christ Erasmus, and a vineyard, in which is the slope of the heirs of Ursa, of good memory.³

¹ On the terminology of Rome's houses, see Hubert, *Espace urbain et habitat à Rome*, pp. 172–9, and for Italy in general, see also La Rocca [Hudson], “‘Dark Ages’ a Verona”, p. 67, note 149.

² On *crypta/crypta* as ruins, presumably with some functional use, see Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, p. 119.

³ ‘me leone religioso presbytero uenerabilis tituli sanctorum quattuor coronatorum. Seu Helena honesta femina filia quoddam petrus. Seu ursa quoddam iugalibus. Sub usufructu dierum uite nostrae do donamus. Cedimus. Tradimus et inreuocabiliter largimur atque offerimus. Nullo nobis cogente. Neque contradicente. Aut uim faciente. Sed propria spontaneque nostre uoluntatis. Post discessum nostrum donamus et largimus tibi crescentio dulcissimo atque dilecto filio petrus. . . . Idest domus integram tigulicium solaratum cum inferioribus et superioribus suis. A solo et usque ad summum tectum. Cum curte ante se in quo est pergola atque puteum et scala marmorea. Et cum introito suo. Nec non et ortuo maiore iuxta se et de post se. in integro uineato. Cum diuersis arboribus pomarum simulque et criptis cum usu aquae. Et cum omnibus ad eas pertinentibus posita rome regione secunda iuxta decennias; Et inter affines a duobus lateribus uie publice. Unam que ducit ad portam mitrobi. Et aliam que ducit a lateranensis sacri palatii iuxta superscripta decennias. Et a tertio uel a quarto latere [lacuna] seu pastino de monasterio sancti martyris Christi herasmi et uinea in quo est pentoma de heredes quoddam ursa bone memoria. Iuris uestri [uenerabilis?] maioris sacri palatii.’ RS 90 (965), pp. 135–6. For a map of the area, see Figure 15.

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This house, garden, vineyard, and orchard were sold along with a number of suburban properties located outside the walls in Campanino, others at S. Lorenzo, and others outside the Porta Nomentana in a transaction recorded by a charter of 965, which was subsequently transcribed into the eleventh-century *Register* of Subiaco. The description of the properties conveys a rather fine urban parcel, including a substantial house and a range of cultivated land within the circuit of late antique walls around Rome. In this corner of the Caelian hill, the neighbouring lots were also cultivated properties, as the charter makes clear when describing the boundaries, so we might imagine this neighbourhood to have been a rather leafy patchwork of large houses, cultivated lots, and a couple of monasteries.⁴ After the sale, the vendors retained use of the possessions for their lifetimes, a typical arrangement in cessions of early medieval Italian properties. The text of the transaction, at least the text as it has been passed down to us by the copy in the *Register* from the monastery at Subiaco, is very much in keeping with contemporary transactions concerning rural properties, as we shall see, and suggests that the buyers and sellers were of relatively high status, doing business within their same social horizon. Their cultivated lands were integral parts of their households, and the lots with houses and gardens were surrounded by other cultivated properties.

There were many types of food cultivation within the city of Rome, even within a single property. This is clear from another document dating to 982, according to which Iohannes, the archdeacon of the church of S. Maria Nova, Rome, rented out for three generations a house in Regio 4, near the Colosseum, to another Leo, this one a priest from SS. Cosma e Damiano (Fig. 2):

It is one two-storied house with roof tiles; the whole thing with lower and upper floor, up to its roof, with a small courtyard and pergola and marble staircase in front of it, with its garden behind it in which there are olive trees or other fruiting trees, with entrance and exit and with all that pertains to it. It is located in Rome, Regio 4, not far from the Colosseum, in the temple which is called the Romuleum [scil. the Temple of Venus and Rome], between the boundaries from one side, the house of Romanus, a smith, and the house of Franco and Sergio, brothers, and the garden of the heirs of Kalopetrus (deceased), and on the second side the garden on Constantinus the priest, and his associates, and on the third side the garden of Anna, most noble girl, and house of Stephen, a bronze-worker, and on the fourth side a public road.⁵

⁴ On the Caelian Hill and other cultivated properties there, see p. 88, Chapter 3.

⁵ ‘inter Iohannem ... archidiaconum summae sanctae Apostolicae Sedis et praepositum venerabili diaconiae sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae domin[ae nostrae] quae appellatur Noba, consentientem sibi cuncto clero et serbitores eidem venerabili diaconiae, et te diverso Leonem humilem religiosumque presbiterum venerabili diaconiae sanctorum martirum Cosme et Damiani quae ponitur in Via Sacra ... condutionis titulo. Idest domum solarata

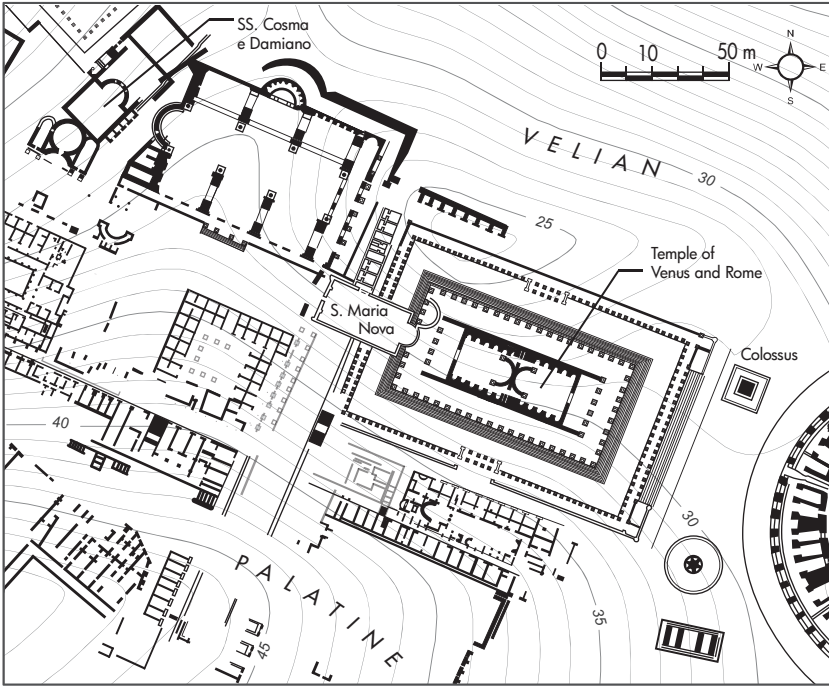


Figure 2 Plan of the area of the lower Forum Romanum, including the Temple of Venus and Rome in the Middle Ages. Plan based on Lanciani, *Forma Urbis*, tav. 29.

Here, on the Roman Forum, a house located within the precinct of an ancient temple is a sizeable structure with different kinds of cultivated land around it. Neighbouring properties were similar holdings, though these may not have been as lavish. A marble staircase and pergola are mentioned specifically in the charter; they may have been particularly

tegulicia et scandolicia una in integrum cum inferiora et superiora sua a solo et usque a summo tecto, cum corticella sua et pergula atque scala marmorea ante se, cum hortuo suo post se in qua sunt arbores olivarum seu ceteras arbores pomarum, cum introito et exoito suo vel cum omnibus ad eam pertinentibus. Posita Romae re[gi]one quarta non longe a Colossus in templum quod vocatur Romuleum, inter affines ab uno latere domum de Romano ferrario, atque domum de Franco et Sergio germanis, sive hortuo de heredes quondam Kalopetro, et a secundo latere hortuo de Constantio presbitero et de suis consortibus, et a tertio latere hortuo de Anna nobilissima puella et domum de Stephano herario, et a quarto latere via publica', *TSMN* 1 (1982), pp. 182–4. On the neighbourhood around S. Maria Nova and the temple, see Augenti, *Il Palatino nel medioevo*, pp. 102–3; on the bronze-workers there, see Wickham, *Medieval Rome*, p. 143.

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prestigious aspects of this house. The actors in the transaction are neighbours in some sense: S. Maria Nova is located between SS. Cosma and Damiano and the former Temple of Venus and Rome, so the people involved in this rental agreement worked and prayed very nearby this property in the centre of town, where Leo lived. These documents sketch for us the look and feel of the early medieval city, as well as a peek at the lives of its inhabitants, revealing the integral role played by urban cultivation in the life of Romans. Previous scholarship has paid considerable attention to the social relationships forged through property transactions and the ways in which status was conveyed through the re-use of ancient buildings and urban topographies. But the gardens and orchards, which linked people's houses and status to their ability to provide food for their families, have been ignored. This book takes urban gardens as its subject, to redefine the early medieval city as a place where households were often productive, where food gardens were desirable assets, strategically protected, and where new ideas about wealth and welfare emerged.

The survey of the early medieval property documents from the seventh to the mid eleventh century reveals gardens, orchards, and other cultivated lands located both on the edges of the city, as well as in the more densely built-up centre. In early medieval Rome, as in every other city of the Italian peninsula, people organised themselves and their social relations around their food gardens. Many of the people who appear in these Roman documents were attached to a Roman church in one way or another, as clerics, lay officials, or lessees. We see also a tradesman, the smith, and women with allotments; we can see families organising their possessions and inheritances with a view to safeguarding houses – and their gardens and orchards – for subsequent generations.

References to kitchen gardens at houses in Rome appear in letters and contracts from the late sixth century, the mid seventh century at Ravenna, and with increasing frequency as the documentary record expands in the early Middle Ages. The episcopal city of Lucca in the eighth century has been described as 'a garden city' based upon the frequency of '*horti*' among the houses in the preserved property documents.⁶ Gardens have been taken as a ubiquitous part of early medieval cities.⁷ Food gardens in the medieval city are generally taken by historians as clear signs of the

⁶ Belli Barsali, 'La topografia di Lucca', p. 488.

⁷ 'Avec une belle unanimité, les actes mentionnent tout au long de la période, et bien au-delà, la présence de jardins derrière les maisons. À cela rien d'original: dans toutes les villes, même les plus peuplées, espaces non bâtis et cultivés aéraient le tissu urbain ... Omniprésence des jardinets donc, du Xe au XIIIe siècle, quel que soit le quartier [of Rome]', Hubert, *Espace urbain et habitat à Rome*, pp. 164–5.

decline of the post-Roman world. Once their ubiquity is noted, their causes identified as the economic collapse of the Roman empire, urban gardens are not explored further. Such a summary view overlooks the confluence of many social, economic, and political forces which created the need and the possibility of gardening, and misses the vigorous efforts of people to make and secure their access to gardens, and the values they accorded to self-sufficiency.

In this book I examine the creation of urban spaces for cultivation, their use, by whom and how, and ideas about productive horticulture in the early Middle Ages. The primary place of food-growing in early medieval Italy was certainly in the countryside, in fields, orchards, and gardens that were either owned outright, rented, or worked by obligation or servitude.⁸ A geographic division between rural production and urban consumption is nearly universal for urbanised pre-modern cities from antiquity on, but in Italy the distinction became fuzzy for a period between about 500 and 1050 CE, and it is in this period that urban food gardening emerged across the cities of Italy. In the early Middle Ages, much urban property was cultivated for food.

My study of urban gardens, through their textual and archaeological records, provides us with a window onto shifting social structures within the city, the presence or absence of markets in perishable foodstuffs, and emerging ideas of charity. The combined analysis of property documents with letters, narrative chronicles, and new urban archaeology make it now possible to observe urban food provisioning in early medieval Italy and to relate the phenomenon of urban gardening with wider economic patterns, cultural and social contexts, and shifting power structures in the city. The centrality of household economies emerges clearly from this study, as do the rich and sophisticated new ideas about cultivation and Christian charity; these ideas gave colour and value to the economic and ecological transformations of urban landscapes.

A significant proportion of early medieval Italian documents which refer to agricultural land growing fruits, vegetables, grapes, olives, and sometimes nuts describe these cultivated lands as being within cities. A graphic representation of all of the edited property documents, more or less, from tenth-century Rome is provided here (Fig. 3). Out of 186, three-quarters pertain to suburban and rural farmlands owned by people or institutions based in the city, the rest to urban properties; of these, four-fifths are, or include, cultivated spaces. As at Rome, so too at Salerno the majority of the documents which pertain to urban houses include references to cultivated spaces. Paolo

⁸ Montanari, *L'alimentazione contadina*, pp. 309–36; and on domestic-scale food production in villages, see Petracco-Sicardi, 'La casa rurale nell'alto medioevo', pp. 364–5.

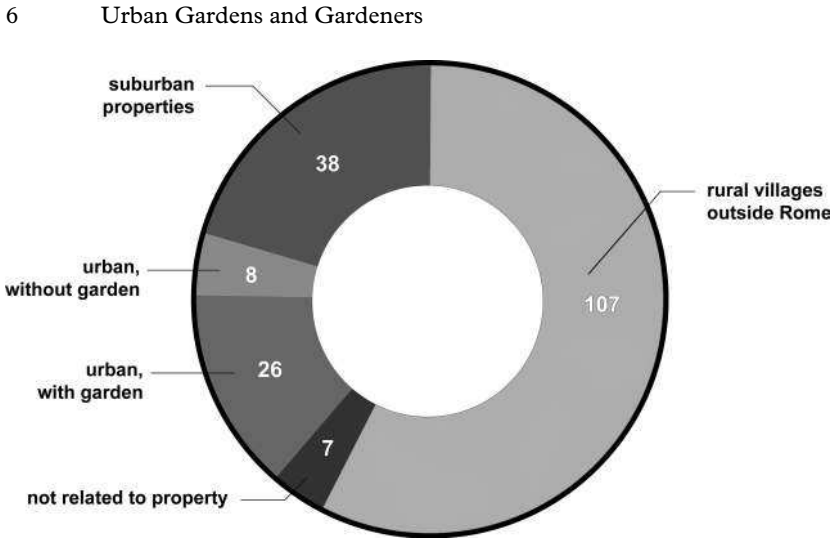


Figure 3 Graph of the preserved charters from tenth-century Rome and the proportion of these documents which relate to urban gardens.

Delogu surveyed property documents from Salerno preserved in the Abbazia di Cava, identifying 105 houses at or around Salerno in the period between 853 and 946 CE. Of these, 10 are urban townhouses, 8 of which have plots of land joined to them.⁹ Documents recording property transactions such as these constitute a significant body of evidence for the phenomenon of urban agriculture and reveal, sometimes, not only where there was cultivation within cities but also who owned a garden, and to whom they passed it on.

Through my survey of the property documents from the seventh to the mid eleventh century, I can find gardens, orchards, and other cultivated lands located both on the edges of the city as well as in the more densely built up centre. In early medieval Rome, people organised themselves and their social relations around their food gardens. Many of the people who appear in these documents were attached to a Roman church in one way or another, as clerics, lay officials, or lessees. We see also a tradesman, the smith, and women with allotments; we can see families organising their possessions and inheritances with a view to safeguarding houses – and their gardens and orchards – for subsequent generations.

⁹ Delogu, *Mito di una città meridionale*, pp. 118–19, notes 23–4. Later in the tenth and eleventh centuries, there are fewer documents recording houses with parcels of land: between 962 and 1064 there are 95 houses, with *curte* or *terra vacua* pertaining to only 10 of them, but 78 are without; 7 are unclear or pertain to houses already tallied.

Ubiquity of Urban Cultivation

Rome was the largest city in Italy in this period and in all of Latin Europe until the eleventh century; it was the most complex city but was in many ways a scaled-up version of other Italian cities. The picture of a city filled with houses next to gardens which emerges from this sample of the documentary record is borne out when compared to Naples and its documents, and across Italy, both in the north and in the south. As in Rome, it was common for wealthy families and monasteries based in Naples to own rural properties outside the city, extending beyond the immediate suburbs to rural villages in the periphery, as well as their houses with gardens inside the city. For example, a family of smiths owned a number of townhouses on the Vico S. Giorgio, within the walls, as well as concentrations of property at the villages of Marano, 6 km to the northwest, and Miano, 3 km to the north.¹⁰ One document describes a property parcel including a ‘terra’, a term which usually refers to a grain field, within the city and a vegetable garden outside the Porta Capuana.¹¹ It is unlikely that there were fields of wheat within the city of Naples, which was a relatively small area enclosed by walls, so there was some fluidity to the terminology of cultivated spaces both within the walls and beyond, as we will discuss. Neapolitan documents of the tenth and early eleventh centuries give some sense of the wide range of crops grown in and around the city.¹² These include greens (*folia*),¹³ onions and leeks,¹⁴ wheat and millet,¹⁵ grapes for wine, made into young wine (*saccapanna*),¹⁶ fruit and nuts,¹⁷ chestnuts and acorns,¹⁸ white beans,¹⁹ small fava beans,²⁰ red beans,²¹ and barley.²² There is an occasional reference to citron trees at Naples; citrus trees, such as they were in the

¹⁰ Skinner, ‘Urban communities in Naples’, pp. 291–4. ¹¹ RN 5 (917), pp. 20–1.

¹² For discussion of the products grown in Italian cities, see Montanari, ‘I prodotti e l’alimentazione’; Skinner, *Health and medicine*, pp. 4–7; Vitolo, ‘I prodotti della terra’. Note that Skinner, *Health and medicine*, p. 7, identified cucumbers in two Neapolitan documents. This identification is a mistranslation of *caucumenas*, which refers to young plants or vine propagations and appears in many documents from Naples and elsewhere. See Libertini, *Documenti del regio archivio napoletano*, p. 70.

¹³ CDC vol. II, 336 (982), pp. 162–4. It has been suggested that greens were exclusive to Neapolitan documents, *Health and medicine*, p. 7, but they also appear elsewhere, if infrequently, cf. *SMCM* 16 (1072).

¹⁴ RN 443 (1033), p. 277 for the monastery of S. Gregorio, grown in Fullotani.

¹⁵ Among many examples, see RN 379 (1019), pp. 236–7, from the monastery of SS. Sergio and Bacchus, grown in Paterno.

¹⁶ There are dozens of records specifying payment in kind (wine) for the area of Naples.

¹⁷ RN 379 (1019), pp. 236–7. ¹⁸ RN 399 (1023), p. 250; RN 396 (1022), p. 247.

¹⁹ RN 395 (1022), p. 247. ²⁰ RN 3 (915), p. 19; RN 281 (993), p. 174.

²¹ RN 267 (990), pp. 165–6 in Casafarro; RN 275 (992), p. 170 in the area of the Porta Romana; RN 277 (992), pp. 171–2; RN 391 (1021), pp. 244–5.

²² RN 392 (1021) pp. 245–6, in this case for the horses working the vintage.

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early Middle Ages, were mostly grown in the south.²³ Through the documentary record, Neapolitan urban cultivation and the people who grew food and received agricultural products in rental payments emerge in fine detail. They are one part of a larger picture of agriculture and its sociopolitical context in early medieval Italy, a part which warrants, I argue, special consideration.

In selecting urban cultivation as the focus of special consideration, I aim to reveal the interrelationships of economies, ideas, and material realities. While on the one hand urban production related to the wider agronomics of medieval Italy, on the other hand it reveals in fine detail how some people negotiated the changed circumstances of urban life in the centuries after the fall of Rome. In focussing on urban farming, we can observe other broad changes, too, such as the church – both the people within the institution and the ideas which they developed and put forward – becoming a major force within society and economies becoming increasingly simplified, local, and centred on households. In this sense, a history of urban gardening serves as a sort of microhistory, a spyhole into urban relationships, household strategies, and the practicalities of getting food on the table, daily, in the profoundly unpredictable world created at the end of empire.

Despite the presumed ubiquity of food gardens, and the abundant evidence provided by property documents, no study has yet attempted to explain when and how the spaces for food horticulture – vegetable gardens, orchards, vineyards, and grain fields – appeared in the urban fabric and how these changes respond to, or provoke other changes in medieval cities. Nor has the significance of urban cultivation as it evolved over time been the focus of research. This absence of study prevails despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that scholars have long noted the omnipresence of cultivated spaces within early medieval cities. Given the intense focus in recent years on the early medieval city as a centre of production and a landscape of power, the extent and nature of early medieval urban horticulture still remain unclear. Does the presence of domestic gardens indicate a shift in landholding patterns or expectations about the nature of the urban landscape? Did they appear in certain sectors of a city more than others? Is there evidence for change over time in their appearance and use, or geographical variation? Early medieval archaeologists, while noting the presence of areas which might have been cultivated, have not examined the ways in which gardens changed

²³ 'portionem de domum et de curte et horticello, ubi est cetrarius', *RN* 67 (949), p. 57. On citrus, see Vitolo, 'I prodotti della terra', p. 18 and now *AGRUMED. Archaeology and history of citrus fruit*.

not only the urban profile of the city but also the social and economic landscape. Domestic food production and market gardens in early medieval cities have rarely been analysed at all, despite their widely recognised ubiquity.

Urban gardening was hardly unique to Italy among other parts of the post-Roman world, but there are two reasons for which Italy is a compelling focus of this study.²⁴ First, the cities of the Italian peninsula were emblematic of the processes of Roman urbanisation across western Eurasia. The legacy of ancient cities – and many of Italy’s cities were very ancient by the Middle Ages – was both material and cultural. Roman cities had been the principal places of governance, administration, much commerce, as well as the performance of civilising cultural values and status within imperial hierarchies. A dense network of cities, linked by roads and rivers, had developed across the peninsula during the Roman Republic and became richer and more vibrant in the imperial period, up to about 350.²⁵ The fabric and built environment of Italian cities endured as a resource to be exploited and re-exploited in subsequent centuries, and the idea of a city as a social and political entity, a machine for the performance of social prestige and power, and an economic condition generated by residential density, underpinned much of Italian society through the Middle Ages.²⁶ Thus, because Italian cities had been more numerous and more sophisticated than elsewhere and because they provided such central pillars in the structure of early medieval society, the study of urban gardens in Italy is critical to our understanding of how cities and society worked.

The second reason that Italy is a suitable subject for the study of urban cultivation is the availability of evidence. We know more about cities in Italy than about cities nearly anywhere else in early medieval Western Eurasia thanks to documentary archives and well-preserved (and well-excavated) city centres. Documentary records of the properties of early medieval Italy and intensive urban archaeology over several decades of the twentieth century provide ample and diverse angles from which to view urban food production. Using charters, letters, and inscriptions, this book plots the emerging phenomenon of cultivated land inside the medieval Italian city, from domestic vegetable patches, orchards, and

²⁴ Compare Constantinople; see Maguire, ‘Gardens and parks in Constantinople’; Koder, *Gemüse in Byzanz*. On Byzantine gardens (broadly defined), see Littlewood et al., *Byzantine garden culture*; Brubaker and Littlewood, ‘Byzantinische Gärten’.

²⁵ On the cities of Roman Italy, Cracco Ruggini, ‘La città nel mondo antico: realtà e idea’; Crawford, ‘Italy and Rome from Sulla to Augustus’.

²⁶ Cantino Wataghin, ‘Quadri urbani’; La Rocca, ‘Public buildings and urban change’; Marazzi, ‘Cadavera urbium’; Goodson, ‘Urbanism in the politics of power’.

vineyards between houses, to arable fields cleared within city walls. References to these kinds of plots begin to appear in documents of the late sixth century and increase in frequency up to the late eleventh or twelfth centuries, when population pressures began to drive most cultivation outside the city again, as gardens were built over for new houses and suburban areas were developed for commercial agriculture. Urban archaeology provides some additional insights into these changes. The centres of most Italian cities have been excavated, whether in the nineteenth century, after the Second World War, or in modern commercial excavations. Some very recent excavations have included palaeobotanical analysis of pollens and plant remains. The archaeological identification of gardens remains challenging, but excavations have revealed late antique townhouses partially backfilled with earth where deposits of Dark Earth (thick accumulations of dark-coloured sediments) formed. The material realities of early medieval cities, when considered holistically, make newly clear the chronology and extent of the change in structures of townhouses, and the presence of urban agriculture within residential complexes and household economies and the possible roles that urban gardening played in the evolution of new ideas about early medieval societies. Further, by drawing on such textual and archaeological resources, this book also attempts to reconstruct the *un*built environment, revealing the range and intensity of urban cultivation in early medieval Italy and its economic and its social value. Consideration of the interplay between ancient buildings, residential architecture, and cultivated areas provides a new context to examine how people interacted in medieval cities through their urban spaces.

Urbanism

The intense urbanism of Italy is relatively unusual compared with the rest of the Western medieval world, where cities – such as there were – were small central places within territories filled with villages, rural monasteries, and elite country residences.²⁷ In Carolingian Europe, political ritual and social mobility were often tied to rural lands and their management. The Frankish kingdom (and later the empire), was ruled by the central authority of the king, but also through an extensive web of administrative forces, down to the county level.²⁸ By contrast, in post-Roman Italy, and in central and southern Italy in particular, cities persisted from antiquity

²⁷ On the unique qualities of Italian urbanism and its historiography, see La Rocca, ‘Perceptions of an early medieval urban landscape’, pp. 427–8; Wickham, *Framing the early Middle Ages*, pp. 644–56.

²⁸ Ganshof, *Frankish institutions under Charlemagne*, pp. 71–97.