

THE
PEASANTRIES OF EUROPE
from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

Edited by
TOM SCOTT

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The Peasantries of Italy,

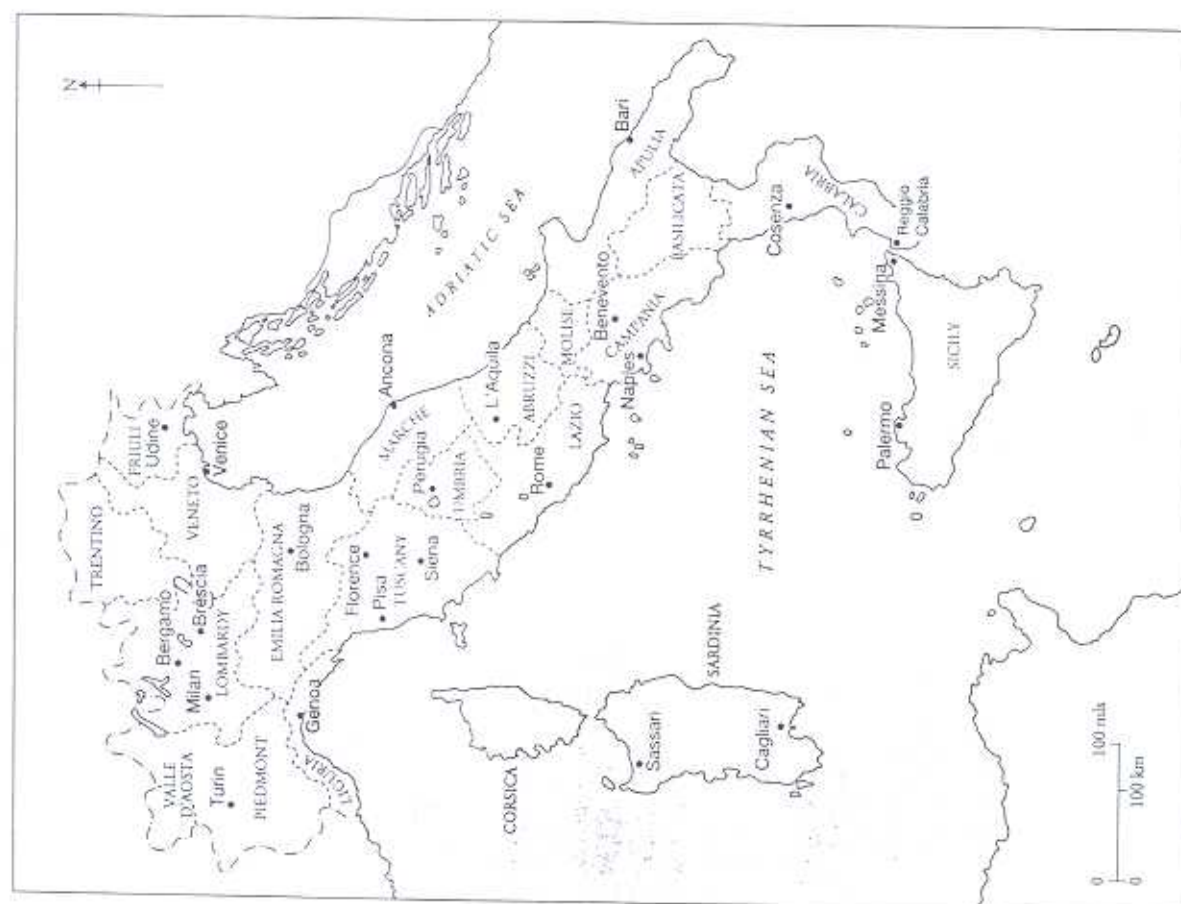
1350–1750

S. R. Epstein

The history of late medieval and early modern Italy has generally been written either by juxtaposing distinctive and unconnected regional patterns, or by contrasting developments in the peninsula's 'south' and its 'centre-north', with the dividing line running somewhere between the regions of Tuscany, Umbria and the Marches on the one hand, and Lazio and Abruzzi on the other. From a political and institutional point of view these approaches make good sense. By the early fourteenth century at the latest, the institutional contrast between north and south was apparent to contemporaries and irreversible. By the mid-fifteenth century, when the dust began to settle after over a century of military conflict and social upheaval, five or six dominant states were in the process of emerging from the rubble. To the north, territorial states under Milanese, Venetian and Florentine leadership had established sovereignty over a motley of independent city-states and feudal lordships, while leaving many of their new subjects' prerogatives unchallenged; to the south, Sicily, Naples and the Papal States were ruled by secular or ecclesiastical monarchies, and feudal lordship was generally stronger, and the legal standing of towns weaker, than in the north.

As elsewhere in Europe, Italian political history has been told as a lengthy prelude to the birth of the nation-state with unification in 1861. Economic historians have generally adopted a similar perspective, within which Unification marks a watershed in economic policy, national market integration and the process of industrialization. They have identified the causes of the country's late industrialization in retarded unification, the persistence of 'feudal' institutions in the highly urbanized, 'bourgeois' north and in the lack of dynamic, 'bourgeois' urban societies in the agrarian and 'feudal' south. However, while paying homage to these schemes in theory, in practice most agricultural historians have dwelt rather more on regional particularities. Some general outlines are nonetheless well-established. In the first place, agriculture in the south was on the whole more specialized and commercialized than in the centre-north, where mixed cropping combining cereals and tree crops (wine, olives, fruit, nuts, mulberry leaves for silkworms) was widespread. Secondly, during the late Middle Ages wheat established itself as the townspeople's preferred food

the Italian north and many peasants made do with rye in central Italy



Map 4.1 Italy

and the south, and with millet in the north. From the late seventeenth century maize took over as the staple food of the urban and rural poor north of the Apennines; chestnuts remained popular in the colder and less fertile uplands. Lesser grains like barley, spelt and far were kept as animal feed and as a reserve stock against bad harvests in the better but more variable cereal crops. Typically 'Mediterranean' crops, like vines and olive trees, also began a long phase of expansion following the Black Death in response to growing consumer demand and became an increasingly important component of basic diets.

Thirdly, pastoralism underwent considerable expansion. While this was a common occurrence throughout Europe in the long period of underpopulation following the Black Death, in Tuscany, Lazio and the eastern seaboard of the state of Naples late medieval sheep transhumance became a major source of tax revenue for cash-strapped governments and took on an independent institutional life which lasted for the whole period with which we are concerned.

Although sheep transhumance was by and large alternative rather than complementary to sedentary agriculture, between 1350 and 1750 no more than a third of the country was under cultivation; between 1350 and 1500 the proportion was substantially less. The reasons were largely geographical. Nearly 70 per cent of the country rises over 500 metres above sea level; the only large alluvial plain lies in the basin of the river Po in the northern Lombardo-Venetian region. The sheer length of the peninsula means that climate varies considerably with latitude and relief. Whereas the coastal lowlands enjoy a typical Mediterranean climate, the mountainous interior is cold, well watered and often snowy; the length and intensity of the summer dry season increases as one moves southwards. But although climate constrained agricultural choices, it never determined them entirely: despite intense regional differences in soil conditions and climate, in the course of our period cropping patterns became more, rather than less, similar across the peninsula.

This chapter attempts to strike a middle path between a more strictly regional approach, which runs the risk of losing sight of the many shared features of agriculture across the peninsula, and a 'national' approach which tends to exaggerate the economic and institutional unity of the country before political unification. It is hoped that this will show the many similarities, and the occasional differences, between the southern and northern Italian peasantries under a different and possibly challenging light.

PEASANTRIES AND THE STATE

Towns and Lords: The Centre-North

Between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-sixteenth century city-states everywhere were incorporated into larger and politically more complex territorial or regional states, thereby establishing central and northern Italy's basic political framework until Unification in 1861. Historians addressing the consequences

of political integration on city-states used to argue that incorporation caused a loss of control over taxation and over some strategic industries, but that the cities' fundamentally exploitative relationship with the countryside was on the whole unaffected. More recently, however, there have been attempts to distinguish more clearly between outcomes in different territorial states. Regional states were not simply a rag-bag of previously independent city-states. Their rulers recognized and at times fostered a range of institutional counterparts in the countryside which were semi-autonomous from, and frequently hostile towards, the former city-states. According to this view, the late medieval state fostered some degree of corporate pluralism by recognizing political jurisdictions and rights outside the remit of the former city-states.

This interpretation, which suggests that conditions in the countryside were less uniformly oppressive than was formerly believed, draws an important distinction between the status of the immediate urban hinterland, the *contado*, and that of the countryside beyond it, the *distretto*. In the *contado*, towns were virtually omnipotent in all major administrative, legal, fiscal and economic activities. The hinterland offered the urban elites the prestige of local office, whose costs were mostly paid by the peasantry;¹ the major law courts sat in the cities, upholding statutes that favoured citizen over peasant rights and landlord claims over tenants;² and the town controlled trade, manufacture and labour markets, and the distribution of taxes. The frequent portrayal of town and *contado* as locked in endless strife over fiscal, judicial and economic rights is thus not entirely misplaced. Fiscal policies in particular discriminated by social status, which in north-central Italy was a function of residence; hence, inhabitants of the dominant city, of subject cities and of the countryside were differently assessed. Whereas townspeople were mainly taxed through excise and other tariffs, and in large commercial cities like Florence, Venice and Genoa by means of interest-bearing forced loans to the state, peasants paid non-refundable poll and hearth taxes set by the ruling town. Not surprisingly, burghers strongly resented any form of taxation which required assessing their real wealth: in Republican Florence, direct taxation was attempted only twice during the early fourteenth century by two short-lived seigniorial regimes, and became associated thereafter with political 'tyranny'.³ *Contadini* instead worried less about how taxes were collected than about the way the tax burden was distributed. They particularly disliked the fact that both the size and distribution of taxation were set by the city;⁴ that assessments were very infrequently revised; and that urban property was exempt from rural taxes, with the result that land transfers

1. G. Chittolini and D. Willmet (eds), *L'organizzazione del territorio in Italia e Germania secoli XIII-XVI* (Bologna, 1994).

2. See G. Pocca, 'I mercanti di fronte al fisco. Primo esame della normativa fiscale del Quattrocento', in *Calata e storia nell'Italia medievale. Studi per Paolo Brezzi* (Rome, 1988), pp. 663-82; on Siena's regulation of sharecropping. See also below, pp. 96-7, 100-6.

3. A. Molin, 'Tre città stato e i loro debiti pubblici. Questi e ipotesi sulla storia di Firenze, Genova e Venezia', in *Italia 1350-1450: tra crisi, trasformazione, sviluppo* (Pisa, 1993), pp. 185-215.

4. Berenson, c.1350 and 1450, the per capita tax load of the Florentine *contado* was approximately two to four times higher than in Florence itself. Cf. S. R. F. Pocca, 'Stato territoriale ed economia regionale nella Toscana del Quattrocento', in R. Villani (ed.), *Intelligenza, cultura ed arte in Toscana antica di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, 3 vols. (Pisa, 1995), vol. 1, p. 876 n. 22.

to townspeople or concessions of borough rights to peasants (who were required by law to immigrate to towns in order to enjoy them, but did not always comply) eroded the rural tax base and caused a proportionate increase in the tax burden.⁵

The rise of territorial states did by contrast provide opportunities to renegotiate the terms of power between towns and their more distant *diuturna*. Regional rulers were willing to offer some fiscal and administrative independence to feudal lordships, rural confederacies and larger rural settlements in exchange for their political and military support. While such concessions seldom involved wholesale autonomy from the city, they did help establish significant economic liberties in the countryside (such as the right to hold free markets and fairs and to engage in manufacturing outside the control of urban guilds), which would have important long-run consequences. None the less, privileged communities were more likely to be situated at a state's periphery, where petty lordships and rural communes had been able to resist earlier urban expansion and where the new territorial states were keen to counter threats of military invasion; generally less conciliatory policies prevailed where fewer independent enclaves survived from earlier periods.⁶

Both the dukes of Milan and the Venetian oligarchy granted exemptions from urban jurisdiction to rural communities which had already established a degree of autonomy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Venice may have supported peasant grievances more actively, particularly in the provinces of Brescia, Bergamo and Verona on the western border with Milan, but it always took care not to upset the local urban elites.⁷ Both states pursued a generally conservative fiscal policy until the early sixteenth century, leaving tax assessments in the hands of individual cities. This was in sharp contrast with the policy of Florence. Between 1384 and 1434, the Florentine ruling class treated newly incorporated cities more like a subject hinterland than a confederacy of equals, depriving them of their own *contadi* altogether and extending Florentine fiscal jurisdiction to the entire state with the famous *Catasto* of 1424–27.⁸ However, this wholesale attack on traditional prerogatives backfired, and Florence responded to several urban uprisings by quietly reverting to the old arrangements.

At the same time that Tuscany was reverting to ancient patterns of urban supremacy, Venice and Lombardy responded to major political crises (Venice's crushing defeat at Agnadello in 1509 and Milan's incorporation into the Spanish empire in 1535) by initiating a wholesale revision of existing systems of taxation. In both states, rural federations arose to negotiate the terms of assessment

5. In the late sixteenth-century assessment of Cremona, urban landowners paid only one-quarter of the land tax paid by the peasantry. Cf. G. Vigo, *Uomini e società nella Lombardia del Cinquecento* (Bologna, 1979), p. 27.

6. S. R. Lipsitz, 'Taxation and social representation in Italian territorial states', in M. Beames and W. Prentice (eds), *Finanza pubblica e finanza privata in età moderna* (Napoli, 1990), pp. 101–15.

7. T. Pedersen, *Venezia e la "Banda del Terzetto"*, *Il governo delle comunità nel territorio veneziano (1500–1717)* (Milan, 1992), pp. 41–50; J. L. Law, 'Super differenzia agnata: Venezia inter districte et civitates', *Venezia, Verona e il contado nel "400"*, *Archivio Veneto*, 5th series, 116 (1981), pp. 3–32.

8. D. Herlihy and C. Klappsch-Zuber, *La Toscana e i suoi feudi. Una storia del Contado fiorentino da 1427* (Paris, 1978).

between rustics and townspeople, battling to abolish the ancient political and fiscal distinctions which sustained urban supremacy. These organizations provided rural elites with the authority and, frequently, the income from tax farming they required to consolidate local leadership, with the result that in the short run, the 'peasant oligarchies' riding the wave of sixteenth-century expansion probably gained most from fiscal reform. On the other hand, in the longer term the countryside's efforts to achieve greater freedom of action would give it a significant advantage over the more heavily regulated towns during the seventeenth-century economic downturn.⁹

Although concessions of jurisdictional rights served similar political purposes everywhere, there were some striking differences in implementation. Republican regimes like Venice (and Florence before the change of regime in the early sixteenth century) preferred to negotiate with rural communities and were generally hostile towards remaining vestiges of feudal lordship; by contrast, the dukes of Milan and lesser princes elsewhere instigated a neo-feudal revival, confirming old fiefs and establishing new ones to pay off their military followers, and instead seemed less willing to grant concessions to autonomous rural entities. Thus, for instance, after Florence became a principate under the Medici in the 1530s the practice of infeudation became a central feature of the new regime. The Tuscan example suggests that the choice of a corporatist rather than a neo-feudal strategy of alliances expressed the prevailing political culture: republicans preferred to associate with corporate groups having a modicum of popular legitimacy, while monarchists were more attuned to their military and social peers.¹⁰

The resurgence of feudal practices between the late fourteenth and the mid-sixteenth century was not, therefore, a purely reactionary process of 'refeudalization', but was instead part of a far wider reorganization of territorial rule.¹¹

9. For Agnadello see I. Cervelli, *Machiavelli e la crisi dello stato renegato* (Naples, 1974). For fiscal and broader institutional reforms see S. Zanperetti, 'I "sinedei dolosi": La formazione e lo sviluppo dei corpi territoriali nello stato regionale veneto tra 1500 e 1600', *Rivista storica italiana*, 99 (1987), pp. 269–320; G. Didone, *La riforma della Terza di Milano dopo la guerra di Cambrai. Finanze e amministrazione (1513–1530)* (Milan, 1986); L. Pozzolo, *L'età dello Stato. Società, finanza e finanza nella Repubblica veneta del secondo 500* (Treviso, 1990); A. Rossetti, *La confluenza lombarda nel Cinquecento. Territori, finanze, società* (Milan, 1994); Vigo, *Uomini e società*; A. Zappa, 'L'avvento dell'estimo generale dello Stato di Milano nell'età di Carlo V', *Storia e società*, 14 (1991), pp. 545–77. Seventeenth-century developments are discussed below, pp. 102–6.

10. G. Chittolini, 'Governo ducale e poteri locali', in *Gli Urbani e Milano e la Lombardia e i loro rapporti con gli Stati italiani ed europei (1450–1550)* (Milan, 1982), pp. 27–42, idem, 'Principe e comunità: alcune note sulla Lombardia alla fine del Medioevo', in E. Martinengo (ed.), *Le Alpi per l'Europa. Una proposta politica* (Milan, 1988), pp. 219–35; G. Pansini, 'Per una storia del feudalesimo nel Granducato di Toscana durante il periodo mediceo', *Quaderni storici*, 5 (1972), pp. 131–86; G. Galimberti, 'I patti venetiani di fronte alla proprietà feudale (secoli XVI–XVIII). Materiali per una ricerca', *Quaderni storici*, 15 (1980), pp. 162–92; K. O. von Ardenne, 'L'ordinamento feudale in Italia nel XVI e XVII secolo e le sue ripercussioni sulla politica europea. Un contributo alla storia del nudo feudalesimo in Europa', *Annali dell'Istituto storico della germanica in Trento*, 4 (1977), pp. 51–94. See also below, p. 11.

11. G. Chittolini, *La paragonata dello Stato regionale e le istituzioni del contado. Secoli XVI e XVII* (Turin, 1979). Introduction; idem, 'Signorie rurali e feudi alla fine del Medioevo', in O. Carpianti et al., *Comuni e signorie. Integrazioni, società e feudi per l'Europa* (Turin, 1981), pp. 639–67. Established in 1545, the duchies of Parma and Piacenza were a unique hybrid of semi-independent city-states and petty fiefdoms with a bewildering mosaic of competing jurisdictions. See L. Arcangelini, 'Giurisdizioni feudali e organizzazione territoriale nel Ducato di Parma (1545–1587)', in M. A. Bonanni (ed.), *La Città parmensis di Parma e Piacenza. 1543–1622*, 2 vols (Parma, 1981).

on the one hand (the feudal aristocracy in the south, the city-states further north) and by promoting new or weaker political forces on the other (the towns under royal control in the south, rural communities and lordships in the centre-north).¹⁰

With the exception of L'Aquila, Messina, Naples and a few others, however, southern Italian towns never achieved the rural prerogatives of their northern peers. The southern towns' general inability to control rural resources politically, particularly food supplies, made them particularly sensitive to changes in economic circumstances, with the result that they attracted large numbers of rural immigrants when times were good and lost them just as quickly when better opportunities arose elsewhere. This demographic sensitivity was intensified by the very high rates of seasonal and permanent migration in much of the rural south. Although town governments attempted to react to demographic instability after the mid-fifteenth century by claiming greater jurisdictional rights, including authority over the villages (*casali*) in their hinterland, and by demanding fiscal and commercial privileges from the Crown in order to attract and maintain a more stable population, the effects of this political offensive are still unclear.

The absence of research on urban society in the south is all the more unfortunate because the number of peasants living in towns was so unusually high. On standard definitions of towns as centres with more than 5,000 inhabitants, southern Italy had one of the highest shares of urban population in early modern Europe, with peaks of more than 50 per cent achieved in Sicily and Terra di Bari (Apulia). While these settlements are frequently dismissed as mere 'agro-towns' which acted as temporary 'dormitories' for migrant peasants but displayed few urban features, this probably underestimates their administrative and economic sophistication, especially in the more economically developed regions of the south.¹¹

More direct relations between peasants and feudal lords have attracted more attention. Seigneurialism had indisputably stronger roots in the south than in the centre-north, and the Spanish viceroys in Naples may well have deliberately supported baronial rights in order to achieve political and administrative stability.¹² In Sicily, roughly half the population lived under feudal jurisdiction, in the kingdom of Naples the proportion came closer to four-fifths. Consequently, seigneurial rights provided no less than 20 per cent of total lordly income, rising in some instances to more than half. At the same time local and regional conditions displayed striking variations, ranging from Calabria, where seigneurial demands continued to rise from an already high base through to the early seventeenth century, to Terra d'Otranto and Principato, where until the 1640s

10. G. Galasso, *Economia e società nella Calabria del Cinquecento* (Naples, 1975), chs 2 and 4; B. Salvemini, 'Prima della Puglia. Terra di Bari e il sistema regionale in età moderna', in L. Masella and B. Salvemini (eds), *Storia della Puglia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. La Puglia* (Turin, 1989), pp. 3-218; Epstein, *Asi Island*, esp. ch. 7; C. Muro, *Segni sul governo dell'economia nel Mezzogiorno spagnolo* (Naples, 1992), pp. 144-7.

11. Salvemini, 'Prima della Puglia', pp. 114-15; F. Benigni, 'Aspetti territoriali e ruralizzazione nella Sicilia del Seicento: note per una discussione', in Società Italiana di Demografia Storica (ed.), *La popolazione delle campagne italiane in età moderna* (Turin, 1987), pp. 56-72.

12. Muro, *Segni sul governo*, pp. 148-52.

The revival was kept within strictly defined parameters. Feudatories were forced to recognize the superior authority of the state; their jurisdictional prerogatives over taxation and justice were clearly defined; they could not wage war independently. Even fiefs which remained strictly speaking autonomous, along much of the Apennines from Liguria in the north-west to Tuscany and the Marches in the centre-east, survived as *de facto* protectorates which acted as territorial buffers between larger states, provided military leaders and mercenaries, and ensured a modicum of security in areas which townsmen had neither the resources nor the ability to control. Unfortunately the inner workings of feudal lordships are still virtually unknown, so one can do little more than speculate on the nature of the relations between lords and their peasant vassals, tenants and retainers, and on the effect of lordship on peasant living conditions. It is none the less unlikely that any of these was unmitigatedly oppressive. A newly enfeoffed community might have to pay new dues, but any demands would have been mitigated by the ever-present threat of migration by disgruntled subjects. Additional payments had to be set in any case against the fiscal disadvantages of urban rule and the benefits of feudal paternalism: a lord with good political connections could be a powerful advocate of community interests. It is also unlikely that enfeoffment acted adversely on agriculture and trade; on the contrary, it sometimes provided a stimulus by freeing rural communities from urban monopolies. It is thus not entirely surprising that living standards in feudal or rural communal regimes were often higher than under urban rule.¹³

Lords and Towns: The South

The tendency in recent years to downplay the extent of urban power in the centre-north and to emphasize the role of rural corporate and feudal institutions has been matched by a growing recognition of the significance of southern Italian towns. Regional monographs on areas as diverse as Apulia, Sicily and Calabria convey a sense of urban vibrancy that is very much at odds with traditional renditions of the country in the lock of oppressive feudal institutions. The roots of this urban dynamism can probably be found in the later Middle Ages, when the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily experienced similar institutional developments to those of the more northerly territorial states. In both parts of Italy the goals of political integration and stability were pursued by assimilating the formerly more independent and powerful elements

(Rome, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 91-121; Gidycz, 'Caudatani e duchi negli stati farnesiani (1545-1587)', in *Il Rinascimento nella Corte papale: società e cultura* (Bari, 1977), pp. 77-95.

13. Chittenden, *La formazione dello stato*, pp. 263-5; S. R. Epstein, *The Italian for Italy: Economic Development and Social Change in Late Medieval Sicily* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 5; idem, 'Stato territoriale', pp. 880-3; M. A. Ruggini, *Nella spirale di una crisi. Popolazione, mercato e prezzi in Terra tra Empire e Secolo* (Milan, 1975), pp. 36, 45, 141; M. Benvenuti, 'La rendita feudale nel Regno di Napoli attraverso i secoli: il Principato Ultra (1550-1806)', *Storia e storia*, 3 (1980), p. 574; P. P. Vazzari, *L'ipotesi Comunistica. L'incremento, l'occupazione and social structure in the Alps since the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989). See also below, pp. 86, 105.

lords drew most of their income from commercial land rents. The weaker brand of seigneurialism in Sicily also explains why barons were able to attract immigrants to new rural settlements from the late 1580s onwards.¹⁶

What appear to be identical seigneurial prerogatives disguised considerable differences in practice. These differences depended to a large degree on which side of the feudal coin came uppermost, be it the patrimonial emphasis on property rights to land or the jurisdictional concern with rights of lordship over men. Whether lords tried to increase feudal dues or aimed to maximize their rent depended on a combination of factors, which included the availability of transport routes and markets, the intensity of peasant mobility, the size of fiefs and the degree of competition for labour between lords, and the presence of towns outside feudal jurisdiction; greater commercial activity, labour mobility, and feudal and urban competition generally undermined the jurisdictional aspects of seigneurialism, and tended to subject land held in fief to straightforward market pressures. In addition, the extent of seigneurial rights affected how lords responded to the seventeenth-century depression. Where strong seigneurial rights survived, exactions increased in line with population, rising sharply during the sixteenth century and tapering off after the demographic and economic downturn of the 1630s and 1640s; by contrast, lords in more commercialized regions responded to declining rents by attempting to reintroduce the exactions they had previously allowed to lapse.¹⁷

The Politics of Consent and Repression

Rural militias

From the late fifteenth century, Italian territorial states responded to rising military expenditure and to increasing difficulties in recruiting mercenary troops by experimenting with the use of permanent peasant militias. The example of Venice and Mantua was followed first by Florence, Lucca and Urbino, and a few decades later by the Papal States, Naples, Sicily, Savoy (Piedmont) and others. Although from a military standpoint these attempts at enlarging the military base were of little use, one not entirely unforeseen consequence was to broaden the central authorities' support in the countryside. For similar reasons, however, opposition to such experiments was intense and often posed insuperable obstacles for reform.¹⁸

16. Calasso, *Economia e società*, A. Lepore, *Area di lavoro nell'età moderna* (Naples, 1978), M. A. Vascoglia, 'L'azienda signorile in Terra d'Otranto', *Quaderns storici*, 15 (1980), pp. 39-60; eadem, 'Rovista feudale e agricoltura in Puglia nell'età moderna (XVI-XVIII sec.)', *Storia e storia*, 3 (1980), pp. 527-60; Benvenuto, 'La rendita feudale', p. 565; T. Davies, 'Village-building in Sicily: an aristocratic remedy for the crisis of the 1590s', in P. Clark (ed.), *The European Crisis of the 1590s: Essays on Contemporary History* (London, 1985), pp. 191-200.

17. Benvenuto, 'La rendita feudale', p. 587; Vascoglia, 'L'azienda', p. 44. The debate on 'reticulation' is reviewed by E. Starobin, 'La crisi del Seicento in Italia', in N. Tranfaglia and M. Piro (eds), *La storia / grandi problemi del Mezzogiorno all'età contemporanea*, 10 vols (Turin, 1986), vol. 3/2, pp. 313-37; Muro, *Naggi nel*

Individual failures reflected each state's constitutional peculiarities. The plan for a trained peasant militia devised by Niccolò Machiavelli for the Florentine Republic in 1506 aborted because of the capital's elites' ingrained fear that the armed peasants would rise against their oppressors.¹⁹ Ironically, the militia, which included a contingent of Florentine citizens and which was closely identified as a 'Republican' institution, was disbanded by the first Medicean regime (1512-27); Duke Cosimo de' Medici, by contrast, saw it in keeping with his policy of rebalancing relations between Florence and the provinces and reintroduced it after his return in 1530.

Venice established a trained rural militia of 10,000-12,000 men capable of being deployed outside its home territory in 1507, during the military crisis that preceded the defeat at Agnadello in 1509.²⁰ Venice was less fearful than Florence about arming the peasantry, and its trust was repayed after Agnadello when the peasants played a critical role in recapturing lost territory from rebel towns. Venice's problems with the militia were financial and organizational rather than political. Inducements for joining included exempting candidates from personal taxes and public labour dues on roads, canals and town walls, and paying them daily expenses during training; unfortunately the cost of all these perquisites fell on the rural communities, causing predictable resentment. The peasants' training was at best half-hearted; 'friendly brigands rather than a reliable reserve, let alone a potential shock force', they were more effective as guerrillas than as cannon fodder.²¹ Venice itself took only sporadic interest in them when under severe military pressure; although active on paper during the entire sixteenth century, their first call to action after Agnadello occurred in 1615-17. Needless to say, the rulers' trust was not unstinting; peripheral areas whose devotion was uncertain were not brought into the militia system before the early seventeenth century, nor were militiamen ever employed in the increasingly determined campaign to root out rural banditry.²²

The dukes of Savoy introduced rural militias only in the 1560s.²³ Rather than a small military contingent employed to support a core of full-time soldiers and mercenaries, however, the Piedmontese corps was meant to be a full-blown territorial army. It therefore relied for its functioning more heavily than elsewhere on the militia's self-interest and on a sense of commonality between rural communities and the state. But the need to concede fiscal and legal privileges was also the project's undoing, for it threatened competing aristocratic interests which the prince was unable to ignore. In Piedmont, as elsewhere, rural militias failed because their rulers were incapable of solving a fundamental political and

19. P. Poni, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana*, 2nd edn (Turin, 1952), pp. 436-43; J. R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe 1450-1620* (London, 1985), pp. 199-201.

20. M. E. Mallett and J. R. Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State. Venice c.1400 to 1617* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 49-50, 350-66.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 351.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 364; L. Pezzolo, 'L'archiduca e l'aratro. Considerazioni e problemi per una storia delle milizie rurali venete nei secoli XVI e XVII', *Studi veneziani*, new series, 7 (1983), pp. 64-5, 69-70; M. Knappton, 'Il Terzetto vicentino nello Stato veneto del '500 e primo '600: nuovi equilibri politici e fiscali', in G. Cracco and M. Knappton (eds), *Diatribe di Stato italiano: l'aratro e la Terraferma fra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Trent, 1984), p. 110.

23. W. Barbieri, *La crisi del Principe. La tradizione militare italiana* (Turin, 1988), pp. 5-6.

ideological contradiction: between an implicitly 'Republican' institution like the militia, which presumed that military defence was in society's collective interest, and a system of power based upon inviolable differences of status between nobility, citizens and peasants and in which arms were a symbol of privilege.

Unrest and rebellion

The lack of rural uprisings in late medieval and early modern Italy on anything like the scale of Iberia, France, England and Germany is an unexplained puzzle. Although there are many recorded instances of unrest, these seldom challenged the social and political order and tended to be highly localized; the Neapolitan revolt of 1647–48 is the only known instance of a peasant rebellion turning into something akin to a national uprising.²⁴ More broadly based regional uprisings were more frequent between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth century, when territorial states were being established and military and fiscal pressures were intense. A string of anti-feudal revolts broke out in Lombardy, Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, the region of Trent and north-eastern Sicily, tapering off with the great Friulan revolt of 1511; more 'modern' tax rebellions against territorial overlords were staged by valley communities in the Lombard Alps and the Tuscan Apennines. High taxes also caused unrest among the rural subjects of Florence in 1425–27 and of Perugia in 1525, and contributed to the peasant rising of 1459 in Calabria.²⁵ After the first decades of the sixteenth century, however, concerted insurrections of this kind died away. Most recorded instances of unrest occurred in the feudal south, but they were very localized and did not in any sense presage the extent and intensity of the provincial uprisings of 1647–48.²⁶

This remarkable acquiescence by Italian peasants has been viewed as evidence of political and economic disenfranchisement. Rural poverty in the centre-north caused by urban exploitation caused 'total resignation' among the peasantry; in Tuscany, landlord paternalism and the breakdown of community ties associated with the rise of sharecropping further weakened the capacity for collective organization. Increasing poverty and the defeat of the revolt

24. R. Villari, *La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini 1585–1607* (Bari, 1967); A. Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello nella storia politica borghese* (Naples, 1989), ch. 5, see also O. di Simplicio, *La rivolta masanelliana in Liguria* (Rome, 1986), p. 118.

25. G. Cherubini, 'Le campagne italiane dall'XI al XV secolo', in O. Capitani et al., *Comuni e signori, pp. 417–18*; Pedersari, *Ungheria*, p. 64 n. 51; E. Roveda, 'Le istituzioni e la società in età viscontea-sforzesca', in *Storia di Pavia* (Pavia, 1992), vol. 3/1, pp. 73–5; E. Muir, *Mad Blood Staining: I nobili and Feudalism in Friuli during the Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD/London, 1993); Herlihy and Klappich, *Le Torioni*, pp. 40–2; C. Cattini Zazzarini, 'Un episodio di rivolta del contado perugino del 1525', *Bollettino della Diploazione di Storia Patria per l'Umbria*, 80 (1983), pp. 153–63; Epstein, *Two Islands*, pp. 326–38; E. Prosen, *La Calabria a metà del trecento XV e la rivolta di Antonio Contillo* (Naples, 1963), pp. 216–25. See also G. Cherubini (ed.), *Prontaria e rivolta contadina nell'Italia medievale*, *Annali dell'Istituto "Alcide Gerbi"*, 16 (1994).

26. C. de Frède, 'Rivolte antifeudali nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia durante il Cinquecento', in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, 5 vols (Milan, 1962), vol. V, pp. 3–42; Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello*, ch. 5; A. Lepore, *Storia del Mezzogiorno d'Italia*, 2 vols (Naples, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 285–93.

of 1647–48 in the south forced an increasingly desperate rural populace into the political dead end of 'social banditry'.²⁷ But whereas explanations of this kind assume that peasants could only achieve their political objectives through rebellion, it seems more reasonable to assume that revolt was an act of last resort. Under normal circumstances, peasant elites might expect to air their grievances through legitimate political channels and achieve some redress. Revolts could and did break out when adequate social and political means to filter and defuse conflict had temporarily broken down; but one cannot assume that this would be the norm. Indeed, a hankering for legal propriety often persisted even after conciliation had become impossible. The Perugian peasant rebels of 1525 sent ambassadors to the city's liege, the Pope in Rome, and referred to a recent papal edict in their attempt to have a hated hearth tax repealed. In 1647–48, peasant rebels petitioned the Spanish authorities to support their demands for institutional change; the town of Nocera even drew up a notarial act to formalize the forcible eviction of the local duke.²⁸

This evidence suggests that the unusually low incidence of rural rebellions in Italy may have been a result of the peasants' better opportunities for political organization, rather than because they were unusually oppressed. The constitutional settlements achieved across the peninsula before 1500 were the outcome of protracted and far from peaceful negotiations between four principal interest groups: the ruling city's elites or the prince, the subject urban elites, the feudal lords, and the elites of autonomous rural communities and federations. From the point of view of the peasantry, the sovereign's need to accommodate so many competing interests made it possible for the first time to vent political tensions through legitimate channels which bypassed their immediate lords. A clear instance of the support this could engender among the peasantry is the rural insurrection of 1509 in support of Venice and against the latter's rebellious subject cities – which had transferred to the Imperial camp and which also happened to be the peasants' direct overlords.

Banditry

Were more isolated forms of banditry, rather than concerted communal rebellions, more typical forms of protest among the Italian peasantry? This assumption seems to underlie most studies of rural banditry, which portray it as a form of revolt just short of armed insurrection and describe it as a reaction to economic and political 'modernization'. According to this interpretation, the upsurge in banditry between the 1560s and the 1640s is the result of economic hardship among the peasantry caused by growing taxation, declining living standards and increasing social polarization, and of political distress among the

27. Di Simplicio, *Rivolta*, pp. 119–20; Cherubini, 'Le campagne italiane', p. 418; F. McArdle, *Alleganza. A Study in Tuscan Rural Society, 1587–1794* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 201.

28. Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello*, ch. 5; Cattini Zazzarini, 'Un episodio di rivolta'.

aristocracy, whose traditional privileges were being challenged by the centralizing state.²⁹

Several features of Italian banditry are at odds with this explanation. In the first place, banditry peaked between the 1570s and the 1590s and again briefly in the 1620s and 1630s, when peasant and aristocratic conditions were not unduly strained, whereas periods of more serious economic hardship experienced a degree of peace. Peasant banditry was also concentrated in the borderland zones between states, which were able better to withstand economic downturns.³⁰ Banditry was in any case a legal rather than an economic or sociological category: in principle, the bandit was not a robber, but a man tried *in absentia*, someone whom the state was unable to take to court and had outlawed (Ital. *bandito*) as a consequence.

Studies of the Papal States and the Venetian *Terraferrma* do in fact suggest that the incidence of banditry may be more a measure of the state's political ineffectiveness than of criminal activities as such. The phenomenon became of serious concern a few years after the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1554), which ended the wars that had raged across the peninsula since the 1490s and established a stable balance of power within the peninsula. Freed from external threat, Rome and Venice trained their political ambitions inwards. With the aim of establishing unchallenged jurisdiction within their territories, they invested great effort in establishing clear political frontiers, both for its obvious political symbolism but, more especially, in order to exert greater control over virtually unregulated cross-border trade. It so happened that these peripheral areas were also where states faced the strongest challenge from near-independent feudal lordships and mountain communities.³¹

Peasant banditry seems to have been largely a consequence of this political offensive in the periphery. Lacking the military manpower and the political skills to enforce their claims, Rome and Venice resorted indiscriminately to legal bans. Relatives to the fourth degree and whole rural communities were found guilty by association; financial and other inducements were offered to spies and turncoats.³² Outlaws proliferated because the law could not be enforced; repression fed upon its children.

29. The classic statements are by E. H. Carr-Saunders, *Bandits* (London, 1909), and E. H. Carr, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols, trans. S. Reynolds (London, 1973), vol. II, pp. 734-56. See also M. Aymard, 'Proposito per una conclusione', in G. Orselli (ed.), *Bandite armate, banditi, banditismo e repressione di giustizia negli stati europei di antico regime* (Rome, 1986), p. 510; J. Delumeau, *La fin de l'économie et l'essor de l'état moderne*, Italian transl. (Florence, 1979), p. 144.

30. Above, n. 12.

31. I. Puvion-Lavey, *La storia italiana. Il banditismo delle Alpi, il banditismo nella seconda metà del Cinquecento* (Rome, 1985); C. Puvion, 'Nella spirale della violenza. Cronologia, intensità e diffusione del banditismo nella Terraferrma veneta (1550-1610)', in Orselli, *Bandite armate*, pp. 21-52; M. A. Carr and M. A. Carr, 'Tra finanza familiare e rivolta politica: banditi e banditismo nella montagna estense (sec. XVII)', in *Ibid.*, pp. 53-66; A. Tomolo, 'Territori indurati. Una proposta di studio sul banditismo cinquecentesco nell'area delle partecipazioni muscolari e bolognesi', in *Territorio e comunità nell'Italia postmoderna. Il caso della partecipazione agli affari comuni, da terre rosse ai beni italiani* (Bologna, 1983), pp. 175-85.

32. See Puvion, 'Nella spirale', pp. 37-8; M. D. Floris, 'La repressione della criminalità organizzata nella Repubblica di Genova tra Cinque e Seicento. Aspetti e cronologia della prassi legislativa', in Orselli, *Bandite armate*, pp. 87, 91.

Although judicial escalation made it virtually impossible to eradicate banditry once established, banditry also persisted because of its close association with large-scale smuggling – which had itself become a new crime in an age of increasingly definite if not definitive frontiers. Smugglers were usually organized in networks of real and fictive kin (*parentele*) which purposely straddled political borders,³³ and which had probably been established during the later Middle Ages to make it easier to pool skills, commercial information and support for expanding inter-regional and cross-mountain transhumance and trade.³⁴ *Parentele* structured much of their members' social and political activities, and found protection or acquiescence among local feudatories. While intermarriage and feuds between rival networks were among their most basic features, they also provided justice and settled disputes between members and with the outside world, and helped stabilize relations between the mountains and the plains.³⁵

Contemporaries' and more recent views of these as the barbarous customs of a closed and archaic world are based on a misunderstanding. The state's offensive during the latter half of the sixteenth century turned mountain trade into a crime and outlawed its practitioners and feudal protectors; smugglers were transformed into robbers, and found leaders among the disaffected nobility.³⁶ We witness not the comforting victory of cultural modernity over archaism, but a struggle between two comparable systems of social organization and power.

THE PEASANT ECONOMY

Property Rights to Land and Tenurial Relations

Tenurial arrangements and the distribution of property underwent huge changes in the course of the early modern period. Whereas the prevailing contract in the late Middle Ages was leasehold, with rents paid mainly in kind, four centuries later rents were mostly paid in cash. Peasants owned considerably more land individually and collectively towards 1350 than 1750; landed property – particularly in the centre-north – was much more fragmented at the time of the

33. O. Ruggio, 'Parentele, feudi e banditi: la Val Fontanabuona tra Cinque e Seicento', in Orselli, *Bandite armate*, pp. 233-76; S. Lombardini, 'Rivolte e ribellismo contadino nel Montegatese del Seicento. Ipotesi di ricerca', *Medioevo storico-linguistico italiano*, 80 (1982), pp. 645-57; E. Guidoboni, 'Terre, villaggi e famiglie del Polesine di Casaglia tra XV e XVI secolo', *Società e storia*, 4 (1981), p. 828; L. Faccini, *La Lombardia fra '600 e '700. Ricostruzione economica e mutamenti sociali* (Milan, 1988), p. 27.

34. R. Cominci, 'Strategie familiari, potere locale e banditi in una comunità del contado bolognese del XVI secolo', in Orselli, *Bandite armate*, p. 226.

35. Ruggio, 'Parentele, feudi e banditi'; Cominci, 'Strategie familiari'; N. S. Davidson, 'An armed band and the local community on the Venetian "Terraferrma" in the sixteenth century', in Orselli, *Bandite armate*, pp. 401-22; C. Puvion, 'La criminalità mafiosa in Italia nella seconda metà del Cinquecento. Il caso della Repubblica di Venezia. Alcune ipotesi e possibili interpretazioni', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 151 (1992/93), p. 110.

36. Puvion, 'La criminalità', p. 109.

Black Death. Between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-eighteenth century, there emerged an integrated system of latifundia and smallholdings in the south, and of mixed and capitalist farming in the centre-north; rural smallholders were evicted, and land was consolidated into large farms owned by townspeople and the Church.

With the exception of Lombard irrigated farming, these developments tend to be seen as posing insurmountable obstacles to economic development. Sharecropping and latifundism were employed by absentee feudal and urban landlords to exploit tenant labour rather than to engage in capital investment and technical innovation; peasant aversion to markets put additional decisive constraints on agricultural growth. Agricultural property and tenancy rights were the paramount factors which determined a less than optimal distribution of income and a lower rate of growth than was technically feasible.³⁷ What evidence is there for these claims?

Property rights to land

Feudal law, which prevailed up to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, distinguished two categories of landownership: *dominium utile*, which conferred beneficial rights of usage and was vested in the tenant, and *dominium directum*, which included rights of disposal and of jurisdiction over the tenant and was vested in the lord. Until the early fourteenth century, the distinction was embodied in the institution of serfdom and in long-term or multi-generational leases based on customary rents; none the less, these property rights were also rapidly disappearing. Servile dues were being abandoned, to survive mainly in peripheral regions of the north; unified, 'bourgeois' property rights to land were expanding; and customary leases were being replaced with more flexible short-term contracts.³⁸

While most of these developments began well before the 'shock' caused by the Black Death, the plague accelerated the pace of change. Competition for scarce and increasingly mobile labour spelled the demise of serfdom in 'core' regions,³⁹ demographic decline and the rise of larger, more integrated territorial states increased the rate of commercialization among survivors. Yet feudal rights remained important in several respects. Not only did seigneurial dues remain a major source of income in southern Italy, and to a lesser extent in the

centre-north, even where towns established comprehensive rights of jurisdiction in competition with feudal lords, they tended to transform such rights into collective powers of lordship over the countryside.⁴⁰

The distribution of property between peasants, feudal lords and townspeople (including Church property under the last two headings) is still rather obscure. A recent overview of early modern Naples states baldly that the proportion of feudal to non-feudal property in the kingdom cannot be quantified. On the other hand, tax surveys in the centre-north appear to show that urban property expanded almost uninterrupted between the thirteenth century and the mid-sixteenth. By the early 1500s Florentines owned over 60 per cent of their *contado* and the inhabitants of Cremona over 57 per cent, not including the properties of the Church; similar proportions applied to the rest of the Po plain and to the Venetian *Terraferrma*.⁴¹

That townspeople should own substantial amounts of land before the Black Death is not surprising: there were sound economic reasons both for urban immigrants to preserve their rural property and for townsmen to reinvest a share of their commercial profits in the land. But the strong growth of urban landownership after 1348-50 calls for a different explanation, which can be only partially connected with changing population levels. Between c.1350 and c.1450 the rural population declined by approximately 40-60 per cent, and urban losses were frequently larger. Urban elites benefited disproportionately from the increased land supply this provoked, because of their greater wealth and because their larger households and better organized kinship networks ensured a higher probability of survival. This difference alone in 'inheritance effects' between town and country would have caused a net transfer of land from rural to urban hands; but other factors were also at work. Land continued to accumulate, albeit at a slower rate, in urban hands when the population began to recover after the mid-fifteenth century. This suggests that the main cause of land transfers was rural hardship induced by fiscal pressure rather than demographic forces alone. In central and northern Italy, the Black Death was followed by a sharp increase in fiscal and military pressure, as princes and city-states competed for survival and territorial aggrandizement. Evidence from Florence and Brescia suggests that peasants responded to military and fiscal distress by selling their land or migrating, causing the rural tax base to shrink even further and forcing survivors into an ever-tighter fiscal vice.⁴²

40. G. Chinolani and G. Coppola, 'Grand domaine et petites exploitations: quelques observations sur la version italienne de ce modèle (XIIIe-XVIIIe siècles)', in P. Gansser and T. Hofmann (eds), *Large Estates and Smallholdings in Europe in the Middle Ages and Modern Times* (Budapest, 1982), p. 181.

41. M. A. Visceglia, 'Dislocazione territoriale e dimensione del possesso feudale nel Regno di Napoli a metà Cinquecento', in eadem (ed.), *Signori, poteri, contadini in Italia centro-setentrionale in età moderna e contemporanea* (Rome/Bari, 1992), pp. 31-91; Murto, *Signori e guerra*, p. 187; G. Cherubini, 'La proprietà fondiaria nel secolo XV-XVI nella storia geografica italiana', *Storia e storia*, 1 (1978), pp. 9-23; Arcangelì, 'Giurisdizioni feudali'.

42. D. Hedley, 'Santa Maria Impronta: a rural commune in the late Middle Ages', in N. Rubin (ed.), *Florentine Studies. Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence* (London, 1967), pp. 242-76; J. M. Ferraro, 'Proprietà terrena e potere nello stato veneziano', *Civiltà*, 8 (1984), D. Beltrami, *La penetrazione economica dei signori in Terraferrma. Forze di lavoro e proprietà fondiaria nelle campagne emiliane dal tardo XVI al XVIII* (Venice/Rome, 1963), pp. 112-40.

37. The general argument was first outlined in E. Sereni, *Il capitalismo nelle campagne nell'Italia moderna. Rapporti di capitale e controllo agrario dal secolo XVII al 1890*, 2nd edn (Turin, 1974).

38. Giordani, *Contadini e proprietari*, ch. 2-3.

39. G. Coppola, 'Equilibri economici e trasformazioni nell'area alpina in età moderna: scarsi di risorse ed economia integrata', in G. Coppola and P. Schiera (eds), *La storia alpina: area di civiltà, regione urbana* (Naples, 1991), p. 210. See also D. Degross, 'L'economia del tardo medioevo', in P. Cammarosano (ed.), *Storia della civiltà friulana. Il medioevo* (Udine/Pesaro, 1988), p. 295; I. Peri, *Il villaggio in Italia* (Palermo, 1965); M. A. Visceglia, *Territorio feudo e potere locale. Terra d'Otranto tra Medioevo ed Età moderna* (Naples, 1988), pp. 116-17.

Taxation was undoubtedly responsible for the slow erosion of the peasant commons. References to sales of the commons increase from the late fifteenth century, particularly in the south where both feudal and community lands were affected and where forcible enclosure by feudal lords also occurred;⁴³ but the best known instance of land privatization took place on the Venetian *Terraferma*. Despite frequent usurpations in the sixteenth century, the year 1647 – when Venice began a systematic sale of commons in the eastern part of its state to townsmen and, quite frequently, to wealthy peasants made good, in order to finance the war against the Ottomans – proved something of a turning-point in the dissolution of rural collective ownership.⁴⁴

This tale of growing urban encroachment should not disguise the remarkable resilience of rural landownership. In eighteenth-century Lombardy, 54 per cent of the highlands and 70 per cent of the mountains were classed as commons; in the province of Trent the proportion rose from 22 per cent in the river plains to 70 per cent in the mountains; and commons accounted for 40–70 per cent of the Venetian state. In the south, next to commons held for local use (which survived mainly in the interior), vast tracts of land were set aside as pasture for transhumant sheep under community or state control.⁴⁵ By 1650 individual peasant ownership may also have been more widespread in the south, especially along the coasts and in mountainous areas like north-eastern Sicily and Calabria; peasant smallholding actually increased in some southern regions in the late seventeenth century, showing that ownership did not only progress in one direction.⁴⁶

Tenurial relations

The Black Death was possibly the single most critical event for the history of Italian agriculture in our period. The late medieval demographic, social and economic 'crisis' ended a period of institutional experimentation dating back to

43. L. Chiappa Mauri, 'Riflessioni sulle campagne lombarde del Quattro-Cinquecento', *Nuova storia italiana*, 69 (1985), p. 129; Giuglietti, *Contadini e proprietari*, p. 262; F. Piccini, 'Le Isola', pp. 301–70; S. Zorini, 'Monasteri e problemi di una crisi agraria in uno "Stato" feudale repubblicano (1585–1615)', *Midagor di C'rob*, *Journal de Rome. Moyen-Âge, Temps modernes*, 90 (1978), pp. 729–769; Benvenuti, 'Rendita feudale', p. 992; Visceglia, 'Rendita feudale', p. 555; *idem*, *Territorio feudale*, p. 267; G. Poli, *Terreno e insediamento nella Puglia moderna. Patisaggio agrario e strutture produttive tra XVI e XVII secolo* (Galatina, 1980), p. 34.

44. Pedersani, *L'Europa*, pp. 114–15, 196–200, 221–2, 277, 284; P. Lunari Sartori, 'Il mutuo contadino nel Cinquecento: ceca e famiglia nelle campagne venetesi', in G. Borelli (ed.), *L'uomo e araba agitata in territorio veneto*, 2 vols (Verona, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 327–8; G. Ferrari, 'La popolazione veneta sui beni comuni', *Nuova storia italiana*, 69 (1985), pp. 5–64; D. Beltrami, *Saggio di storia dell'agricoltura nella Repubblica di Venezia durante l'età moderna* (Venezia/Rome, 1958), pp. 43–8; G. Panich, 'I beni comuni: note storiche e proposte di ricerca', in A. Tagliacarne (ed.), *L'acqua e la Terraferma: antiche e moderne vie d'acqua dei Retroni* (Milan, 1983), pp. 371–82.

45. Coppola, 'Equilibrio economico', pp. 206–9; J. A. Marino, *Rural Economy in the Kingdom of Naples* (Baltimore, MD/London, 1988); F. Mercutio, 'Uomini, cavallette, pecore e grano: una calamità di parte', *Storia e storia*, 8 (1985), pp. 767–93; M. Galferio, 'Usi e abusi. Comunità rurali e difesa dell'economia tradizionale nello Stato pontificio', *Passato e presente*, 24 (1980), pp. 73–93.

46. Poli, *Territorio e contadino*, Lecce, *Terza di Lavoro*, pp. 70–7; F. Piccini, 'La Isola', ch. 3; G. Deblle, *Cruciale d'un società rurale. Montecitorio e la Valle Caudine tra XVI e XVII secolo* (Naples, 1973), pp. 128–9, 170–2, 206–7; Visceglia, 'Rendita feudale', p. 541.

the twelfth century, selected three principal tenurial arrangements, and defined the parameters of agricultural growth up to the late eighteenth century.

The most significant development in agriculture north of Rome was the reorganization of land, from highly fragmented and dispersed plots into farms averaging ten to thirty hectares. Consolidation (*appoderamento*, from *potere* = farm) produced two very different agricultural systems. In much of central Italy and several areas further north, consolidated farms turned to the multiple cropping of cereals, vines, olives, fruit trees and other labour-intensive products like flax or silk. A central purpose of this form of *appoderamento* was to establish a farm large enough to employ a family of four or five and provide for its basic needs; specialization was constrained by the overriding concern for subsistence. Mixed farming was associated with different kinds of leasehold. Share tenancy on consolidated farms (*mezzadria poderalo*), which urban legislation favoured over fixed rent, was typical of Umbria, Tuscany, Emilia and the Marches.⁴⁷ Output was divided equally between landlord and tenant; the costs of seed, working livestock and tools were shared or met by the landlord, who controlled output choices and managed the sale of any surpluses. Fixed rent in kind or cash prevailed instead on the dry plains and hills of Lombardy and the Veneto, where tenants more frequently provided the working capital and were generally more independent.⁴⁸

A quite different arrangement emerged during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the irrigated plains of central Lombardy near Milan. Some of the highest rates of productivity in Europe were achieved there on consolidated farms of 50–130 hectares, which abolished the fallow outright by integrating cereal production with cattle fed on irrigated water meadows and more marginal crops like rice, flax or hemp. The farms were leased for a cash rent to rural entrepreneurs who furnished capital inputs, including the wages of seasonal migrants. The system spread gradually across much of the Po plain during the early modern period, with just a brief setback in the depths of the demographic collapse of the 1630s and 1640s.⁴⁹

Neither the reasons for consolidating land, nor the origins of new tenants, nor the factors which determined the choice of contract are clearly understood. Consolidation has been interpreted as a way of saving on labour costs in a period of rising real wages. Since proportionately greater savings could be achieved with land-hungry crops like cereals or hay than with labour-intensive products like wine and olive oil, one would expect consolidated farms to specialize in the former and leave labour-intensive crops to be cultivated on

47. G. Piccini, 'L'evoluzione della rendita fondiaria in Italia: 1350–1450', in *Italia 1350–1450*, p. 249; B. Campesani, 'Proprietari, mezzadri e pigionanti in un villaggio della bassa pianura bolognese (1650–1700)', *Annali dell'Italia Unità Ciro*, 7 (1985), p. 109.

48. See Giuglietti, *Contadini e proprietari*; Piccini, 'L'evoluzione della rendita'; C. Poni, *Fatti e tendenze fondarie e agricole. Studi di storia rurale* (Bologna, 1982), pp. 283–358; G. Biagioli, 'The spread of *mezzadria* in central Italy: a model of demographic and economic development', in A. Favre-Chamoux (ed.), *Evolution agricole et croissance démographique* (Lage, 1987), pp. 139–54. For the Lombard *mezzadria* see below, n. 49.

49. G. Chittoloh, 'La pianura irrigua lombarda tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento', *Annali dell'Italia Unità Ciro*, 10 (1986), pp. 207–21; L. Chiappa Mauri, 'Le trasformazioni nell'area lombarda', in S. Cernini (ed.), *La Toscana nel medioevo. Costumi di una civiltà regionale* (Pisa, 1988), pp. 409–32; Faccini, *La Lombardia*, ch. 6.

of the economy. Peasants and landlords responded to changing commercial opportunities by specializing in what they could do best: smallholders in the mountainous north-east concentrated on wine, oil and silk; *massari* on the western latifundia specialized in wheat. By the second half of the fifteenth century a complex system of production had developed, in which *massari* relied upon smallholders for harvest labour, and smallholders depended upon *massari* for supplies of food grain. Similar patterns of functional integration between land- and labour-intensive agriculture emerged at the latest in the sixteenth century in other regions such as central Apulia and Neapolitan Campania. In the Tuscan and Roman Maremma and the Apulian Capitanata, by contrast, the collapse of demand for grain and depopulation associated with malarial infestations caused a proportionally greater expansion of transhumant pastoralism.⁵⁴

Italian peasants therefore responded to the late medieval crisis either by specializing or by diversifying their output. From this perspective, the oft-remarked contrast between an 'extensive' agriculture in the south and an 'intensive' agriculture in the centre-north is misleading: in organizational and commercial terms, Lombard irrigated farming was more similar to the specialized southern arrangements than to the self-sufficient mixed farming typical of central Italy. It is mixed farming which stands out as the exception and needs to be explained.

Specialized farming in Sicily, central Apulia, Campania and the areas of irrigated farming in the north could rely upon developed labour markets which supplied wage labour at peak periods in the agricultural cycle, and upon competitive product markets which redistributed output relatively efficiently. These institutional resources may have been less developed in regions where diversification aimed to reduce risk by emphasizing self-sufficiency: labour was mainly supplied by the family, credit mainly by the landlord, and output was ideally consumed rather than being sold on the market. Since it seems unlikely that Tuscan or Umbrian peasants were inherently more 'risk averse' than peasants in Apulia or Sicily, it seems reasonable to suppose that they were responding to factors – such as the lack of seasonal wage labour, difficulties in gaining access to credit, or non-competitive product markets – which made specialization too uncertain a path to pursue.

Households

In an essay on the family systems of pre-modern Europe, Peter Laslett described a family model and an underlying system of values which he argued were typically 'Mediterranean'. The description presumed that southern Europe (including Italy, Iberia, southern France and Greece) is a culturally homogeneous area. Laslett's 'Mediterranean family model' displayed certain fundamental

54. Epstein, *Age of the Peasant*, p. 127; Piccini, 'L'evoluzione della rendita', p. 254; Poli, *Territorio e contadino*, pp. 54–6; Vascoglia, *Territorio rurale*, p. 123.
55. Epstein, *Age of the Peasant*, pp. 200–7, 210–22; Galasso, *Economia e società*, pp. 143–52, 174–81.
56. Faccini, *La Lombardia*, chs 6–7; Giugis, *Contadini e proprietari*, ch. 2; Poli, *Territorio e contadino*, p. 61.
57. R. Romano, *Tra due crisi: l'Italia del Rinascimento* (Turin, 1971), pp. 51–68; Giugis, *Contadini e proprietari*, pp. 72–97, 200–43; Piccini, 'L'evoluzione della rendita', pp. 259–60, 264–6; Epstein, *Age of the Peasant*, ch. 1.

smallholdings. In effect, the more advanced irrigated farming in Lombardy was practised on large-scale farms, whereas the specialized vineyards and olive groves whose products were in increasing demand after the Black Death were overwhelmingly concentrated on smaller plots.⁵⁵ None the less, the fact that in much of central and northern Italy tenants of larger farms pursued a strategy of crop diversification rather than specialization suggests that labour savings were not the only purpose of consolidation.

A comparison with developments in the south casts some light on the matter. South of Tuscany, agriculture pursued the path of specialization. Grain was produced mainly on large-scale farms (*masserie, casali*) run by tenants employing seasonal wage labour, in which land alternated as arable and dry pasture for transhumant sheep. Around towns and along the coasts, by contrast, small 'Mediterranean gardens' produced labour- and capital-intensive crops such as wine, olive oil, almonds, silk and, in Sicily and Calabria, sugar cane. As a general rule the distinction between extensive and intensive land use matched that between feudal and peasant ownership. But the fault lines did not overlap entirely: Sicilian and Calabrian barons were among the first to exploit the potential of the sugar and silk industries,⁵⁶ for example, and everywhere rural elites ran their own *masserie*. Although no equivalent to the northern consolidated family farm emerged, this was not for lack of investment. On the contrary, the fact that southern Italy exported a significantly larger surplus of capital-intensive crops such as wine, oil and raw silk than the centre-north suggests that the south also invested proportionally more in them. Intercropping of grain with vines or olive trees along Umbrian, Tuscan or Venetian lines was not unknown further south, but the order of priority between the two was reversed: whereas the northern sharecropper paid more attention to the staple crop than to the cash crop, the smallholder on the Apulian coast did the opposite.⁵⁷

It has been frequently suggested that the plague made a greater difference to agriculture in the central and northern regions than in the south. Whereas north of Rome land consolidation raised agriculture to a higher growth path, southern agriculture continued along a rut it had trodden since the twelfth century. Unable to break out of its feudal mould, it stagnated during the early modern period as a 'dependent' sector exporting surpluses to the more developed north.⁵⁸ Recent research suggests that this contrast is overdone. For Sicily, whose agriculture is often viewed as typical of southern Italian 'export-dependence', the second half of the fourteenth century marked a watershed: feudal land became more commercialized, more sophisticated credit and labour markets emerged, the domestic market became more integrated, and agricultural exports – of only marginal significance before 1350 – became a linchpin

58. Chappas Maun, 'Ritlessioni', p. 127; Piccini, 'L'evoluzione della rendita', p. 254; Poli, *Territorio e contadino*, pp. 54–6; Vascoglia, *Territorio rurale*, p. 123.

59. Epstein, *Age of the Peasant*, pp. 200–7, 210–22; Galasso, *Economia e società*, pp. 143–52, 174–81.

60. Faccini, *La Lombardia*, chs 6–7; Giugis, *Contadini e proprietari*, ch. 2; Poli, *Territorio e contadino*, p. 61.

61. R. Romano, *Tra due crisi: l'Italia del Rinascimento* (Turin, 1971), pp. 51–68; Giugis, *Contadini e proprietari*, pp. 72–97, 200–43; Piccini, 'L'evoluzione della rendita', pp. 259–60, 264–6; Epstein, *Age of the Peasant*, ch. 1.

features: an early age at marriage for women; the absence of adolescent, pre-marital servanthood; a high proportion of multiple households containing more than two generations; and patrilocal marriage, in which the marrying son would remain in the father's household rather than setting up a new one. Richard Smith has suggested that the features identified by Laslett 'formed a constellation of variables that distinguished many Mediterranean rural societies of the later Middle Ages from England and quite possibly from other countries in northwest Europe', remarking how the comparison with England points to the existence of 'two distinctive cultural regions'. For Smith, Mediterranean rural culture displayed a preference for kin links through the male lines and a prevalence of values that were both patriarchal and placed great stress on honour and virginity at marriage.⁵⁵

Smith's hypothesis is based on evidence from late medieval rural Tuscany, which describes a pattern of large and complex rather than nuclear households; patrilocal marriage; and a strongly patriarchal structure headed by the eldest male in the household. More recent research, however, indicates that this central Tuscan pattern was far from typical, and that there were striking differences in household structure between regions and between different rural sectors and significant change across time.

One interesting example of change over time comes from the late medieval countryside of Lucca, to the immediate north-west of the area discussed by Smith. In the early fourteenth century peasant households in this region were nuclear; they had large numbers of children who left the paternal home at marriage; male and female age at marriage was low; and up to half of wealthier peasants' property was shared out between male sons after they reached the age of twenty-five. By the mid-fifteenth century, however, peasant families had become smaller; marriage was patrilocal, and the peasant household had become extended; male age at marriage had increased; and sons could no longer claim a share of their father's property after reaching the age of twenty-five. We find a similar case in medieval Lazio, where in the tenth to twelfth centuries households were strictly nuclear and marriage was neo-local (sons left the paternal household upon marriage); by the fifteenth century, however, married sons stayed within the father's household, and after the latter's death it had become common for male heirs to continue living together and to keep the property undivided.⁵⁶

As in late medieval Lucchesia, family structures in late medieval Lazio seem therefore to have adopted at least some of the features identified by Laslett and Smith as peculiarly 'Mediterranean', in a process which would also fit other scholars' claims that rural households in central and northern Italy became larger and more complex over time. However, this phenomenon did not apply

to the entire country; by the eighteenth century the Italian countryside displayed three principal systems of household formation.⁵⁷ The first featured patrilocal and late female age at marriage and was found in the shape of the stem family in rural Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria, and of the multiple household (including co-resident siblings) in the rest of the centre-north. The second system, based on neo-local residence and early female age at marriage, applied mainly to parts of the southern mainland and Sicily. The third system, which displayed neo-local residence and a late female age at marriage, was typical of rural Sardinia and the southern Tyrrhenian coast and also of north-central Italian cities. Within these broad patterns there was still considerable regional variation, particularly in female age at marriage and in features such as rates of celibacy and the incidence of pre-marital servanthood.⁵⁸

These regional divergences seem to have been due in large part to differences in land tenure and associated labour markets. In the more fertile plains and hills of north-central Italy the strong correlation between *appoderamento*, under-developed labour markets and extended households responded to the need to increase labour inputs as the size of the farm expanded. In the same regions, rural labourers, small-scale tenants and landowning peasants had predominantly nuclear households.⁵⁹ On the southern Tyrrhenian coast around Naples, 'lineage'-based household structures were associated with peasant smallholders and petty artisans who grew labour-intensive tree crops requiring large but irregular inputs of labour. Along the coasts of Apulia and Abruzzi, nuclear households of highly mobile wage-labourers were associated instead with latifundia and olive groves. Geographically and economically intermediate regions displayed a combination of these features.⁶⁰

Land, Labour and Credit Markets

Land

A strong tradition of scholarship has assumed that peasants did not treat land like any other commodity to be bought and sold on the market, but imbued it with values of family identity and prestige that were antithetical to economic maximization. In this view, peasant land transactions followed two distinct circuits:⁶¹ a kin-based circuit, in which exchanges were restricted to relatives

57. E. Benigno, 'The Southern Italian family in the early modern period: a discussion of coresidential patterns', *Continuity and Change*, 1 (1989), pp. 165-94; M. Barbagli, *Sotto la stella della Madonna della famiglia in Italia dal XVI al XX secolo*, 2nd edn (Bologna, 1988).

58. Barbagli, *Sotto la stella della Madonna della famiglia*, pp. 225-54; Lanaro Sartori, 'Il mondo contadino', p. 314.

59. Poni, *Paesi e contadini*, pp. 283-336; A. Doveri, 'Famiglie di contadini e famiglie di pagani del contado pisano nel secolo XVIII. Struttura ed evoluzione', *Archivum*, 8 (1985), pp. 797-813; V. Biondini Broccheri, 'Famiglie e mestieri nell'Alto Milanese tra '500 e '600', *Archivum*, 117 (1991), pp. 37-58; D. Sella, 'Profilo demografico e sociale di un comune rurale lombardo. Balsamo nel 1597', in *Modi di vita di Luoghi del Pado* (Bologna, 1982), pp. 333-44.

60. Dellile, 'L'ordine dei villaggi'.

61. This paragraph summarizes M. Catoni, *I contadini di San Friate. Metamorfosi di un mondo rurale nell'Emilia dell'età moderna* (Turin, 1984), pp. 122-40 and G. Levi, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorist*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Chicago, 1985), ch. 3.

55. P. Laslett, 'Family and household as work group and kin group: areas of traditional Europe compared', in R. Wall, J. Robin and P. Laslett (eds), *Family Form in History* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 313-63; R. M. Smith, 'The people of Tuscany and their families in the fifteenth century: medieval or Mediterranean?', *Journal of Family History*, 6 (1981), pp. 107-28.

56. E. Leveroni, 'Dalla famiglia stretta alla famiglia larga. Linee di evoluzione e tendenze della famiglia rurale lucchese (secoli XIV-XV)', *Studi storici*, 30 (1987), pp. 171-202; S. Caracci, 'Aspetti delle strutture familiari nel Lazio tardo-medievale', *Archivum della Società Romana di Storia Patria*, 110 (1987), pp. 151-76.

and prices reflected unwritten norms of 'reciprocity' rather than market values; and a market-based circuit, in which land was sold by the peasant kin to urban investors. Whereas transactions among kin were used strategically to ensure an optimal balance between land and household size, sales to 'outsiders' were merely short-term responses to financial crisis. This model implies that land could only flow *out* of the peasant sector, and is therefore closely linked with the view previously referred to that peasant ownership experienced uninterrupted decline during the early modern period.

It is hard to assess these conclusions from current studies, which are either highly localized or rely on infrequent snapshots of land distribution based on urban tax returns. Yet both aspects of the model – peasant traditionalism and the unidirectional flow of land transactions – seem overstated. This is partly because historians have been more concerned with uncovering evidence of peasant hardship and exploitation than with social and economic developments within rural society itself, and have consequently ignored most evidence of rural land acquisitions. Rural land markets were in fact more active, and the pattern of transactions between the rural and the urban sectors more complex, than this model suggests. Peasants seem to have sold *and* bought land in response to even quite rapid changes in their economic circumstances. Agricultural labourers in early modern Apulia slipped in and out of the market in expensive vine- and olive-growing 'micro-plots' with great ease, suggesting neither a strong emotional attachment to land nor a sharp distinction between short-term economic 'tactics' dictated by hardship and a long-term 'strategy' of optimization. In the centre-north, urban property expanded rapidly when rising fiscal demands on the countryside coincided with a run of bad harvests or a broader economic depression – as in the 1520s and 1530s, the 1590s, and during the central decades of the seventeenth century, at other times the balance of trade was more equal or could even be reversed. Neither can one ignore the fact that forced sales by the weaker rural strata often benefited propertied elites in the countryside equally or more than urban landlords.⁶²

Land markets did not, of course, work everywhere according to identical rules. Markets faced three major constraints. The first consisted of community laws restricting or excluding sales of land to outsiders. Restrictions by urban communities were probably mostly intended to exclude buyers from rival towns,⁶³ but rural by-laws responded also to more legitimate worries: outsiders could disrupt communal systems of land management devised to avoid overgrazing, and when buyers were townspeople who were exempted from local taxes, any acquisition caused a net increase in the tax charges of the rural community itself. A second obstruction to the free circulation of land arose from the fact that the social and economic elites were able to avoid developing

62. Salvemini, 'Patria della Puglia', p. 34; G. Corazzoli, *Vite e lotte a grano. L'io aspetto del reddito rurale nel Veneto del '500* (Milan, 1979), p. 52; Faccini, *La Lombardia*, pp. 86–90, 137–44; S. Cahn Jr., 'The movement of landed property in the contado of Siena: relations between city and country, 1295–1450', unpublished ms (1984); G. Viduani, 'Contadini e mercato: tracce di sopravvivenza', *Storia e storia*, 10 (1987), pp. 877–913 demonstrates the implausibility of the distinction between peasant 'tactics' and 'strategy'.

63. W. J. Connell, 'Chierico e Stato territoriale. Il potere fiorentino a Prato nel XV secolo', *Storia e storia*, 14 (1991), pp. 529–30.

property outside their families through various systems of entail, male inheritance and primogeniture,⁶⁴ while the existence of seigniorial rights restricted sales of feudal land to aristocrats or to only the wealthiest commoners. Lastly, the higher tax burden borne by peasants lowered the relative price of their land compared with urban landholdings, an inbuilt bias which favoured the latter's accumulation.⁶⁵ A further and equally significant constraint was the 'feudal-communal' system of land-holding,⁶⁶ which resulted in different agents (individual peasants, rural communities, feudal lords and at times the state) possessing a variety of rights over the same land.

Although it has been suggested that this system, and by implication the other restrictions outlined, was a fundamental source of economic retardation, because it restrained pressures towards specialization and commercialization, it seems none the less unlikely that Italian land markets were very much less efficient than elsewhere in Europe at this time. In the most highly commercialized regions of the south, Sicily and Apulia, many traditional 'feudal-communal' constraints on land markets had already disappeared by the fifteenth century, and feudal and peasant property circulated quite freely⁶⁷ – implying that the persistence elsewhere of traditional institutions was more probably a consequence than a cause of underdevelopment.

Labour

Different agricultural systems required different kinds of labour market: specialized agriculture relied to a greater degree on seasonal wage labour than mixed cropping, which instead maximized family inputs. Although all cultivators faced shifting labour requirements during the year, specialized farmers had to cope with both fewer and larger seasonal variations than multiple croppers. Specialists were therefore more likely to maintain a small household and hire outside labour when necessary, than sustain a large family which would have lain idle for much of the year. Multiple croppers, who faced lower peaks and troughs in seasonal labour requirements, could aim to meet them instead through family labour, and thus had an incentive to maintain larger households;⁶⁸ once the system was established, they could achieve further 'smoothing' of family inputs by producing an increasing quantity of complementary seasonal crops. In other terms, one would expect to find efficient agricultural labour markets (and agricultural specialization) associated with nuclear households, and less

64. E. L. Minio, 'Formazione delle élites urbane nella Sicilia del tardo medioevo: matrimonio e sistemi di successione', *Quaderni storici*, 30 (1995), pp. 9–42; G. Deblin, *Famille et propriétés dans le Royaume de Naples (XV^e–XVI^e siècles)* (Rome/Paris, 1985), pp. 23–85; R. Gellibrand, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: a study of four families* (Princeton, NJ, 1960), p. 272.

65. Nigro, *Fiume e mare*, p. 27 n. 75.

66. P. Charley, *Old, Salt, and Underdevelopment: Economic Problems in A1 Thilo Century Naples* (Naples, 1965), pp. 11–13.

67. Ippoliti, *La Sicilia*, pp. 344–5; Vassallo, *Terreno e popolo*, p. 116, above, n. 62. Even where feudal institutions were most powerful, land could circulate quite freely. Cf. Zatta, 'Momenti e problemi', pp. 718, 729.

68. Barbagli, *Stato di crisi 1600*, ch. 4.

efficient ones (and less specialized agriculture) with extended households. Despite other intervening factors, this basic relationship does in fact seem to have applied, with nuclear households prevailing in the south, and extended households emerging during the later Middle Ages in the central and northern regions associated with *mezzadria poderal*.⁶⁹

Sharecropping *poderi* were mainly unspecialized. Mixed croppers in central and northern Italy appear at first to have responded to the problem of labour shortages by employing the offspring of poor cottagers and smallholders as live-in servants; concurrently or somewhat later, Tuscan and Emilian sharecroppers began to pool resources between neighbouring farms 'to avoid using wage labour'.⁷⁰ These 'internal labour markets' were improved by the development of large property complexes (*fattorie*) which arose during the later Middle Ages to collect and redistribute produce among several dozen farms, but which from the late seventeenth century were increasingly used by landlords to intervene actively in production. At the same time the supply of seasonal wage labour from nearby cottagers seems to have increased, possibly because of the need for a more flexible labour force as *fattorie* became internally more specialized.⁷¹ However, these developments were restrained by the landowners' practice of allocating tenants to farms with the aim of achieving an efficient balance between land and labour: if the size of the household changed following births or marriages, the tenant would be asked to move. In practice, the difficulty of finding an optimal balance between farm and family size caused high rates of peasant turnover and motivated landlords to take a close interest in their tenants' matrimonial decisions.⁷²

Credit

As one would expect with such a highly commercialized and urbanized economy, rural credit was ubiquitous. Most forms of credit were already well developed before 1350. The most widespread form of rural credit was the long-term or multi-generational lease, in which tenants agreed to assart a plot and make capital investments in it in exchange for rights of usage and a nominal rate of interest (rent). This arrangement, which clearly antedates the fourteenth century, continued to be practised throughout our period, particularly for tree crops which took several years to produce a return. By the late twelfth or early thirteenth centuries one also finds more flexible short-term capital markets,

69. Ibid.; Benigno, 'The Southern Italian family'.

70. Lanaro Saroni, 'Il mondo contadino', p. 314; Sella, 'Profilo demografico', p. 339; Besimo Brocchieri, 'Famiglie e mestieri', p. 46; Poni, *Fatti e carteggi*, p. 316.

71. S. R. Epstein, *Alle origini della fattoria toscana. L'evoluzione di S. Maria della Scala di Siena e di un altro feudo (1250-1450)* (Florence, 1980), pp. 269-74; E. Lottici e Gregori, 'Organizzazione e sviluppo di una fattoria nell'età moderna: l'ente a Ronchi (1651-1740)', in M. Muri (ed.), *Ricerche di storia moderna*, 2 vols. (Pisa, 1976/79), vol. 1, pp. 209-88; G. Giorgetti, *Capitalismo e agricoltura in Italia* (Bari, 1977), pp. 238-9; Droschi, *Famiglie di contadini*, Poni, *Fatti e carteggi*, p. 336.

72. Poni, *Fatti e carteggi*, pp. 340-1; Campodoni, 'Proprietari, mezzadri', p. 118; Mc Ardle, *Abbigliamento*, pp. 151-2, 164.

including the use of land as collateral for both short- and long-term loans, the lease of draught animals, and the rudiments of a market in agricultural futures (advance sales of agricultural produce); the latter allowed smaller advances to be made, often as seed or food grains rather than cash, to be repaid at the following harvest.⁷³ These developments were the effect both of more active land and product markets, and of the rise of powerful urban authorities which could enforce laws sanctioning disbursement.

These systems were based on private bargaining. Lenders often had considerable leverage on the terms of the contract, although not primarily because they were monopolists but because they were better informed than the peasantry: rural lenders were typically village or town notaries, whose practice made them ideally situated to assess general economic conditions and potential borrowers' circumstances. For borrowers the consequences of this imbalance could be neutralized either by providing systematically cheaper loans or by improving access to market information. The first solution was attempted in central and northern regions like Lazio and the Veneto through the creation of rural pawnshops (*Monti di pietà*, *Monti dei pigni*), but these institutions were probably not very effective, mainly because they excluded the use of land and the main movable goods (chattels, working animals and tools) as collateral.⁷⁴ The more sophisticated alternative, which combined the supply of credit with a system for collectively reducing risk, evolved mainly in the more commercialized regions south of Tuscany. First recorded in early fifteenth-century Sicily, the system was based on agricultural prices established through public, centralized bargaining. In *contratti alla meta* (Sicily), *alla voce*, *a liquidazione* (Naples) or *a signoria* (Maremma), producers were advanced working capital at an agreed price per unit of grain, cheese, olive oil, wine, silk and almonds. This price (*meta*, *voce*) was set after the following harvest by a committee which included creditors, debtors and public representatives. Initially these contracts were restricted to more specialized and creditworthy peasants, but during the sixteenth century they began also to include cottagers on more traditional share and fixed rent leases. Centralized bargaining lowered transaction costs and improved circulation of scarce capital in the rural sector; by drawing on producers' and buyers' future expectations, it reduced uncertainty and helped stabilize output and prices over time.⁷⁵

73. D. Herlihy, 'Population, plague and social change in rural Piccola, 1201-1430', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 18 (1963), pp. 239-40; A. Saponi, 'I mutui dei mercanti fiorentini del Trecento e l'incremento della proprietà fondiaria', inidem, *Studi di storia economica (secoli XIII-XV)*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1955-67), vol. 1, pp. 191-221; E. Poni, 'L'attività assicurativa dei mercanti sanguignantesi nell'età comunale', *Archivio storico italiano*, 119 (1961), pp. 145-62; G. Poni, *La Toscana nel medioevo (secoli XI-XV)*, *Archivio storico italiano*, 118 (1960), pp. 207-23.

74. G. Alfani, 'Sulle origini dei Monti di Pietà nel dominio siciliano', *Archivio storico italiano*, 118 series, 2 (1958), pp. 67-112; Deluciani, *La vita economica*, p. 156; Lanaro Saroni, 'Mondo contadino', p. 330. Venice regulated on this in 1458 and 1461 in the context of powers taken by cities in lieu of rural tax arrears. Cf. G. M. Varanini, *Cittadini e contadini e stato regionale. Ricerche sulla terzogenesi veneta nel Quattrocento* (Verona, 1992), pp. 125-61.

75. Epstein, *Le famiglie*, pp. 144, 171, 205; M. Verga, 'Rapporti di produzione e gestione dei feudi nella Sicilia centro-occidentale', *Quadern storici*, 15 (1980), pp. 120-40; Chonley, *Del sale*, pp. 122, 132-3; Zotta, 'Momenti e problemi', pp. 734-6; Salvemini, 'Prima della Puglia', pp. 45, 98.

The Florentine tax survey of 1424–27 can provide a rough estimate of the proportion of non-marketed output and consumption in the countryside. No more than 70 per cent of the rural population (equal to 50 per cent of the total population) had access to enough land to attempt 'self-sufficiency'. If one assumes with some exaggeration that they consumed up to 50 per cent of their net output, it follows that no more than 25 per cent of total sellable output could theoretically remain within the 'subsistence' sector.⁸³ These figures imply also that the oft-cited claim by the eighteenth-century Neapolitan economist Ferdinando Galiani that southern peasant households consumed no less than half their output is quite certainly wrong, not least because agriculture in many southern regions was more highly commercialized than in Tuscany.⁸⁴ It must in any case be emphasized that the Tuscan estimate is an upper limit, which assumes that virtually the only agricultural produce to reach the market was in the form of rent, and that it is highly unlikely that such a 'subsistence' economy could have sustained a rate of urbanization of 25 per cent. Both estimates in any case ignore manufactures and services produced in the countryside, which were mostly traded outside rural households, and which would further reduce estimates of the extent of the 'subsistence' sector.

It follows from the evidence discussed previously that peasant economic choice was most influenced by the institutional relations between town and country and between feudal and non-feudal lands under royal authority. These underwrote the most significant changes during the late medieval and seventeenth-century 'crises'. During both periods, territorial states attacked existing fiscal, economic and jurisdictional privileges and lowered barriers to trade; the result of these two waves of 'jurisdictional integration' was to intensify commercial integration and specialization within regions of increasing size.

The late Middle Ages witnessed the expansion of territorial states in the centre-north and the consolidation of royal power in the south. The rulers' desire to broaden their political consensus generally provoked a decline of urban authority over the countryside in regions previously controlled by city-states, and greater control over feudal independence and the rise of towns under royal jurisdiction in the southern monarchies. Increased political centralization and integration weakened or abolished outright many urban and feudal controls over rural production and markets, and was followed everywhere by greater specialization within politically defined regions.⁸⁵ The most significant

⁸³ The method of calculation follows Hall, data on Tuscany from Herlihy and Klapisch, *Le donne*, p. 107.

⁸⁴ F. Galiani, *Della società e della agricoltura*, ed. A. Merello (Milan, 1963), p. 234. For Sicily, see Epstein, *An Island*, p. 282 n. 47.

⁸⁵ M. Morri, *Formazione di una regione economica. Ipotesi sulla Toscana, sul Veneto, sulla Lombardia. Studi storici*, new series, 11 (1985), pp. 47–59; P. Malanima, 'La formazione di una regione economica: la Toscana nel secolo XVI', *Società e storia*, 6 (1983), pp. 229–169; M. Longpré, 'Il sistema economico della Toscana nel Trecento', in Gersani, *La Toscana*, pp. 41–66; Degrossi, 'L'economia del tardo medioevo', pp. 338–40, 395; Salvemini, 'Prima della Puglia', pp. 6–11, 105–8. Venice began seriously to address the issue of territorial integration only following the Treaty of Cambrai (1529), in response to a significant downturn in foreign trade; cf. Variani, *Comuni italiani*, pp. 163–81 and M. Knapp, 'Guerra e finanza (1381–1508)', in G. Cozzi and M. Knapp, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia. Dalla guerra di Chioggia alla rinascita della Terraferma* (Turin, 1986), pp. 332–6 for conditions in the late fifteenth century.

developments occurred in the countryside, as peasants responded to the decline in rents and the rise in labour productivity and per capita income which followed the Black Death, by increasing output in higher-value agricultural crops (wine, olive oil, cheese, meat, plant dyes, silk) and in small-scale manufacture, and by decreasing the proportion of staple cereal crops.

Besides adequate contracts and credit markets, agricultural specialization required a flexible system of distribution that was not always at hand. Particularly where urban powers over the countryside remained strong, market institutions were not always adequate for the new needs. For example, although rural fairs expanded significantly across Italy after 1350 in response to the more specialized patterns of regional trade, fewer numbers were established where towns could enforce their monopoly over trade, as in central Italy around Florence and Perugia. By contrast, where urban jurisdiction was weak, as in southern Italy, or could be challenged effectively by rural communities, as in Lombardy and the *Veneto*, new fairs were not hindered. The same applied to the capacity of towns to control the price and distribution of grain in their hinterland. These institutional differences shaped rural responses to opportunities for increasing agrarian commercialization and specialization.⁸⁶

Although the growth of territorial states lowered some commercial barriers between the countryside and capital cities, and gave the former some institutional autonomy, it did not fundamentally change the medieval pattern of competition through legal privilege: where urban and seigneurial claims to rural revenue did not interfere with the rulers' fiscal and economic concerns, they were generally left in place. On the other hand, the strategic importance of the grain trade for urban welfare and political stability made it a prime target for regulation. Control was strongest in the centre-north, where subject cities' prerogatives – elaborate customs systems, price controls, bans on exports and forced sales during scarcity – were tempered only slightly by the capital cities' need for larger and more distant supplies.⁸⁷ Endemic smuggling was one response to the higher transaction costs, lower sales prices and often unpredictable controls caused by market regulation.⁸⁸ With the significant exception of Rome and Naples, the grain trade was less regulated in the south, mainly because most towns lacked the requisite institutional backing, and possibly, in

⁸⁶ Del Torre, *Un'epoca*, pp. 105–6; S. R. Epstein, 'Regional fairs, institutional innovation and economic growth in late medieval Europe', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 47 (1994), pp. 450–82; idem, 'Cities, regions and the late medieval crisis: Sicily and Tuscany compared', *East and West*, 130 (1991), pp. 3–50; idem, 'Town and country in late medieval Italy: economic and institutional aspects', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 46 (1993), pp. 453–77.

⁸⁷ P. Macey, 'La questione annonaria negli antichi stati italiani', *Quadern storici*, 7 (1974), pp. 256–46; A. M. Pini Quaglia, 'Per provvedere al popolo: il sistema annonario nella Firenze dei Medici (Firenze, 1990); Romani, *Nella spina*, pp. 96, 104–9, 113, 115; W. Iarullo, *Strutture agrarie e crisi annonaria nel primo Cinquecento bolognese* (Bologna, 1977), p. 35; D. Zanetti, *Problemi annonari di una economia preindustriale. Genova a Parma dal 1498 al 1700* (Turin, 1964), pp. 40–51; Del Torre, *Un'epoca*, pp. 191–201, 205–9.

⁸⁸ L. Rossini and G. Zatti, *Uomini, grano e contrabbando sul Garda tra Quattrocento e Seicento* (Verona, 1985); R. Polesi, 'L'importanza della produzione cerealicola e vinicola nella formazione del reddito della Terraferma veneta dal '500 al '700', in Tagliacarne, *Un'epoca e la Terraferma*, pp. 383–409; Romani, *Nella spina*, p. 63; O. Ruggio, *Paide e portuale. La vita granaria visto dalla Lombardia* (Turin, 1990), pp. 136–9; G. Tocco, *La torre inerte. Poteri e territori nei secoli di Parma e Piacenza tra Sei e Settecento* (Bologna, 1985), pp. 280–9; Chisley, *Old Italy*, pp. 152–3. See also above, n. 33.

A range of solutions was thus devised to meet credit requirements for consumption and for working capital, and to a lesser extent for real estate acquisitions or improvements. Although acts of usury and exploitation did undeniably occur, credit was not simply a tool for exploiting peasant hardship by accumulating land at their expense. The records tend to overstate the proportion of debts which led to repossession, because lenders were more likely to draw up a formal contract for loans which faced a higher risk of default; a significant proportion of credit transactions took place verbally because the risk of default was low, but the terms of these arrangements can obviously not be assessed. The existence of similar rates of interest across regions, and their long-term decline,⁷⁶ indicates that rural credit markets became more competitive and efficient over time and suggests that they were not systematically biased against peasant debtors.⁷⁷

Although individual lenders can seldom have possessed monopoly power, credit markets could be distorted by the collective powers of urban jurisdiction. The fear that a 'credit revolt' by Friulan peasants in 1533 might spread to the rest of the *Terraferma* prompted Venice to instigate a compromise between the urban elites in Udine, who upheld the rule that interest payments be made in kind at a time of rapidly rising prices, and the rural communities, who wished to repay debts in cash. Although the city of Udine and its peasants agreed (in 1563) that payments in kind were more onerous, they disagreed on the implications: whereas the former argued that they were necessary to make the peasants work harder, the latter rebutted that they could produce more if they were left with a larger share of the seed. Further south, Naples so dominated the kingdom's credit markets before the mid-seventeenth century that serious problems arose if the flow of money from the capital was interrupted – as occurred briefly during the harvest crises of the late 1580s and 1590s, when the government's attempt to manipulate grain production in Apulia led to a walkout by local producers.⁷⁸

The main limitation of formally constituted credit markets was the fact that they were restricted to peasants who owned substantial collateral. Landless, poor peasants must have found it hard to invest or to insure against risk by borrowing against future harvests, for the lender would have no means of compensation for default – a fact that presumably made poor peasants more reliant on locally based informal, petty credit. These difficulties may explain some of the peculiarities of central Italian sharecropping, which was dominated by propertyless tenants who under normal circumstances would not have had access to working capital. The reason why landlords were willing to advance capital under this arrangement was that they could be repaid with peasant labour at 'wages' below the market rate. Indeed, these landlords' preference

Product Markets and Commercialization

The debate on the 'transition' from feudalism to capitalism in Europe is based on the German socialist Karl Kautsky's view that it was necessary to evict the peasantry from the land in order to achieve modern agricultural growth, which was a prerequisite for capitalist industrialization.⁸⁰ This claim is based on three main assumptions: first, that pre-modern agriculture was subject to economies of scale, so that larger farms run with wage labour were more efficient than peasant smallholdings; second, that pre-capitalist peasants were highly risk averse, implying that they would not innovate and increase output in the same way that capitalist tenants would; and third, that peasants aimed for 'subsistence' rather than to increase their income through 'commercialization'. Our discussion of tenurial relations and land, labour and credit markets has suggested instead that peasants responded to commercial pressures and opportunities by innovating and specializing, or alternatively by diversifying to reduce risk, on the basis of the institutionalized incentives and constraints they faced. Although the 'specializing' and the 'subsistent' peasant are obviously idealized extremes, they underline the fact that there was no such thing as a 'peasant economy' because of the considerable differences in rural incentives across space and time.

The claim about the peasantry's preference for 'subsistence' appears to be based on the prevalence in pre-capitalist rural economies of payments in kind, which are taken as evidence of a 'natural' (non-market) economy. This confuses the concept of 'natural' versus 'monetary' economy, which applies to the means of payment in use, with that of 'subsistence' versus 'commercialized' economy, which applies to the nature of the economic structure.⁸¹ The decision to pay in kind rather than money does not express a specific economic strategy: it is 'largely a matter of convenience... [saving] time and intermediation costs'.⁸² Consequently, the presence of transactions in kind cannot be used to measure the extent of economic 'subsistence'; strictly speaking, an estimate of peasant subsistence must consider only goods produced and consumed by the same peasant household.

79. Cf. S. R. Epstein, 'Tuscans and their farms', *Rivista di storia economica*, 12 (1994), pp. 111–37.

80. R. Brenner, 'The agrarian roots of European capitalism', in T. L. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 213–327; I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System. I. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974), ch. 1.

81. See e.g. R. Romano and U. Tucci (eds), *Storia d'Italia. Istituzioni 6. Economia naturale, economia monetaria* (Turin, 1983).

82. G. Federico, 'Household budgets as a source for the study of rural economy (Italy, 1800–1940): commercialization and peasants' behaviour', in T. Pierckemper (ed.), *Zur Ökonomie der privaten Haushalte. Haushaltsforschung als Quelle historischer Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Frankfurt/New York, 1991), p. 183.

76. Suberini, 'Prima della Paglia', pp. 101–2; Corazzini, *Piani e livelli*.

77. Idem, 'Prestitori e contadini nella campagna friulana intorno alla metà del '500', *Quaderno storia*, 9 (1974), p. 474.

78. Idem, *Piani e livelli*, pp. 73–4 and passim; idem, 'Sulla diffusione dei livelli a franchetto tra il patriziato veneziano nella seconda metà del '500', *Atti del convegno*, new series, 6 (1982), pp. 103–28; Zatta, 'Alimentare e problemi', p. 783; also Charley, *Op. cit.*, pp. 44, 84.

the more commercialized regions, because higher agricultural productivity and better systems of distribution made intervention redundant.⁹⁷

Advance warning of the second wave of jurisdictional reform came during the 1590s, when a series of disastrous harvests brought to an end the long economic and demographic upswing begun in the late fifteenth century, and gave 'impetus... to an enhanced view of government responsibilities'.⁹⁸ More proximate causes of the notorious 'seventeenth-century crisis', however, were the catastrophic epidemics of 1629–31 in the centre-north and of 1647–56 in the south. Losses of between a quarter and a third of the total population occurred at the same time as tax demands escalated, the north suffered military invasion, and the south was caught up in urban and peasant uprisings. In the short term, demographic losses and social and political upheaval caused trading networks to collapse; in Lombardy, the rural economy ground to a virtual standstill for more than a decade.⁹⁹ But in the longer run, the pressure by central authorities pursuing a sort of 'involuntary mercantilism' to abolish established fiscal and economic privileges was beneficial. The main consequence, most visible in Piedmont, Lombardy and the Veneto, was to 'ruralize' the economy: while the loss or declining significance of medieval privileges caused a sharp contraction of medium-sized cities, cheaper service and manufacturing centres in the countryside were allowed to grow.¹⁰⁰

The demise of many of the jurisdictional obstacles that had survived the late medieval 'crisis' and the rise of a more entrepreneurial peasantry increased trade and territorial specialization within and between neighbouring states, particularly across the Po plain.¹⁰¹ However, perhaps to an even greater degree than during the late medieval 'crisis', the speed and nature of the economic recovery was shaped by the prevailing political institutions. In the kingdom of Naples, for example, the medium-term effects of demographic collapse were far from uniformly positive. Many of the more powerful barons reacted to the decline in land rents by raising taxes on trade; the more entrepreneurial among them resorted more straightforwardly to banditry. This exacerbated the

89. M. L. Ruggio, *L'evoluzione della politica amministrativa a Napoli dal 1503 al 1806* (Naples, 1923); L. Fazio, *La politica del grano. Annona e controllo del territorio in Sicilia nel Settecento* (Milan, 1975); Deluminau, *Una economia*, pp. 28, 143, 156–70.

90. N. S. Davidson, 'Northern Italy in the 1590s', in Clark, *The European crisis*, p. 170. See also P. Burke, 'Southern Italy in the 1590s: hard times or crisis?', *ibid.*, pp. 177–99; Drees, 'Village-building'; Zonta, 'Monaci e problemi', pp. 749–51; P. Cazzaia, 'Il problema annonario nella Ferrara pontificia (il legno) Serra e la Congregazione dell'Abbondanza (1616–1622)', *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università di Macerata*, 2 (1970–71), pp. 543–65.

91. Faccini, *La Lombardia*, ch. 6.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20; R. P. Carrington, 'Il processo di "ruralizzazione" in Italia nei secoli XVI–XVII. Verso una regionalizzazione', *Rivista di storia economica*, new series, 10 (1993), pp. 353–86; S. Ciriacconi, 'Venice et ses villes. Structuration et déstructuration d'un marché régional', *Rivista storica*, 276 (1986), pp. 292, 294–5, 297; Beltrami, *La feudalizzazione economica*, p. 5; Jucet, *La terra italiana*, M. Verga, 'Tra Sei e Settecento: un "età delle pre-riforme"?' *Storia*, 1 (1995), pp. 111–21.

93. Faccini, *La Lombardia*, pp. 137–44; D. Sella, *Crisi and continuity. The economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), chs 6–7; P. M. Hohenberg and L. H. Lees, 'Urban decline and regional economies: Brabant, Castile, and Lombardy, 1550–1750', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), pp. 439–61; E. Sereni, *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano* (Bari, 1961), pp. 262–4; Ciriacconi, 'Venice', pp. 294–307; G. Levi, *Centro e periferia di uno stato assoluto* (Turin, 1985), pp. 7–69; Carrington, 'Il processo', pp. 384–5 no. 100–1.

kingdom's commercial disintegration and made it more difficult for highly commercialized, export-led economies like central Apulia's to convert.⁹⁴

The sharp contraction of southern agricultural exports to the north after the mid-seventeenth century thus reflected both the north's structural transformation and a process of relative economic decline in the south. Already in the late sixteenth century, demographic stagnation in northern Italy had caused demand for southern grain to decline; previously imported commodities – silk, olive oil and wine – also began to be produced more heavily in the north.⁹⁵ The mid-seventeenth century depression and increased regional integration in the north intensified this process of 'import substitution'. In the case of silk manufacture – considered by many historians to be the harbinger of Italy's industrial revolution – the decline of urban and guild monopolies also made it easier to set up new silk mills in the Lombard, Venetian and Piedmontese countryside.⁹⁶

Both the late medieval and the seventeenth-century demographic crises were followed by the expansion of rural and semi-rural manufacture. Although such 'proto-industry' often arose in the more peripheral parts of the country, it was not necessarily the result of upland overpopulation or poverty; in several instances mountain peasants had already achieved higher living standards than their neighbours in the plains.⁹⁷ The fact that rapid manufacturing growth in the late seventeenth century was preceded by a similar cycle in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, also suggests that the developments during the seventeenth century were less revolutionary than past theories of 'proto-industrialization' have assumed. Both phases were the consequence of a process of income and demand substitution. Population losses, specialization and the redistribution of income brought about by declining urban privilege, increased lower- and middle-class discretionary incomes and produced a relative shift in demand from staple food to cheap manufacture. Rural manufacture in central and northern Italy (little is known about developments in the south)⁹⁸ was typically situated in areas free of urban economic and fiscal control, including large boroughs lacking urban charters in the Lombard plain,⁹⁹ mountain communities in the Alpine valleys,¹⁰⁰ and semi-autonomous feudal lordships surviving

94. Salvemini, 'Primi della Puglia', pp. 94–9; Benvenuto, 'Rendita feudale', p. 599; Visceglia, 'Rendita feudale', pp. 546–50; Leprie, *Storia*, pp. 23–6, 41–2. Regional trade was recovering by the 1680s (Dellie, *Giustizia*, pp. 62, 187).

95. Galasso, *Economia e storia*, pp. 343–53.

96. S. Poni, 'Per la storia del distretto industriale serico di Biadello (secoli XVI–XIX)', *Quaderno storia*, 25 (1991), pp. 93–107; S. Ciriacconi, 'Economie et crises de la proto-industrialisation dans la Vénétie: le cas du Haut-Vicentin (XVII–XIX siècles)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 32 (1985), pp. 311–23; A. Mucchi, 'La deindustrializzazione della Lombardia nel secolo XVII', *Archivio storico lombardo*, 11th series, 3 (1986), pp. 167–203; P. Covadon, 'L'angolo e protoindustria: il caso di Rastignano tra XVII e XVIII secolo', *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino*, 82 (1984), pp. 460–77.

97. Roimani, *Nella grande*, pp. 36, 45, 141; Epstein, *An Island*, ch. 5; Benvenuto, 'Rendita feudale', p. 574.

98. Developments after 1656 are discussed in *ibid.*, p. 586; Marino, *Finanziamento*, pp. 229–39; Leprie, *Storia*, vol. II, pp. 48–50; Dellie, *Giustizia*, pp. 219–20; M. Armand, 'Commerce et consommation des draps en Sicile en Italie méridionale (XV–XVIII siècles)', in M. Spallanzani (ed.), *Productions animales et commerce des produits de la laine (seizième–XVIII siècles)* (Florence, 1976), pp. 127–30.

99. Sella, *Crisi and Continuity*, ch. 6; G. Carrington, 'Quasi-centro', Borghi e terre in area lombarda nel *da poco di loro (secoli XVI–XVIII)* (Florence, 1976), pp. 3–26.

100. G. Zaina, 'Seguendo le relazioni dei Rettori. Manifattura e politica industriale della Lombardia Veneta', in Tagliarini, *L'acqua e la Terraferma*, pp. 531–46; D. Carminati Masera, 'Potere locale e stato: una

in the interstices of territorial states,¹⁰¹ whose jurisdictional autonomy was extended during both periods of institutional 'crisis'; by contrast, where rural franchises were insignificant as in Tuscany, rural industry failed noticeably to emerge.¹⁰²

'Proto-industrial' developments were not, of course, purely cyclical in nature. During the late seventeenth century the product range expanded to include silk, straw hats, cotton clothing and a larger range of metalware in addition to the cheap woollens, mixed fabrics and ironware which dominated late medieval production; there were significant technological advances between the two periods, particularly in the silk and metal industries; and both the scale of production and the number of people employed in rural manufacture were greater around 1700 than two centuries before. Yet the main source of 'proto-industrial' strength was also its most basic source of weakness, since the prerequisite of jurisdictional independence meant that industrial location was determined more by random institutional features than by factors strictly of cost. Political contingency, rather than relative production costs, determined whether a community or an entire region could 'choose' to pursue rural manufacture and overcome the main obstacle to pre-industrial agricultural progress: the long-run decline in the marginal productivity of labour.

Agricultural Productivity

Contrary to claims that Italian agriculture was impeded by institutional and cultural failings, by landlord absenteeism, exploitative contracts and peasant aversion to the market, the evidence reviewed so far has suggested that property rights, tenurial relations and credit markets were reasonably efficient and responded positively to demographic and commercial change, and that peasants did not avoid trade on principle. More serious bottlenecks to growth arose from high internal and external tariffs, which reduced competition and opportunities for specialization, and by two additional constraints on rural labour markets. The latter were caused by the lack of adequate supplies of seasonal wage labour and by urban monopolies over manufactures and services, which restricted opportunities for rural employment and exacerbated the problems caused by excess labour.

comunità hillside nel Cinque-Seicento', *Abitato storico-geografico italiano*, 82 (1984), pp. 363-89; D. Caspari, 'Signori e contadini nella Lunigia di Valmadrera. Secoli XVI-XVII', in G. Cozzi (ed.), *Storia sociale e geografia nella Repubblica veneta (in. XI-XVII)*, 2 vols (Rome, 1981/85), vol. II, pp. 133-90; S. Crisconio, 'Prodotto, lavoro a domicilio e sviluppo economico nelle campagne venete in epoca moderna', *Quaderni storici*, 18 (1983), pp. 57-80.

101. S. Crisconio, 'Industria rurale e strutture feudali nella Terraferma veneta tra Sei e Settecento', *Studi storici*, 36 (1986), pp. 67-80; C. M. Bellanti, 'Dalla città alla campagna: industrie tessili a Mantova tra carestie ed epidemie (1550-1630)', *Civiltà storica*, 25 (1988), pp. 444-5; idem, 'Rural manufactures and rural protoindustries in the "Italy of the cities" from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century', *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), pp. 259-60.

102. P. Malanima, *La disadattata di un'economia rurale. L'industria di Firenze nei secoli XVI-XVII* (Bologna, 1982) and Poni, 'Per la storia', pp. 154-5 argue that proto-industry was held back in areas of overpopulation *perhaps* because sharecroppers were fully employed in agriculture; here an opposite line of causation is implied.

As elsewhere in pre-industrial Europe, Italian agriculture was characterized by high land productivity (output per hectare), indicating that farms made efficient use of available resources within the existing institutional framework, and by low labour productivity (output per person), implying that the agricultural sector was overmanned. Although the lack of reliable statistics means that the effects of low labour productivity on rural standards of living can only be surmised, a comparison between Italian and British agriculture on the eve of the First World War provides a useful benchmark. In 1909 the productivity of labour in English agriculture was 2.2 times that of Italian agricultural labour in 1911; net output per hectare in England was 0.7 times that achieved in Italy; consequently, English agricultural labourers' standard of living was roughly 1.6 times that of their Italian counterparts.¹⁰³

Between 1350 and 1750 Italian agriculture generally became more, rather than less, labour-intensive. The land produced more, but the number of peasants living on it increased faster. Data on grain yields are difficult to interpret, but prices and output per hectare suggest that the average productivity of grain farming increased significantly, despite a brief setback during the seventeenth century. Even so, although the most productive regions could match the better northern European agriculture (between sixteen and seventeen quintals per hectare was achieved at Lodi near Milan in 1771), average output in the eighteenth century was still probably closer to twelve quintals.¹⁰⁴

Major capital investments in large-scale drainage and land reclamation, irrigation and land consolidation mainly in the better-watered centre-north, new settlements in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century southern Italy, and some experimentation with new crop rotations, all played a part in these improvements.¹⁰⁵ New, often more labour-intensive crops were introduced. The impact of maize on rural productivity and consumption patterns in northern Italy is comparable to that of the potato in nineteenth-century northern Europe. First recorded in the Veneto in the 1560s, maize spread rapidly after the turn of the century; by the 1650s it had replaced lesser cereals in Venetian peasants' cropping patterns and was becoming a staple of the urban and rural poor. Landlords

103. P. K. O'Brien and G. Toniolo, 'The poverty of Italy and the backwardness of its agriculture before 1914', in B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton (eds), *Land, Labour and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity* (Manchester/New York, 1991), pp. 385-409.

104. M. Armand, 'Mesures et interprétations de la croissance: Rendements et productivité agricole dans l'Italie moderne', *Annali E.C.*, 28 (1973), pp. 475-98; A. De Maddalena, *Rural Europe 1500-1750*, in C. Cipolla (ed.), *The Industrial Revolution in Europe*, vol. 2: *The Western and Southern Centuries* (London/Glasgow, 1972), pp. 342-5. Higher seedling density, which tends to lower individual seed yields, could be compensated by higher output per unit of land. Cf. P. Eichel, *Progresso agrario, disegualismo sociale e agricoltura di montagna. La produttività del Collio di Spina in Italia (secoli XVI-XVII)* (Bologna, 1978), pp. 199-201; Caron, *L'industria rurale*, p. 118 fig. 12. Evidence of seed yields is also restricted to wheat, whose output varies more than for lesser grains.

105. Irachli, *Progresso agrario*, pp. 199-201; G. Felloni, 'Italy', in C. Wilson and G. Parker (eds), *The Introduction to the Sources of European Economic History* (London, 1977), pp. 10-11; Armand, 'Mesures', p. 491. English data are summarized in Campbell and Overton, *Land, Labour and Livestock*, pp. 180, 273, 279, 302-3. 106. P. Malanima, 'L'economia italiana nel Seicento', in *Storia della società italiana*, XI: *La Controriforma e il Seicento* (Milan, 1989), pp. 176-81; S. Crisconio, *Altre e migliori: la famiglia europea in età moderna* (Milan, 1994), chs 1-2; Delmonico, *La famiglia*, pp. 154-5; Poni, *Unità e diversità*, pp. 101-5; Romano, *La storia*, pp. 57-9; Davies, 'Village-building', Verga, 'Rapporti di produzione'.

the more commercialized regions, because higher agricultural productivity and better systems of distribution made intervention redundant.⁹⁰

Advance warning of the second wave of jurisdictional reform came during the 1590s, when a series of disastrous harvests brought to an end the long economic and demographic upswing begun in the late fifteenth century, and gave 'impetus... to an enhanced view of government responsibilities'.⁹¹ More proximate causes of the notorious 'seventeenth-century crisis', however, were the catastrophic epidemics of 1629–31 in the centre-north and of 1647–56 in the south. Losses of between a quarter and a third of the total population occurred at the same time as tax demands escalated, the north suffered military invasion, and the south was caught up in urban and peasant uprisings. In the short term, demographic losses and social and political upheaval caused trading networks to collapse; in Lombardy, the rural economy ground to a virtual standstill for more than a decade.⁹² But in the longer run, the pressure by central authorities pursuing a sort of 'involuntary mercantilism' to abolish established fiscal and economic privileges was beneficial. The main consequence, most visible in Piedmont, Lombardy and the Veneto, was to 'ruralize' the economy: while the loss or declining significance of medieval privileges caused a sharp contraction of medium-sized cities, cheaper service and manufacturing centres in the countryside were allowed to grow.⁹³

The demise of many of the jurisdictional obstacles that had survived the late medieval 'crisis' and the rise of a more entrepreneurial peasantry increased trade and territorial specialization within and between neighbouring states, particularly across the Po plain.⁹⁴ However, perhaps to an even greater degree than during the late medieval 'crisis', the speed and nature of the economic recovery was shaped by the prevailing political institutions. In the kingdom of Naples, for example, the medium-term effects of demographic collapse were far from uniformly positive. Many of the more powerful barons reacted to the decline in land rents by raising taxes on trade; the more entrepreneurial among them resorted more straightforwardly to banditry. This exacerbated the

kingdom's commercial disintegration and made it more difficult for highly commercialized, export-led economies like central Apulia's to reconvert.⁹⁵

The sharp contraction of southern agricultural exports to the north after the mid-seventeenth century thus reflected both the north's structural transformation and a process of relative economic decline in the south. Already in the late sixteenth century, demographic stagnation in northern Italy had caused demand for southern grain to decline; previously imported commodities – silk, olive oil and wine – also began to be produced more heavily in the north.⁹⁶ The mid-seventeenth century depression and increased regional integration in the north intensified this process of 'import substitution'. In the case of silk manufacture – considered by many historians to be the harbinger of Italy's industrial revolution – the decline of urban and guild monopolies also made it easier to set up new silk mills in the Lombard, Venetian and Piedmontese countryside.⁹⁷

Both the late medieval and the seventeenth-century demographic crises were followed by the expansion of rural and semi-rural manufacture. Although such 'proto-industry' often arose in the more peripheral parts of the country, it was not necessarily the result of upland overpopulation or poverty; in several instances mountain peasants had already achieved higher living standards than their neighbours in the plains.⁹⁸ The fact that rapid manufacturing growth in the late seventeenth century was preceded by a similar cycle in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, also suggests that the developments during the seventeenth century were less revolutionary than past theories of 'proto-industrialization' have assumed. Both phases were the consequence of a process of income and demand substitution. Population losses, specialization and the redistribution of income brought about by declining urban privilege, increased lower- and middle-class discretionary incomes and produced a relative shift in demand from staple food to cheap manufacture. Rural manufacture in central and northern Italy (little is known about developments in the south)⁹⁹ was typically situated in areas free of urban economic and fiscal control, including large boroughs lacking urban charters in the Lombard plain,¹⁰⁰ mountain communities in the Alpine valleys,¹⁰¹ and semi-autonomous feudal lordships surviving

94. Salvemini, 'Prima della Puglia', pp. 94–9; Ikenauer, 'Rendita feudale', p. 599; Visceglia, 'Rendita feudale', pp. 546–50; Leprie, *Storia*, pp. 23–6, 41–2. Regional trade was recovering by the 1680s (Dellie, *Confessione*, pp. 62, 187).

95. Galasso, *L'economia e la società*, pp. 345–53.

96. C. Wit, 'Per la storia del dibattito industriale: servizi di Bologna (secoli XVI–XIX)', *Quaderni storici*, 25 (1990), pp. 93–167; S. Ciriacini, 'Fattori e recessi della proto-industrializzazione in Veneto: le cas da Haut-Vicentino (XVII–XIX secoli)', *Revue d'histoire urbaine et contemporaine*, 32 (1985), pp. 311–23; A. Mouch, 'La deindustrializzazione della Lombardia nel secolo XVII', *Archivium historicum*, 11th series, 3 (1986), pp. 167–203; P. Covadon, 'L'artigianato e l'industria: il caso di Raccanigi tra XVII e XVIII secoli', *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino*, 82 (1984), pp. 460–77.

97. Rotondi, *Nella grande*, pp. 36, 45, 141; Frispon, *La storia*, ch. 5; Benvenuto, 'Rendita feudale', p. 574. 98. Developments after 1656 are discussed in ibid., p. 586; Marini, *Industrial economy*, pp. 229–39; Leprie, *Storia*, vol. II, pp. 48–50; Dellie, *Confessione*, pp. 219–20; M. Armand, 'Commerce et consommation des draps en Sicile et en Italie méridionale (XV–XVIII siècles)', in M. Spallanzani (ed.), *Produzione commerciale e consumo dei paesi di terra (secoli XVI–XVIII)* (Florence, 1976), pp. 127–39.

99. Sella, *Crasi and continuity*, ch. 6; G. Chittolini, 'Quasi-città', pp. 3–24.

100. G. Zaini, 'Seguendo le relazioni dei Retori. Manifattura e politica industriale della Lombardia Veneta', in Tagliari, *Forgia e la Terza guerra*, pp. 531–46; D. Carminati Mastera, 'Potere locale e stato: una

89. M. L. Riccio, *L'evoluzione della politica annonaria a Napoli dal 1501 al 1806* (Naples, 1923); L. Fazio, *La politica del grano. Annona e controllo del territorio in Sicilia nel Settecento* (Milan, 1993); Deluciani, *Una economia*, pp. 28, 143, 156–70.

90. N. S. Davidson, 'Northern Italy in the 1590s', in Clark, *The European urban*, p. 170. See also P. Burke, 'Southern Italy in the 1590s: bad times or crisis?', ibid., pp. 177–82; Davies, 'Village-building'; Zonta, 'Momenti e problemi', pp. 749–51; J. Carzoli, 'Il problema innovativo nella struttura pontificia: il legato Serra e la Congregazione dell'Abbondanza (1616–1622)', *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università di Macerata*, 2 (1970–71), pp. 543–65.

91. Fucini, *La Lombardia*, ch. 6.

92. Ibid., pp. 19–20; R. P. Carrington, 'Il processo di "ruralizzazione" in Italia nei secoli XVI–XVIII. Verso una regionalizzazione', *Rivista di storia economica*, new series, 10 (1993), pp. 853–86; S. Ciriacini, 'Venice et ses villes. Structuration et déstructuration d'un marché régional', *Revue historique*, 276 (1986), pp. 292, 294–5, 297; Behrman, *La proto-industria*, p. 3; Tucci, *La terra baronale*; M. Verpe, 'Tra Sals e Settecento: un'età delle pre-riforme?', *Storia*, 1 (1995), pp. 111–21.

93. Fucini, *La Lombardia*, pp. 137–44; D. Sella, *Crasi and continuity. The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), chs 6–7; P. M. Hohenberg and L. H. Lees, 'Urban decline and regional economies: Brabant, Castile, and Lombardy, 1550–1750', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1989), pp. 439–61; F. Seroni, *Storia del paesaggio agrario italiano* (Bari, 1963), pp. 262–4; Ciriacini, 'Venice', pp. 294–307; G. Levi, *Centro e periferia di uno stato assoluto* (Turin, 1985), pp. 7–69; Carrington, 'Il processo', pp. 384–5 n. 100–1.

in the interstices of territorial states,¹⁰¹ whose jurisdictional autonomy was extended during both periods of institutional 'crisis'; by contrast, where rural franchises were insignificant as in Tuscany, rural industry failed noticeably to emerge.¹⁰²

'Proto-industrial' developments were not, of course, purely cyclical in nature. During the late seventeenth century the product range expanded to include silk, straw hats, cotton clothing and a larger range of metalware in addition to the cheap woollens, mixed fabrics and ironware which dominated late medieval production; there were significant technological advances between the two periods, particularly in the silk and metal industries; and both the scale of production and the number of people employed in rural manufacture were greater around 1700 than two centuries before. Yet the main source of 'proto-industrial' strength was also its most basic source of weakness, since the prerequisite of jurisdictional independence meant that industrial location was determined more by random institutional features than by factors strictly of cost. Political contingency, rather than relative production costs, determined whether a community or an entire region could 'choose' to pursue rural manufacture and overcome the main obstacle to pre-industrial agricultural progress: the long-run decline in the marginal productivity of labour.

Agricultural Productivity

Contrary to claims that Italian agriculture was impeded by institutional and cultural failings, by landlord absenteeism, exploitative contracts and peasant aversion to the market, the evidence reviewed so far has suggested that property rights, tenurial relations and credit markets were reasonably efficient and responded positively to demographic and commercial change, and that peasants did not avoid trade on principle. More serious bottlenecks to growth arose from high internal and external tariffs, which reduced competition and opportunities for specialization, and by two additional constraints on rural labour markets. The latter were caused by the lack of adequate supplies of seasonal wage labour and by urban monopolies over manufactures and services, which restricted opportunities for rural employment and exacerbated the problems caused by excess labour.

comunità biellesi nel Cinque-Seicento', *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino*, 82 (1984), pp. 363–89; D. Gasparini, 'Signori e contadini nella Cornica di Valmarengo. Secoli XVI–XVII', in G. Cozzi (ed.), *Storia sociale e politica nella Repubblica veneta (secoli XVI–XVIII)*, 2 vols (Rome, 1980/85), vol. II, pp. 133–90; S. Craciun, 'Problemi di lavoro a domicilio e sviluppo economico nelle campagne venete in epoca moderna', *Quaderni storici*, 18 (1983), pp. 37–80.

101. S. Craciun, 'Industria rurale e strutture feudali nella Terraferma veneta tra Sei e Settecento', *Studi italiani Luigi Einaudi*, 36 (1986), pp. 67–80; C. M. Bellani, 'Dalla città alla campagna: industrie tessili a Mantova tra carestie ed epidemie (1550–1630)', *Critica storica*, 25 (1988), pp. 444–5; idem, 'Rural manufactures and rural protoindustries in the "Italy of the cities" from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century', *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), pp. 259–60.

102. P. Malanima, *La discesa di un'economia silenziosa. L'industria di Firenze nei secoli XVI–XVII* (Bologna, 1982) and Poni, 'Per la storia', pp. 154–5 argue that proto-industry was held back in areas of overgrazing *podere* because sharecroppers were fully employed in agriculture; here an opposite line of causation is implied.

As elsewhere in pre-industrial Europe, Italian agriculture was characterized by high land productivity (output per hectare), indicating that farms made efficient use of available resources within the existing institutional framework, and by low labour productivity (output per person), implying that the agricultural sector was overmanned. Although the lack of reliable statistics means that the effects of low labour productivity on rural standards of living can only be surmised, a comparison between Italian and British agriculture on the eve of the First World War provides a useful benchmark. In 1909 the productivity of labour in English agriculture was 2.2 times that of Italian agricultural labour in 1911; net output per hectare in England was 0.7 times that achieved in Italy; consequently, English agricultural labourers' standard of living was roughly 1.6 times that of their Italian counterparts.¹⁰³

Between 1350 and 1750 Italian agriculture generally became more, rather than less, labour-intensive. The land produced more, but the number of peasants living on it increased faster. Data on grain yields are difficult to interpret, but prices and output per hectare suggest that the average productivity of grain farming increased significantly, despite a brief setback during the seventeenth century. Even so, although the most productive regions could match the better northern European agriculture (between sixteen and seventeen quintals per hectare was achieved at Lodi near Milan in 1771), average output in the eighteenth century was still probably closer to twelve quintals.¹⁰⁴

Major capital investments in large-scale drainage and land reclamation, irrigation and land consolidation mainly in the better-watered centre-north, new settlements in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century southern Italy, and some experimentation with new crop rotations, all played a part in these improvements.¹⁰⁵ New, often more labour-intensive crops were introduced. The impact of maize on rural productivity and consumption patterns in northern Italy is comparable to that of the potato in nineteenth-century northern Europe. First recorded in the Veneto in the 1560s, maize spread rapidly after the turn of the century; by the 1650s it had replaced lesser cereals in Venetian peasants' cropping patterns and was becoming a staple of the urban and rural poor. Landlords

103. P. K. O'Brien and G. Toniolo, 'The poverty of Italy and the backwardness of its agriculture before 1914', in B. M. S. Campbell and M. Overton (eds), *Land, Labour and Livestock. Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity* (Manchester/New York, 1991), pp. 385–409.

104. M. Aymard, 'Mesures et inéquivalences de la croissance. Rendements et productivité agricole dans l'Italie moderne', *Annuaire EHC*, 28 (1973), pp. 475–98; A. De Maddalena, 'Rural Europe 1300–1750', in C. Cipolla (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, vol. 2: *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London/Glasgow, 1972), pp. 342–5. Higher seedling density, which tends to lower individual seed yields, could be compensated by higher output per unit of land. Cf. P. Trudel, *Progrès agricole, déséquilibre social et agriculture de subsistance. La propriété du Crique de Espoirs en Basse-Loire XVII^e–XVIII^e* (Bologna, 1978), pp. 199–201; Caron, *L'industrie*, p. 118 bp. 12. Evidence of seed yields is also restricted to wheat, whose output varies more than for lesser grains.

105. Trudel, *Progrès agricole*, pp. 199–201; G. Velloni, 'Italy', in C. Wilson and G. Parker (eds), *The Introduction to the Sources of European Economic History* (London, 1977), pp. 10–11; Aymard, 'Mesures', p. 491. English data are summarized in Campbell and Overton, *Land, Labour and Livestock*, pp. 180, 273, 279, 302–3. 106. P. Malanima, 'L'economia italiana nel Seicento', in *Storia della società italiana*, XI: *La Controriforma e il Seicento* (Milan, 1989), pp. 176–81; S. Craciun, 'Agriculture et économie', pp. 154–5; Poni, *Forme e sviluppi della modernità* (Milan, 1994), chs 1–2; Del Boca, *Il filo economico*, pp. 57–9; Davies, 'Rapporti di produzione', Romano, *Tra due eredi*, pp. 57–9; Davies, 'Village-building', Verga, 'Rapporti di produzione'.

resisted it initially, apparently because they feared that the new crop would lower the commercial value of their rents or impoverish the soil, and because it was exempted from customary tithes. Northern peasants instead saw maize as a boon, since the greater outlay in labour and fertilizer was rewarded with yields two to three times those of standard grains and could be achieved on marshy land unsuited to most other crops. For reasons still unexplained the crop spread far later to central and southern Italy.¹⁰⁷ Less spectacular but still significant instances of agricultural intensification included the diffusion of rice, of mulberry trees for raising silkworms, and of hemp, flax, vines, olive and fruit trees. Most of these investments were made directly by the peasantry, either by sharecroppers as a means of repaying past debts, or by fixed tenants and smallholders in response to changing patterns of demand.

Although agricultural intensification in the long run lowered labour productivity and rural standards of living, landlords responded to increased land productivity by reducing the average size of tenements, or alternatively kept the land deliberately fragmented like the Venetian buyers of the commons.¹⁰⁸ While this course of action made perfectly good sense in the context of abundant supplies of underemployed and cheap rural labour,¹⁰⁹ it also contradicted the claim that peasant smallholders were the main obstacle to pre-capitalist agricultural growth.¹¹⁰ In most of Italy, both landlords and peasants responded to available opportunities by intensifying their use of labour, rather than by consolidating land and employing less labour as in eighteenth-century England. Ultimately, the Italian path to agricultural development led to a dead end, for which the only solution became the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' massive flows of migration. The reason for this failure, however, was neither a lack of developed markets nor a too entrenched peasantry, but the absence of sufficient sources of non-agricultural employment for the men and women who crowded the fields.

107. G. Coppola, *Il mare nell'economia agraria lombarda (dal secolo XVI all'Età moderna)* (Bologna, 1979), G. Levi, 'Innovazione tecnica e resistenza contadina: il mais nel Piemonte del Seicento', *Quaderni storici*, 14 (1979), pp. 102-100; M. Fassina, 'L'introduzione della coltura del mais nelle campagne venete', *Agrochimica e agrochimica*, 15 (1982), pp. 31-59.

108. Coppola, *Il mare*, pp. 108-9; Beltrami, *La penetrazione economica*, pp. 97, 137.

109. Because peasant farms have a higher output per hectare than capitalist farms. Cf. A. Sen, 'Peasants and dualism with or without surplus labour', in *idem*, *Peasants, Labour, and Development* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 57-9.

110. Above, n. 80.