

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the later Middle Ages, Italy contained more large cities than any other country in Europe. This might not seem particularly remarkable since an increasing proportion of the peninsula's total population had begun to live in urban settlements as early as 1000 BC. As in the valleys of the Euphrates, Nile, Indus and Yangste millennia before, levels of agricultural production in Italy had started to yield an annual food surplus,¹ releasing part of the workforce to make a variety of goods ranging from textiles and pottery to metalware, bricks and wooden artefacts, and allowing some to engage in trade – activities that tend to cluster together in terms of location so as to benefit from economies of scale, including agglomeration economies. Viewed thus, urbanisation was the outcome of the spatial concentration of social surplus production.² It was a process that, throughout much of the 1st millennium BC, saw urban settlements of between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants founded by the Etruscans in northern and central Italy, while Italic tribes such as the Latini and Sabini created settlements throughout the rest of the peninsula, except in its heel and in Sicily where Greek colonisers established trading ports. By the late 4th century BC, the population of Italic Rome had probably reached 10,000 and was broadly similar in size to that of the largest of the Greek ports, Tarentum (present-day Taranto).

Urbanisation in Italy, to a large extent, was reflected in the size of Rome. Dependent on its imperial economy, the population of the city reached a peak of between 1 and 2 million around AD 100, but thereafter for a thousand years it declined as the result of invasion by hostile peoples and the lack of means to sustain its economy. By the time of Constantine (AD 306–37), numbers had dwindled to about 800,000; with the relocation of the imperial capital to Constantinople the population of Rome plummeted to 90,000 during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (*c* 600) and fell yet further, to only 35,000

in around AD 1100.³ Elsewhere in the peninsula, urban populations were much smaller during most of the early Middle Ages than at the time of the empire, and many settlements simply disappeared.

A question must therefore be asked: how was it that the dormant urban areas of Italy came again to experience sufficient growth to enable the country to accommodate the greatest number of cities in Western Europe, and what were the factors that led to the increase in the degree of urbanisation in the peninsula? Like the question, the answer is in two parts. First, despite Italy being mainly mountainous – the Alps provide its northern border and the Apennines its north–south axis – the geomorphology of much of the peninsula is fundamentally favourable to human settlement (fig 1.1) and, once the political and economic instability of the Dark Ages receded towards the end of the 1st millennium, physical geography again exerted a positive influence over urban growth. In the majority of cases, cities were established on or near the coast, in river valleys,

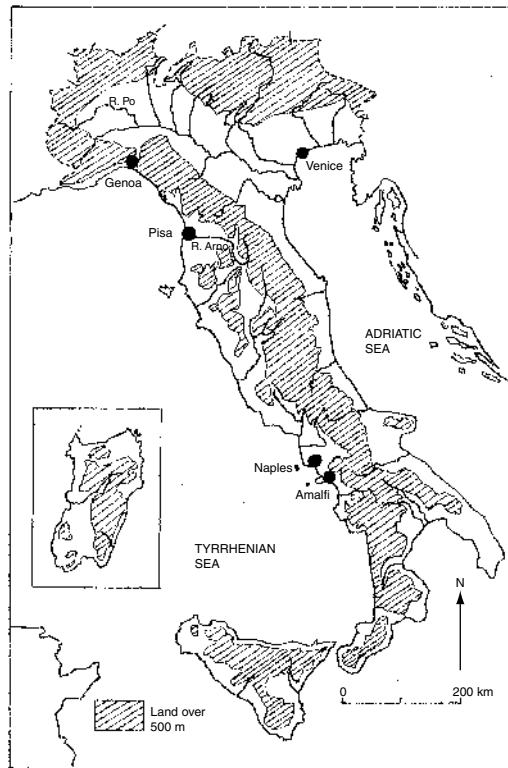


Figure 1.1 The physical structure of Italy

or in close proximity to mountain passes. With a lengthy coastline of some 3,500 kilometres protruding into the Mediterranean, population growth was particularly pronounced in the ports of Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Naples and Amalfi which, in establishing strong trading links with Byzantium and the Arab world, became major centres of population and European economic development as early as the 10th century. The three great riverine systems of the Po, Arno and Tiber were similarly conducive to urban growth, as were locations close to the 17 or more passes that traversed the Alps and the Apennines. Geomorphology, however, was not alone responsible for determining the location and growth of



Photo 1.1 Basilica of S Marco, Venice, *c* 830 (rebuilt 11th century). Reflecting Venetian trading importance, Europe's most flamboyant cathedral combines Byzantine and western styles. With its Greek cross plan, large central dome and smaller domes over the aisles and transepts, the edifice is the focal point of the Piazza S Marco.

cities. Along the northern fringe of the Apennines a string of cities stretched along the important man-made route of the Roman Via Emilia, and it is along this route that urban growth was particularly spectacular in the central Middle Ages.

Second, there was an increased rate of migration from rural areas to the budding towns and older urban agglomerations, a result both of greater agricultural productivity throughout the peninsula and of greater employment opportunities in the cities, a process that, according to Lauro Martines, ‘was well under way by the beginning of the eleventh century and would continue, on a massive scale, down to nearly 1300. The immigrants were the landless and the poor who worked with their hands, but also, and more visibly, the propertied: vassals and subvassals, knights, small landowners, random or itinerant country merchants.’⁴ Urbanisation was particularly apparent in northern Italy in the 11th and 12th centuries. Minor settlements such as Prato and Macerata suddenly burgeoned into thriving towns; ancient cities such as Milan, Pavia, Cremona and Mantua, to quote Martines, ‘were borne up once again in a rising flood of people, property transactions, commerce and feverish activity in the building trades’.⁵ By the end of the central Middle Ages in *c* 1250, relatively minor river ports such as Florence together with the tiny cities of the northern plain – Piacenza, Cremona, Verona and Padua – also ‘exhibited spectacular dynamism and . . . eagerly received foreign merchants or as eagerly dispatched their own’.⁶

Urban Development: the Political Dimension

Italian cities experienced substantial political upheaval during the early and central Middle Ages. Over a period of 500 years following the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century, the Italian peninsula was invaded by a succession of peoples – Ostrogoths, Byzantines, Lombards and Franks. Within the towns that survived both these traumas, ‘real power ended by being local power in the hands of local magnates, usually bishops, though it was soon enough claimed or grabbed by cities’.⁷ By the 12th century, most of northern and central Italy including Rome and the Papal State had been incorporated into the German-ruled Holy Roman Empire, Rome was capital of a small Papal State, Venice remained independent, and Naples and the foot of the peninsula were under Byzantine control. Sicily was subject to Arab rule from the 820s and Norman sovereignty from the 1070s until it was absorbed by the Holy Roman Empire in 1194.

However, in much of northern and central Italy in the 11th and early 12th centuries the Franconian rulers of the Holy Roman Empire were ‘weak, absentee,

or too pre-occupied with other concerns to devote time and energy to local issues',⁸ and aided and abetted by the papacy in its struggle against the empire, ever more cities in northern and central Italy sought and gained independence from feudal suzerainty, though they remained under the overarching authority of the empire. Often in the wake of civic revolt in, for example, Pavia (1024), Cremona (1030–1), Parma (1037) and Milan (1036–7, 1040 and 1042–3), self-governing communes were established between the 1080s and 1138, as set out below:

Pisa	1080s	Piacenza	1090	Pistoia	1105
Lucca	1080s	Asti	1095	Verona	1107
Milan	1081	Cremona	1098	Bologna	1123
Parma	1081	Arezzo	1099	Siena	1125
Rome	1083	Genoa	1099	Florence	1138
Pavia	1084	Como	1105		

(Sources: Martines, *Power and Imagination*, p 18; Waley, *The Italian City-Republic*, p 199.)

Once established, the communes set up regular assemblies of citizens (*arenghi*) to debate matters of common concern and to elect consuls who would take responsibility for internal law and order, external affairs and strengthening the city's political authority over its surrounding territory – the *contado*.⁹ Communes were also responsible for funding major building projects such as the construction of cathedrals, town halls and law courts. However, independence, even within the empire, soon became illusory. Following the demise of the Franconian emperors in 1137, their Hohenstaufen successors attempted to reassert direct control over many of the cities of northern and central Italy. To this end, Frederick I (Barbarossa) presided over the creation of *podestà* to assume responsibility for the administration of justice, finance and defence and to remove it from the hands of the consular authorities, for it was becoming clear that under their rule the cities were growing increasingly ungovernable due to civil strife and intra-communal power struggles among the ruling elites. To preserve neutrality, it became common practice to select the *podestà* from a city other than the one which required his services and, to prevent the holder of the office becoming too powerful, he was appointed for no longer than six months or a year.

At a time when the papacy was striving to gain temporal influence throughout the peninsula, greater imperial involvement in the affairs of the north, particularly in curbing consular power and responsibility, was ultimately a recipe for military conflict, notwithstanding any benefits that accrued. Aided and abetted by the papacy, in 1167–75 as many as 28 northern cities formed the Lombard

League and later defeated Frederick Barbarossa at the battle of Legnano in 1176. Although at the Peace of Constance (1183) Frederick I subsequently conferred constitutional autonomy on all communes, a further attempt to re-establish full imperial suzerainty was successful when Frederick II defeated a resurrected League at Cortenuova in 1237; but the price was continuing political instability for at least a further century. As a defence against imperial power, many Italian cities allied themselves with the papacy, while others, even more wary of papal intentions, supported the empire. During the early 13th century, the Guelph cities of Milan, Bologna, Florence, Lucca, Montepulciano and Orvieto gave their allegiance to the papacy, while the Ghibelline cities of Pisa, Pistoia, Arezzo and Siena demonstrated strong pro-imperialist sympathies. (Guelphs and Ghibellines are Italian political terms based respectively on the family name of the dukes of Bavaria 'Welf' and a castle of the Hohenstaufen dukes 'Waiblingen'. In the Italianised version, the terms entered common usage at the time of the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick's conflict with the papacy, 1235–50.) Within and between cities, tensions were often exacerbated by a similar but more complex division of loyalty, a recipe for internal insecurity in the centuries ahead.

It was during this period of papal-imperial conflict, and particularly in the second half of the 12th century, that many cities such as Pisa (1162), Cremona (1169–87), Milan (1170s), Brescia (1174–86), Bologna (1176–7), Bergamo (1190), Como (1190s) and Reggio (1199) built walls around their suburbs in an attempt to safeguard their autonomy.¹⁰ Although such defences were constructed principally to repel invaders, over time they would come to serve an altogether different purpose. In a period when the urban population of Italy was increasing at a phenomenal rate (by over 50 per cent between 1150 and 1300), city walls provided the physical boundaries within which urban growth could occur and, in demarcating a finite urban space in which construction could take place, often encouraged programmes of planned development to combat squalor and ensure the most efficient use of land.

Urban Development: the Economic Dimension

Although geomorphology largely determines the location of towns and cities, the physical configuration of land *per se* does not provide a reliable indication of the extent to which, in terms of economic development, urban areas will expand, stay the same, or contract, nor does it suggest whether or not economic growth in one town or city will be at the expense of growth elsewhere. Urban growth in

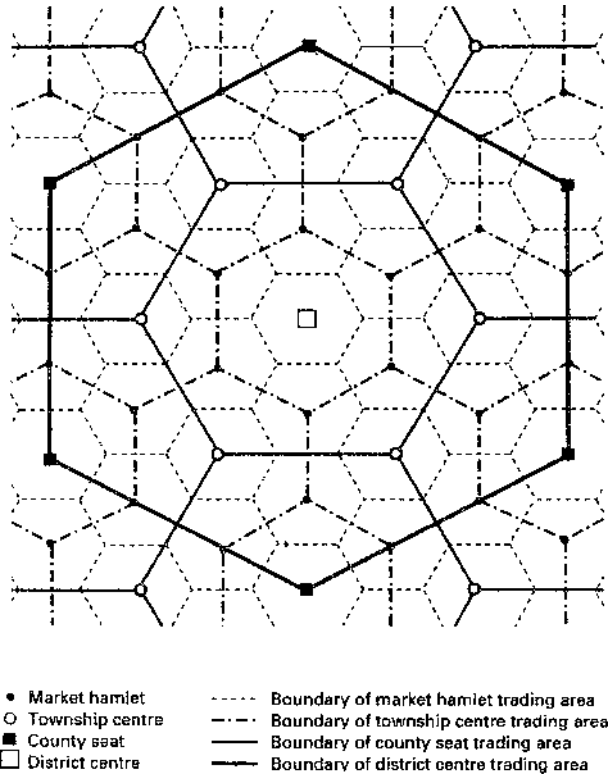


Figure 1.2 Christaller's theory of the arrangement of central places, used to illustrate the relationship between different-sized urban settlements and their market areas
Source: W Christaller, 1933.

economic terms is largely demand-led. A city is more likely to grow if the demand for its goods and services increases than if autonomously it increases the supply of products. The economic growth of cities in any country or region can be examined in relation to a number of interrelated theories such as Christaller's central place theory (fig 1.2), the urban base and cumulative causation explanations of urban growth, and the Keynesian macroeconomic income-generation approach.

Although it might seem somewhat bizarre to compare the spatial pattern and magnitude of urban growth in southern Germany with those of parts of northern and central Italy (particularly since many of the cities of Italy were developed by Rome as military settlements), there are a number of fundamental similarities that are worthy of consideration. In examining the distribution of urban settlements in the former region in the 1930s, Walter Christaller hypothesised

that the distribution of localised services (retailing, wholesaling, banking and public services) accounts for the spacing, size and functional pattern of urban centres.¹¹ Assuming that urban settlements locate on a more or less even plain, service centres would be distributed regularly within a systematic pattern. Market areas or spheres of influence would take the form of a hexagonal mesh which would avoid either certain areas not being served, or other areas being served by overlapping hinterlands – consequences of a pattern of circular market areas.

The main function of each town would be to supply goods and services to the surrounding countryside – town and country being economically interdependent, but with larger towns also performing the role of centres of government. A hierarchy of centres would thus evolve. Towns with the lowest level of specialisation would be evenly distributed and surrounded by their hexagonally shaped market areas. For each rank of settlement, there would be a larger settlement with more specialised functions located at an equal distance from other centres with the same degree of specialisation. Such cities would have larger hexagonal hinterlands for their own specialised services. Even larger and more specialised settlements would have more extensive market areas (and areas of political control) and be situated broadly equidistant from one another.

Christaller believed that the lowest-ranked centres were likely to be located 7 kilometres from each other, while the highest ranked would be 186 kilometres apart; ‘urban’ populations would range in size from 800 to 300,000; market areas would contain between 45,000 and 32,000 square kilometres, and market area populations would range from 2,700 to 2,025,000. Since the number of settlements of successively lower rank follows a geometric progression (1, 3, 9, 27...), the pattern is referred to as a $k = 3$ hierarchy. Towns within the hierarchy would expand as a result of increased production of goods and services to satisfy an increase in demand from a growing population within their market areas, but generally they would remain within their rank and the rule of three would persist.

Christaller recognised that the hierarchy would be modified by long-distance trade, by transport routes and by administrative functions. Towns influenced by these factors would have larger populations than their local market would imply, and would be part of a $k = 4$ or even $k = 7$ hierarchy. Settlement would generally tend to be clustered along main routes such as river valleys and be larger at road junctions and river confluences, and as such their market areas were unlikely to be hexagonal. Manufacturing would also have an agglomerating influence, increasing population out of proportion to the size of the immediate market area. Taking these factors into account, and also acknowledging that urban population in Italy during the later Middle Ages and Early Modern Period was considerably less than that in southern Germany in the early 20th century, one can hypothesise

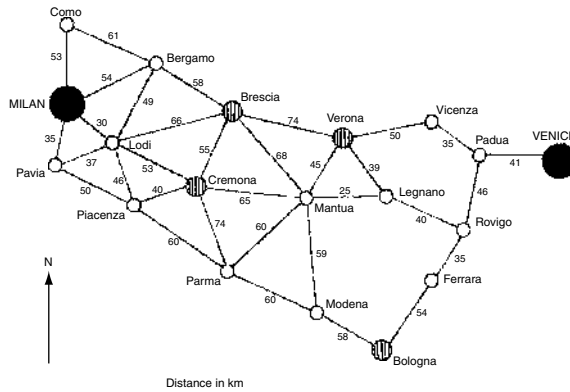


Figure 1.3 Central places on the North Italian Plain

that in general terms central place theory could explain the distribution of urban settlements particularly in the middle of the North Italian Plain (fig 1.3). Taking population data for around 1300,¹² Venice and Milan (both with around 100,000 inhabitants and about 310 kilometres apart) would qualify as regional capital cities, and settlements such as Bologna, Brescia, Cremona and Verona (each with more than 40,000 inhabitants and up to 85 kilometres from their nearest medium-size neighbour) would rank as second-tier cities, while settlements with yet smaller populations such as Pavia, Lodi, Piacenza, Bergamo, Brescia, Parma, Modena and Bologna would fall into a lower rank and be closer in proximity to each other. It is interesting to note that at each level of the hierarchy, the *contado* – the dependent area encircling or adjacent to a main city or town – very largely coincides with the market area concept of Christaller. On the eastern edge of the North Italian Plain, a relatively even distribution of settlements is less apparent, partly because urban development took place in a different political context than in the west (the region had not attracted the same degree of Roman occupation and it was relatively devoid of communal development in the central and later Middle Ages), and partly because the topography was less favourable to settlement (much of the region was marshland).

Examination of the urban base theory provides a further explanation for the variable growth of cities within a given geographical area. As devised by RW Pfouts,¹³ the theory involves a consideration of the demand for the city's surplus output of goods and services from anywhere outside the settlement's boundaries. The more a city specialises, the more it undermines its self-sufficiency. Urban growth will thus depend upon the urban area's ability to export products (such as manufactured goods and banking services) to pay for its imported goods

(for example, food and raw materials). The production of goods and services for export is known as a 'basic' activity and the output of products for distribution solely to the urban area itself is referred to as a 'non-basic' activity (for example, municipal services, building activity, local retailing). According to the theory, the growth of an urban area depends upon the ratio of basic to non-basic activities (as measured by the proportion of the working population involved in the production of each): the higher the ratio, the greater the rate of growth. Non-basic industries will be dependent upon the basic sector, the working population involved with the former providing much of the demand for the products of the latter. On the assumption that underlying economic, social and technological factors remain broadly constant, and that there is an absence of war, famine and plague, the development of basic employment in the town or city will stimulate a marked growth of non-basic employment to meet the higher local demand for goods and services. Thus any temporary instability resulting from an initial increase in basic employment (for example, the introduction of the silk textile industry in Florence in the 15th century) will be eliminated through an upward adjustment in non-basic employment (such as in local retailing). Dependent populations will similarly increase. The extent of the change in both the employed population and the total population will be a multiple of the initial increase in basic employment. If, for example, the basic to non-basic ratio is 1:3, then 2,000 more jobs in textile manufacture for export might increase total employment by 6,000 – or the dependent population from say 4,000 to 12,000.

The urban base theory also suggests that if an urban area loses some basic employment, less non-basic employment will be required and the settlement's population will decline at a multiple of the initial withdrawal of basic employment. Clearly, a decrease in total employment and population could equally be triggered by war, famine and disease.

The theory, however, has its weaknesses. For example, non-basic activity (rather than basic activity) could be the driving force in urban growth. From the later Middle Ages onwards, this might increasingly have been the case in cities accommodating the administrative apparatus of urban government, and in Rome *vis-à-vis* management of the Papal State.

However, would the growth of individual cities in medieval and Early Modern Italy (due to an initial increase in basic activity) have been at the expense of other settlements in the peninsula, and would the decline of particular cities (due to their loss of basic employment) have been the outcome of urban growth elsewhere? An answer is provided by Hoselitz, who in the 1950s argued that urban growth could be 'parasitic' as well as 'generative'.¹⁴ He suggests that in the developed countries

of the 20th century, urban growth was probably generative in that it stimulated economic growth and produced a ‘surplus’ in the wider urban region, whereas in developing countries – and by implication in Europe before modern times – growth was parasitic (ie, surpluses were extracted from surrounding regions and their settlements). The dependency theory, introduced by Myrdal in 1957, reinforced this approach.¹⁵ Under *laissez faire*, according to this theory, cities grow parasitically by exploiting and holding back their surrounding regions. Myrdal suggests that economic growth follows the principle of ‘cumulative causation’, whereby once established in a city economic development promotes further local development – the ‘spread effect’, but this is only at the expense of surrounding areas or other areas elsewhere – the ‘backwash effect’. The same was true of service activity, including administration. The implication is that, in relative and possibly in absolute terms, rich cities and regions get richer and richer, and poor areas, poorer and poorer. This might possibly explain why Florence, Venice, Milan, Genoa, Rome and Naples – for much of the time operating as independent entities – have remained the dominant economic powers in their regions and in the peninsula from the later Middle Ages to the present.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that there is an alternative explanation for the pattern of urban growth that developed in the later Middle Ages and beyond. In the 1960s, Boudeville posited that as a consequence of *laissez-faire* conditions growth trickles spontaneously down from larger to smaller cities.¹⁶ Larger cities would thus perform a generative role in economic development across their regions: for example, during the 16th century Venice generated activity across its *terraferma* while Florence and Milan helped to stimulate urban growth elsewhere in their respective Tuscan and Lombard market areas.

Urban growth, however, can also be explained in macroeconomic terms by the Keynesian model of economic growth, a model which involves an assessment of the effect upon total income of the circular flow of money between producers and consumers, investment and savings, export earnings and import expenditure, and public spending and taxation (fig 1.4). This approach, developed with regard to a national economy by John Maynard Keynes in the early 20th century,¹⁷ identifies money flows as export earnings, the earnings of externally employed factors, and government expenditure; money inflows are identified as import expenditure, payment for externally owned factors (used by producers in the urban area) and government taxes. Investment and savings may or may not be retained for use within the city, but net investment is an injection into the money flow, while net savings represents withdrawal.

Overall or aggregate demand for goods and services in an urban area rises if there is any initial increase in the circular flow of money between

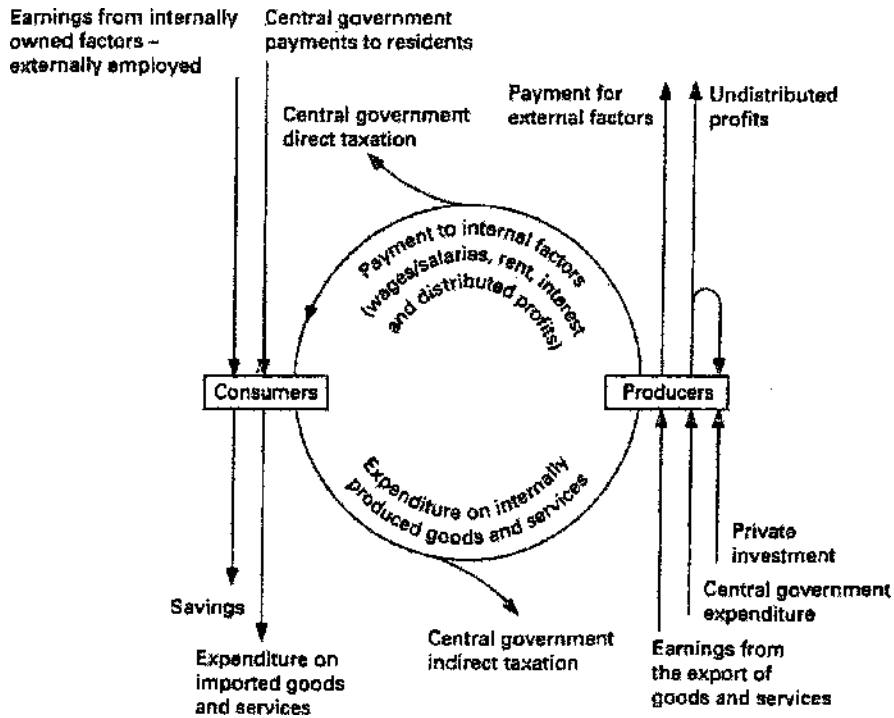


Figure 1.4 Money flows circulating around, injected into and withdrawn from an urban area

producers and consumers, and – if in aggregate – money injections (ie, investment + government expenditure + export earnings) exceed money withdrawals (ie, savings + taxation + import expenditure). If the opposite trends occur, aggregate demand in the urban area declines. Normally, with an increase in aggregate demand, there is a corresponding increase in the demand for buildings for both productive and non-productive purposes and for the general enhancement of the built environment; when aggregate demand decreases, the reverse is the case. Therefore, any initial increase (or decrease) in aggregate demand has a disproportionate effect on the eventual income of the town or city. The greater the marginal propensity to consume (MPC) or the smaller the marginal propensity to save (MPS), the larger the eventual increase in aggregate demand. The extent of this increase – the multiplier (K) – is measured accordingly:

$$K = \frac{1}{1 - \text{MPC}} \quad \text{or} \quad K = \frac{1}{\text{MPS}}$$

Since the Keynesian model suggests that there is a causal relationship between net injections into urban area monetary flow and the rate of urban economic growth, one may conclude – all things being equal – that not only did the export and re-export of manufactured goods and the provision of financial services contribute to the wealth of many of the Italian city-states during the central Middle Ages, but that given balance of payments surpluses the multiplier ensured that aggregate demand within these states increased at a disproportionately high rate, so heralding an economic and building boom in the 13th and early 14th centuries.

Urban Development: the Built Environment

Following the demise of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century and its aftermath, urban development in Italy went into reverse. Although a plethora of churches was built in Italy between the 4th and 6th centuries, from Constantine's basilicas of S Giovanni in Laterano (*c* 313–20) and Old St Peter's (320) in Rome to the centrally planned church of S Vitale (547) in Ravenna, thereafter in the wake of successive barbarian invasions from the north architecture in Italy's crumbling, overgrown, squalid and depopulated cities went into decline for almost 500 years, except for the emergence of Byzantine architecture which came to maturity in the 9th century as exemplified by Venice's basilica of S Marco (*c* 830).

By the late 11th and early 12th centuries Romanesque architecture with its origins in France and Germany began to stamp its mark on the built environment throughout the length and breadth of Italy, but with a difference. In contrast to the development of the style elsewhere in western Europe, and alluding to its Early Christian and Byzantine origins, church architecture in Italy continued to make use of the basilica plan, cupolas and marble facing, while for the first time arches were employed for ornamental purposes rather than for entirely structural ones, and large detached campaniles and baptisteries became commonplace. Many Romanesque churches in Italy (as elsewhere) were also markedly different in scale from those that preceded them. To quote Bill Riseborough, 'new buildings were appearing for the first time in eight or more centuries whose size and height . . . rivalled those of ancient Rome',¹⁸ surely an indication of the Renaissance that was to come.

Yet, despite these common features, there are marked regional variations in style. In many cities of the Lombard Plain, Romanesque cathedrals and churches



Photo 1.2 Maestro Niccolò and others, church of S Zeno, Verona, begun 1120. One of the most distinctive Romanesque churches in Italy, with its large rose window and magnificent portal.

are broadly similar to those of northern Europe, except that in Lombardy they often have tall and stately campanile towers and large octagonal baptisteries not integrated with the main body of the building. Facades are often adorned by a projecting vaulted porch on a base of sculpted lions and a centrally placed wheel-window that allows daylight to penetrate the nave. There is relatively little additional external decoration aside from the open dwarf galleries that sometimes embellish an otherwise plain facade or apse. Examples of this form of architecture are found in the cathedrals of Modena (1099), Cremona (1107) and Parma (1117), the church of S Zeno Maggiore and cathedral of Verona (1120 and 1138), and the cathedrals of Piacenza (1120) and Ferrara (1135). In Milan, however, S Ambrogio (1080) does not quite fit this pattern. As an ancient building, founded by St Ambrose in the 4th century, it retains many Early Christian features such as a spacious entrance atrium and eastern apse and, together with its solemn two-storey gabled brick facade pierced by round-headed arches, presents an image quite unlike any other Lombard building of the period.

In Pisa, a very distinctive variant of Romanesque architecture emerged in the 11th and 12th centuries. Concentrated in the Piazza del Duomo, away from the densely built-up core of the city, the cathedral (1063) with its prominent transept, the round baptistery (1153) and the campanile (1173) display a unique sense of unity. All have marble facing, are adorned by open-arcaded galleries that rise all the way to the facade gable and around the building, and all are capped by terracotta roof tiles. The style was soon replicated, with modification, in Lucca both in the case of the cathedral of S Martino (1070) and in the church of S Michele in Foro (11th–12th centuries).

Romanesque architecture differs yet again in Florence, the city's baptistery and the church of S Miniato exhibiting an elegance of form that owes more to classical Roman models than to northern Renaissance church architecture, and the style is often referred to as 'Proto-Renaissance'.

In the south of the peninsula, in Apulia and Campania, Romanesque architecture is derived in part from Normandy following the conquest of these provinces



Photo 1.3 Niccolò and others, *duomo*, Ferrara, begun 1135. Exhibiting a mixture of Romanesque and Gothic Lombard styles, the building is noted for its monumental triple facade that focuses on a carved central portal.



Photo 1.4 Church of S. Ambrogio, Milan, founded in the 4th century and reconstructed *c.* 1150. The church, possibly the most interesting in Milan, is the progenitor of many of Lombardy's Romanesque basilicas.

by Norman crusaders in the 11th century. The most notable example of Apulian churches of this type is S Nicola (1039) at Bari, but others of similar design were begun at Bitonto, Barletta and Ruvo by the end of the 12th century. In Campania, Salerno cathedral (1076–85) is the most prominent building of Romanesque design. The Normans, in extending their conquests to Sicily (1061–91), inherited the strong Byzantine and Islamic culture on the island that soon manifested itself in a form of architecture that blended motifs of the three traditions, most prominently in the cathedrals of Cefalù (1131), Monreale (1174) and Palermo (1185), and the church of La Martorana (1146) also in Palermo.

In the 12th century, the proliferation of distinctive Romanesque secular buildings is no less impressive than is the distribution of ecclesiastical buildings of the genre. Notable examples include civic buildings such as the Palazzo del Popolo in Orvieto (1157), the *broletto* in Brescia (1187–1200) and the Palazzo della Ragione in Bergamo (1199); privately funded edifices such as the Torre degli Asinelli and the Torre Garisenda in Bologna, 70 or more towers at San Gimignano and numerous similar structures in Florence of which the Torre della Pagliazza and Torre della Castagna are but two examples; and the only Romanesque

royal palace in Italy – the Palazzo dei Normanni (or Palazzo Reale) in Palermo, although the building also embraces Islamic and Byzantine features.

Despite its ubiquity elsewhere in the peninsula, Romanesque ecclesiastical architecture was markedly underrepresented in Venice and on its islands. Here, Byzantine influences were dominant well into the central Middle Ages, as is exemplified not only by the massive basilica of St Mark's but also by the 11th-century church of S Fosca and cathedral of S Maria Assunta on Torcello. There was also an absence of Romanesque influence over the design of secular buildings in the serene republic, Byzantine architecture being much in evidence well beyond the 12th century.

By about 1200, the stage was set for a massive building boom throughout much of urban Italy. Politically, cities were more representative than hitherto and provided a relatively secure arena in which the burgeoning demand for both secular and ecclesiastical buildings could be met. By the 13th century, urban areas



Photo 1.5 Buscheto and others, baptistery, *duomo* and campanile, Pisa, 1063–1173. Inspired by Moorish designs of Andalusia, and a legacy of Pisa's Golden Age, this ensemble of Pisan Romanesque buildings with its black and white marble facades is one of the most dazzling sights in Italy.



Photo 1.6 Guido Bigarelli da Como and others, Cathedral of S. Martino, Lucca, begun 1070. Built in the Pisan-Romanesque style, its asymmetrical facade does not detract from the overall grandeur of the building, its frontage distinguished by the repetition of loggias and tiny columns, and a magnificent atrium.

were experiencing both population and economic growth, while wealth increased dramatically with the expansion of trade, banking and industrial production. That Italy had a very long tradition of applying innovative architectural styles to a wide range of new buildings augured well for a continuing supply of buildings to meet future demand.

However, although the Romanesque style prevalent during the 13th century was superseded by the Gothic paradigm, it is indisputable that in Italy the Romanesque not only exerted a moderating influence on the manner in which fully fledged Gothic architecture was adopted, but also inspired the re-emergence of classical design in the Early Renaissance of the 15th century.

The Political and Economic Rationale of Property Development

Throughout history there is ample evidence to suggest that a proportion of prestigious property development is driven by altruism or religious devotion. It is



Photo 1.7 Church of S Miniato, Florence, begun 1018. Located on a steep hillside in the Oltrarno, the building – with its stunning marble facade – is the finest Romanesque church in Tuscany and one of Italy’s most beautiful buildings.

also manifestly true that, as Deyan Sudjic argues, ‘architecture is used by political leaders to seduce, impress and intimidate’.¹⁹ In Italy, this was certainly the case in the days of imperial Rome and again during the Renaissance. In the intervening period – except under republican rule in Venice – feudalism tended to tie people to the land and urbanisation went into reverse but, with the breakdown of feudal control and the development of quasi-independent city-states across much of northern and central Italy during the 12th and 13th centuries, urbanisation gathered pace and ‘[a]lmost all political leaders [began] using architects for political purposes. It [was] a relationship that [occurred] in almost every kind of regime and [appealed] to egotists of every description.’²⁰ At best, and as Sir Christopher Wren posited late in the English Renaissance, ‘Architecture has its political Use; public building being an ornament of a Country; it establishes a Nation, draws People and Commerce; [and] makes the People love their native Country’.²¹ In modern parlance, this might suggest that civic architecture could be used as a means of reducing social exclusion. At worst, and as Sudjic argued, ‘when the line between political calculation and psychopathology breaks down, architecture becomes not just a matter of practical

politics, but a fantasy, even a sickness that [in various ways] consumes its victims'.²²

Within the private sector, economic growth enabled 'architecture [to become] the principal means by which Italians staked their claims to grandeur and magnificence; it was certainly the chief luxury they spent their money on; and it was the one art form the upper classes were interested in reading about and showed a passionate intellectual interest in'.²³ Clearly, the propensity to indulge in conspicuous consumption was greater among the rich than among the poor, and normally greater during periods of economic prosperity than at times of economic recession.

Although the architects of the Italian Renaissance might be criticised for not directly serving the needs of the community by pandering to the requirements of the state or the demands of the wealthy elite, there was nobody else who could fund the development of the built environment. Thus, it could be argued that



Photo 1.8 Cattedrale, Palermo, 1183. Despite the addition of a 15th-century Catalan-Gothic porch and an 18th-century Baroque dome, the golden-coloured stone building is essentially Sicilian-Norman in its attributes, exemplified by its triple-apsed eastern end and matching towers.



Photo 1.9 Palazzo del Popolo, Orvieto, 1157. Built of volcanic rock, this impressive *palazzo* displays its relatively few Romanesque-Gothic attributes to full effect, its majestic balcony, elegant windows and fluted battlements adorning an otherwise plain exterior.

whereas the powerful and the rich shaped the buildings of the Italian Renaissance, afterwards the buildings shaped the whole community by giving it a sense of civic pride and local loyalty – attitudes not normally found in cities without a rich architectural heritage.

The Beginnings of Town Planning in Medieval Italy

For the first time in over 500 years, town planning was gradually being redeployed as a means of ensuring that the built environment developed in a technically rational, aesthetically pleasing and symbolic manner. One of the first and most spectacular examples of Romanesque planning is the Piazza del Duomo in Pisa (fig 1.5). Here, the baptistery, cathedral and campanile are clearly visible both individually and as a unified group since the composition is situated on the axis of an exceedingly spacious grassy site that is surrounded by

low walls as if to emphasise the scale of development.²⁴ On entering the *piazza* through the Porta Nuova, the visitor notices that the three buildings are both simple and contrasting in geometric form and share the same architectural style. They are arranged in a line: first the baptistery, then the cathedral and lastly the campanile slightly off centre. In their turn they are intended to symbolise entry into the church community, the celebration of mass and communion and, finally, the ascent to heaven.

Such an example of town planning serves to illustrate that in the 11th and 12th centuries, given a greenfield site on the edge of town, buildings could not only be constructed in relation to each other while being different in design, but could conform to an overarching scheme. However, in the ensuing centuries and notwithstanding the further development of greenfield sites, the more substantial examples of town planning are to be found in the central areas of cities, often associated with redevelopment, renovation or conservation, and often executed to accommodate previous or current laws relating to public health, access and circulation.



Photo 1.10 Piazza della Cisterna, S Gimignano, 12th century. Still partly paved by medieval bricks and containing a well dating from 1267, this triangular square is overlooked by some of the town's many towers.

This Book

In this introductory chapter, some of the political and economic factors that influenced the growth of cities in the early and central Middle Ages have been examined as a prelude to an analysis, in Part 1, of the impact of political change and economic cycles on the built environment in the later Middle Ages. Part 2 then describes the emergence of the Early Renaissance in the cities of the 15th century, and Part 3 explores urban development in the 16th century, the period of the High Renaissance and Mannerism. Part 4 concludes by setting out the principal aspects of urban development in the first half of the 17th century, focusing on the emergence of the Baroque. Each part covers a specific period, ranging from around 150 years (in the case of Part 1) to about 50 years (in Part 4). By using discrete time periods of relatively short duration, relevant comparisons can be made between the different factors determining or influencing urban development, a task that would be difficult or meaningless if one attempted to analyse the *raison d'être* of urban growth over the whole period from about 1200 to 1650.

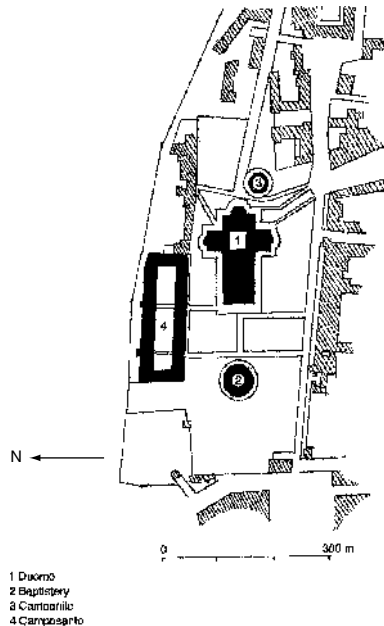


Figure 1.5 The Piazza del Duomo, Pisa

In each part of the book different chapters examine in turn: urban government and the degree of external stability; public patronage and the development of the built environment; the attributes of urban economic growth and decline; and private patronage and property development.

Notes

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- 24 C Moughtin, *Urban Design. Street and Square*, 3rd edn (Oxford and Burlington, MA: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp 70–3.

