

Economic changes and political changes in the cities of northern and central Italy, 1050-1150

by Chris Wickham

Northern and central Italian cities went through substantial political changes in the century after 1050, above all with the development of city communes. Also, some cities in the region were beginning already to develop commercially, particularly the ports of Genoa and Pisa, and one or two cities in the Po plain, particularly Piacenza and Milan. This article argues that these two developments were largely unrelated, using the case studies of Genoa and Piacenza. If they are related anywhere, Piacenza is the most likely city, given its close links to Genoa (and to an extent Pisa) and the considerable precocity of the development of its institutions.

Le città dell'Italia settentrionale e centrale attraversarono profondi cambiamenti politici nel secolo successivo al 1050, soprattutto con lo sviluppo dei comuni cittadini. Inoltre, alcune città della regione stavano già iniziando a svilupparsi sul piano commerciale, in particolare i porti di Genova e Pisa e una o due città della pianura padana, soprattutto Piacenza e Milano. Questo articolo sostiene che questi due sviluppi furono in larga misura non correlati, utilizzando come casi di studio Genova e Piacenza. Se esiste una relazione in qualche luogo, Piacenza è la città più probabile, dato il suo stretto legame con Genova (e in parte con Pisa) e la notevole precocità dello sviluppo delle sue istituzioni.

Middle Ages, 11th-12th centuries, Genoa, Piacenza, city communes, commercial exchange.

Medioevo, secoli XI-XII, Genova, Piacenza, comuni cittadini, scambi commerciali.

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1. Introduction

There are two main problems facing anyone who wishes to discuss the relationship between political and economic changes in north-central Italy between 1050 and 1150. First, the topic is too vast for any single essay. Second, the two did not actually have that much to do with each other. They were not entirely unrelated, of course; large-scale processes are rarely entirely independent of other broad contexts. But the basic causal elements of each were different. Here I would like to lay out, as rapidly as possible, the main lines of each, and then discuss some empirical examples of developments of one that seem to have been influenced by the other, at least in my view.

The political changes are too well known to require a detailed introduction. The collapse of the Kingdom of Italy, the main change of the first half of this period, and the emergence of the city communes, the main change of the second half, were the result of civil war after 1080 and the felt need on the part of local societies, dominated by cities in most cases, to generate their own solutions, given the absence of government. I have offered elsewhere my interpretation of the origins of communes in Italy, and I will not discuss it again here.¹ My main divergence from the traditional narrative concerns the level of awareness city leaders had of what they were doing in the first decades of the 12th century and the level of enthusiasm with which they embarked on an initially very uncertain journey. But it is not controversial simply to say that communes appeared with different chronological pacing, and initially in rather simple forms; that the first institutionalised communes were the two port cities of Genoa and Pisa, which began to develop formalised structures as early as the 1110s; that the major cities of the central Po Valley, the Lombardy of the 12th century, followed a generation later; and that a full self-consciousness for communal regimes developed, where it was not already established, during the wars with Frederick Barbarossa.

The economic changes of the period are less fully studied, but I have discussed them recently and can at least summarize my opinion of them.² The period of economic take-off in northern Italy did not occur in the period we are examining, except for the ports, Venice, Genoa, and Pisa. For most of the

Giovanni Scriba = Chiaudano, Mario, e Mattia Moresco, a cura di. *Il cartolare di Giovanni Scriba*. Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1935.

LI I/1 = Rovere, Antonella, a cura di. *I Libri Iurium della repubblica di Genova*, I/1. Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 1992.

LI I/2 = Puncuh, Dino, a cura di. *I Libri Iurium della repubblica di Genova*, I/2. Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 1996.

LI I/3 = Puncuh, Dino, a cura di. *I Libri Iurium della repubblica di Genova*, I/3. Genova: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 1998.

¹ Wickham, *Sonnambuli verso un nuovo mondo*. This article is the English version of my paper to the December 2022 conference, with a minimum of added footnotes. I also discuss some of the issues raised here at greater length in Wickham, *Le due facce del Comune*.

² Wickham, *Lasino e il battello*, chapter 6.

inland cities, the take-off had not yet begun in 1150, and indeed it usually occurred after 1180 or sometimes later still; the last two decades of the 12th century are the earliest moment in which we can identify clear signs of the movement of artisanal goods between cities, and overseas via Genoa (Genoa, as is well known, is by far the best-documented of the ports, and perhaps – but this is less certain – it was also the most active.) I here set aside Venice, which was not part of the Kingdom of Italy and was primarily linked to the internal economy of the Byzantine empire. The early maritime activity of Genoa and Pisa was initially military, as Pino Petralia has made clear in an authoritative article,³ and only from about 1130 did it begin to be more visibly commercial. In the case of Genoa, in fact, for the next half-century we are looking at a city that prospered by transporting goods from *other* Mediterranean regions – Sicily, North Africa, Egypt, the Levant – rather than as an outlet for Italian productions themselves. Pisa, on the other hand, exported more, thanks to the iron mines of Elba and the Colline Metallifere, increasingly under Pisan control from the 1110s onwards, and to metalworking both locally and in the city, and indeed the Pisan hinterland and the coast to its south appears to have been the most economically complex area of mainland Italy throughout the 12th century, as archaeologists of both Pisa and Siena have made increasingly clear.⁴

Neither city, however, had much economic impact on inland Italian cities until the last years of the century. The exceptions are Lucca in the case of Pisa (documents emphasize its economic ties with Genoa, its ally, but archaeology highlights its relations with its enemy Pisa);⁵ and the import of cotton from Sicily, through Genoa, to some inland Lombard cities, notably Milan and Piacenza, which becomes visible around 1160, as we shall see – but, again, only important from 1190. The cities of the Po Plain and inland Tuscany were certainly expanding in the 1050-1150 period, and the wealth of their elites begins to be visible in urban tower-houses and the rebuilding of churches. But in most cases it is difficult to link this phenomenon to broader artisanal developments, or economic connections outside individual dioceses and counties. That the early communes were governed, for the most part, by a stratum, large and stable, of militarised elites is of course well known, thanks to the work of Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur; in most cities, the elites were first and foremost landowners, and their commercial activities tended to be very secondary, until much later than our period.⁶ Instead, I would argue that urban expansion before 1150 was the product of demographic increases in the

³ Petralia, “Le ‘navi’ e i ‘cavalli’.”

⁴ See for example Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*; Bianchi and Dallai, “Le district minier des Collines Métallifères;” Grassi, *La ceramica, l'alimentazione*; Gattiglia, *Pisa medievale*; Cantini, e Rizzitelli, *Una città operosa*.

⁵ For documents, see *Giovanni Scriba*, nn. 559, 740, 976, 1038, 1261; Poloni, *Lucca nel Duecento*, 37-8; the archaeological evidence in e.g. Cantini, “Ritmi e forme,” 116, 119-22.

⁶ Maire Vigueur, *Cavalieri e cittadini*.

countryside, linked to land-clearance and agricultural expansion, and also the increase in the wealth of urban elites as a collectivity, linked to the accumulations of landed property and the growth of signorial powers; the take-off of artisanal activity would have been impossible without this wealth, because it depended on increased demand, and it came later.

We are facing two very different processes, then. And I would also rule out the most obvious connection that this brief discussion might suggest, namely that the early political development of Genoa and Pisa derived from the early economic development of each. The dates do not coincide: both cities were developing communal institutions as early as 1110, but their real commercial take-off had not yet begun and, to repeat, is hardly visible before 1130 at the earliest. In my view, underlying the early dating of their communes was the rapidity of their land conquests, well outside their traditional *contadi*, which did not yet have a parallel elsewhere (most other cities were limited to fighting border wars with their neighbours), plus, perhaps above all, the need to organize for fighting wars abroad – predatory attacks such as those of the Pisans in Mallorca in 1113-5, or the colonial conflict the two cities fought against each other in Corsica and Sardinia – since maritime warfare required complicated and expensive logistics. However, as noted at the start, large-scale processes and changes are rarely *completely* disconnected. So I will devote the rest of this paper to a discussion of some of the potential links between them. I will, inevitably, be very brief and schematic in doing so.

The first is negative. The fall of the Kingdom of Italy did not promote the economic development of its cities; quite the opposite. The investment in metalworking and other production on public lands, stressed by a number of scholars in recent years, was a feature of the 10th and early 11th centuries, and did not continue beyond the wars of the 1080s (indeed, it seems to have begun to weaken even earlier).⁷ More generally, in the 11th and early 12th centuries, the German king-emperors were also constantly being asked by individual Italian cities for exemptions from trade tolls, in the Po Plain or elsewhere, and they were happy to do so, no doubt for considerable sums of money. This demonstrates some generalised commercial activity in north-central Italy, but it was still on a limited scale, since the cities concerned were not asking for so very much in practice; in 1014, for example, Henry II agreed that the men of Mantua should be exempt from tolls *pro negocio* as far as Brescia and Lake Garda, which are by no means far away, as well as down along the Po to the sea, but not elsewhere.⁸ And even this small-scale connectivity ended with the failure of the kingdom. In terms of economic development, the division of Italy into autonomous communes was, at least at first, problematic. It led to wars and continued destruction, of course. But it also brought a new series of toll barriers and insecurities for merchants outside the territory of

⁷ See for example Bianchi, *Archeologia dei beni pubblici*; Collavini, “Mutazione signorile.”

⁸ Bresslau, und Bloch, *Die Urkunden Heinrichs II.*, n. 278.

their own city, that is to say transaction costs, which had to be overcome by individual agreements between cities, painstakingly recreated city by city, such as those, preserved in the *Registrum magnum* of Piacenza, between that city and Ferrara in 1181, Florence in the same year, and Cremona in 1183, for the safety of merchants traveling into the territory of the other city, although still paying tolls.⁹ It also meant that, with respect to capital investment, each city initially had to depend on the accumulation of land resources that was possible in its own city territory, because investing in another city was rare and risky (I have only seen examples of it in Genoa).¹⁰ Autonomy fostered economic expansion only when cities as communities started to build up local infrastructures, digging canals, widening and paving roads, draining marshes, beginning to create urban sewage systems, which was in almost all cases a development of the 13th century – we have, for example, an explicit example in a series of Milanese witness depositions from 1207, referring to the 1160s, which speak of an open area just outside Porta Vercellina where the Milanese went to *ludere ad ossa* [play dice] *et cagare et pixare*; it is clear that Milan's sewer system was not yet operational.¹¹ In the 13th century, there is no doubt about urban economic protagonism and infrastructural commitment; but it generally took a long time to get started.

All the same, if we look carefully at individual cities after 1100, we can already see some examples of economic changes influencing political choices or vice versa. Not many, but at least some. I will discuss two of them here, Genoa and Piacenza. In my discussion of Genoa, I will argue that economic and political changes may indeed have had mutual connections. But Piacenza, which I will discuss at the end, may be the clearest example in Italy where economic relations probably directly influenced political developments in the city in the 12th century.

2. Genoa

Let us start with Genoa, then. First, its economic history up to the mid-12th century, filling in with some more detail my previous generalisations; and then its political-institutional development, to see to what extent the latter reacted to and aimed to structure the former. As is well known, when it comes to 12th-century maritime trade, no part of Italy – or the Mediterranean as a whole – is as well documented as Genoa. By far the oldest notarial register survives here, that of Giovanni Scriba from the years 1154-64, which records more than 1,300 documents, and which focuses substantially on commercial transactions from the very beginning. In addition, we have for Genoa the most

⁹ Falconi, e Peveri, *Il Registrum Magnum*, vol. 1, nn. 39, 45, 215.

¹⁰ See, before 1180, *LI I/1*, nn. 32, 57, 132, 202, 243, 246, 249.

¹¹ Merati, "La rappresentazione dell'esperienza," 477, 480, 482, 485-6, 490.

detailed civic chronicle of 12th-century Italy, starting in 1099, which pays great attention to the city's Mediterranean projection; and one of the most substantial surviving series of *Libri iurium*, dating initially to the mid-13th century, which also contains a great many texts concerning Mediterranean relations from 1098 onward.¹² If there is one place where the easy platitudes of the historiography of the "commercial revolution" are actually valid, it is here: for it is on the basis of Genoese evidence that they were primarily developed.

Genoese documentation before 1100 is more or less limited to land transactions, as is normal in Italy. However, occasional references to Genoese trade in Egypt are found in the letters of the Cairo *geniza* for the mid-11th century; and by the early 12th century there was a more stable Genoese presence there. This fits the fact that the rights in Levantine cities, which the victorious Crusaders granted to the Genoese in 1098-1109, focus so firmly on trade privileges.¹³ But the *geniza* also shows that the scale of Italian (and even Byzantine) involvement in Egyptian trade before the 12th century was relatively modest, and any growth could not occur quickly. The rise in Mediterranean trading dates, I would argue, to the 1130s, when we first have lists of Genoese customs tolls, and the 1140s, when Genoese treaties with other Mediterranean powers first begin to be documented.¹⁴

Giovanni Scriba's register of 1154-64, with hundreds of foreign trade transactions, gives us for the first time an idea of the size of this traffic and also of the goods involved. Most Genoese contracts mention only investments and profits in money; however, there are a reasonable number of references to particular types of goods in the register – not enough to offer statistics, but enough to use as rough guides. The Genoese regularly imported spices and dyes; pepper was so common in the city that it was used as an alternative to silver coin in transactions; so were bales of cotton, bulk goods imported from Sicily on a particularly large scale.¹⁵ As for exports, the most frequently mentioned is cloth, the classic bulk commodity, on some thirty occasions. In Giovanni Scriba's register, the fabric most commonly identified is fustian, the mixture of linen and cotton that in the 13th century was associated primarily with Lombard cities, and indeed on two occasions fustian is explicitly stated as coming from Milan and Piacenza.¹⁶ Markets for this fabric were evenly dis-

¹² See Giovanni Scriba; *LI I/1*, *LI I/2* and *LI I/3*; Belgrano, *Annali genovesi*, vol. 1; Belgrano, e Imperiale di Sant'Angelo, *Annali genovesi*, vol. 2.

¹³ For the letters (following the abbreviations used in the Princeton Geniza Project: <https://geniza.princeton.edu/pgp/>), see ENA NS 2.13, T-S 10J16.17, Bodl. MS Heb. b 3/26, edited in Gil, *Bemalkhut Yishma'el*, nn. 749, 420, 794; Kedar, "Genoese merchants in Alexandria," and Musarra, "Genova e il mare nell'Alto Medioevo." Trade agreements: *LI I/1*, nn. 61, 119, with Imperiale di Sant'Angelo, *Codice diplomatico*, vol. 1, nn. 7, 12.

¹⁴ *LI I/1*, nn. 3, 6, 123; for treaties, e.g. *LI I/1*, nn. 118 (Valencia), 181 (Byzantium), *LI I/2*, n. 289 (Sicily). For modest northern Mediterranean trade to Egypt before 1100, see Goldberg, *Trade and institutions*, 19-21, 306-9, 334-5.

¹⁵ Examples are Giovanni Scriba, nn. 8, 88, 152, 256, 846, 1064, 1301.

¹⁶ For fustian, see Giovanni Scriba, nn. 383, 678 (the two which cite Milan and Piacenza), 689, 1095, 1110, appendix 10.

tributed among the standard overseas destinations for Genoese shipments to the Mediterranean after 1150.

By contrast, an important absence in Giovanni Scriba is that of significant references to the Lombard cities of the Po valley, or those of most of Tuscany: that is, of any connection with the rest of central and northern Italy. Men from a dozen or so cities are mentioned, it is true, mostly as witnesses to transactions; but the total number is very small, with the exception of Lucca. A few north Italians (mostly from Lodi and Piacenza) were involved in maritime trade or lent money.¹⁷ The fustians from Milan and Piacenza mentioned above – only two out of hundreds of texts – are the only references to goods actually coming from the Po Plain, even if most of the other fustians and much of the rest of the cloth, whose origin is not specified in the contracts, could well have come from Lombardy as well. We have no reason to think, on the basis of this register or other texts prior to 1190, that Genoese relations with Lombardy were as yet complex or – apart from cotton going in one direction and fustian in the other – large-scale. Overall, then, Giovanni's register shows a Genoese commitment to the sea and to the maintenance of a complex network of trade interconnections as an intermediary between Mediterranean regions. Conversely, what Genoa was not, in the years around 1160, was an organic outlet for the complexities of the northern Italian economy. In very general terms, this is because there was not yet a complex economy of northern Italy to connect to organically. However, Genoese political innovations had an effect at least on Piacenza, as we shall see.

As to politics: I have already doubted that the origins of the Genoese commune were influenced by its economic activity. And indeed even later, most of the city's institutional developments responded to the difficult politico-military events of the second half of the century, not to economic changes. Genoa stayed out of Barbarossa's wars, but faced many other challenges. One was the heavy debts that the commune had accumulated after the costly conquest of Tortosa in Catalonia from the Spanish Muslims in 1148, which led to political stasis in the 1150s, until the city paid what appears to have been its main creditor, the commune of Piacenza, 6,000 pounds in money and goods in 1154-5.¹⁸ Another was the serious, and again costly, war with Pisa, on the sea and in Sardinia, particularly in the years 1162-75; this is the most likely context for our first reference in 1165 to a tax, *collecta*, based on an *estimo*, a calculation of personal landed and mobile wealth, here valued at 6 *denarii* per *libra*, 2.5%. This is one of the first clear references to an *estimo* actually levied anywhere in Italy (the others are for Pisa and Piacenza; I will return to the latter).¹⁹ A third challenge was the factional conflicts among the main

¹⁷ For Lucca, see above, note 5. For loans and trading by north Italians, *Giovanni Scriba*, nn. 232, 500-1, 842, 855, 858, 925, 962.

¹⁸ *LI I/1*, nn. 170-5, 178; see, for the *maximum debitum* that was the result of the Tortosa campaign, n. 113. See also Belgrano, *Annali genovesi*, vol. 1, 33-5, 37-8.

¹⁹ Belgrano, 188; see Banti, *I brevi*, 49-50, for Pisa.

Genoese families, who of course also controlled the communal government, which peaked in the early 1190s before a comprehensive peace in 1194-5; the institutional change most closely related to this was the transition to the rule of “foreign” (non-local) *podestà*, a slow process here as elsewhere, but explicitly linked by the city’s *Annales* to the need to overcome factional rivalries.²⁰ These challenges certainly did not undermine Genoa’s economic activity, which indeed grew rapidly in the same years; but the political developments associated with them did not obviously respond to the evolution of the city’s economy.

Conversely, the details of consular legislation were more responsive to the economy, and quite early as well. More than might be expected, this legislation concerned urban infrastructure. The city was expanding rapidly in the 11th and early 12th centuries; its *burgus* was larger than the old *civitas* by the late 1150s, when, as in many other cities, the consuls built a new city wall encompassing both. The city’s population was also becoming denser; tower-houses appear, as in almost all the cities of mainland Italy, with regularity in texts from now on. This, at least, produced a focused consular response. In 1133-4 the consuls decreed that the colonnade in front of the houses along the sea should be made of stone, not wood, and established rules for building above it; they also legislated on the width of new streets and instructed specific citizens about how to build their own sections of these colonnades. In 1138 they also reordered the harbour. Then in 1145 the consuls twice made sure that open spaces were preserved. One of these was the *vacuum de Sarzano*, at the southern edge of the *civitas*, which needed to remain unbuilt because the city’s *populus* (i.e., urban assembly) met there. Similarly, the monastery of S. Siro was allowed to build on the Castelletto hill, north of the city, as long as the overall space remained *vacuum*, so that “the *populus* could see the city and the sea from there”.²¹ The concern for planning demonstrated by the colonnades and these open spaces, which had as yet no known parallels in other cities, shows how much the consuls of the commune of Genoa saw the city’s urban planning as a collective good, which also extended to urban services. Here, that is, we can see that the ruling group of the Genoese commune was already engaged in the 1130s-40s in reordering the city to adapt it to its developing economic role in the same period; and it seems to have been the only city in Italy to do so, with such commitment, so early. The urban economy and urban institutions were here developing in parallel, and with some mutual interconnections. So far, not so many, but elements of a reciprocal effect are beginning to be visible.

²⁰ Belgrano, e Imperiale di Sant’Angelo, *Annali genovesi*, vol. 2, 36; see for internal conflicts Inguscio, *Reassessing civil conflicts*.

²¹ *LII*/1, nn. 24, 53, 63, 172, *LII*/3, nn. 567-8. For Genoese town planning in general, see Grossi Bianchi, e Poggi, *Una città portuale del medioevo*, 40-75.

3. Piacenza

Second, Piacenza, which is much more difficult to study than Genoa. Its historiography has up to now been relatively weak. Furthermore, most of its main documentary collections are unpublished, so it is still unclear exactly how its economy functioned, although editions of its *Registrum magnum* and some scattered financial and legislative texts allow us to gain a sense of some outlines of its political development.²² But at least we can say, as far as the economy is concerned, that evidence we have for the growth of textile production in the central Po Plain in the 12th century focuses particularly on Piacenza, along with Milan. A bas-relief in the cathedral, dated to c.1150, one of a series of reliefs depicting urban trades, depicts two women cutting cloth. This shows at least some production for sale, early enough; and 'Lombard' textiles, as well as arms, are mentioned in the Genoese regulations of 1128-30. That these textiles came, at least in part, from Piacenza is implied by its proximity to Genoa in the 1140s, as evidenced by Piacenza's loan to Genoa after 1148 – the Piacenza loan was in fact facilitated by a consul who was very active in the documents of the latter city, Folco Stretto, who in return obtained trading rights in Genoa in 1149 – and even more so by the fact that the debt was repaid in 1155 in part in raw cotton and dyeing materials.²³ Moreover, in the 1130s some Piacenza textiles were being exported abroad via Pisa; and a contract from the city shows an artisan and his wife giving a pledge in exchange for cotton in 1146. A set of witness accounts of the oppressions of Barbarossa's officials in Piacenza and its territory, dating from 1164 and referring to 1162-4, mentions the taxation of both fustian and its raw materials, linen and cotton.²⁴

These are scattered, anecdotal references, but they at least give a sense of some artisanal activity, which we do not yet see elsewhere except in Milan. Large-scale cloth weaving in Piacenza may have begun somewhat earlier than in Milan, which until the mid-12th century has more evidence of ironworking – although Milanese dyers, at least, were already active in the 1130s, and some cotton-workers a decade later.²⁵ Later, at the end of the century, cloth production in Piacenza was certainly complex; its mercantile statutes, whose earliest clauses can in my view be dated to the 1190s, list cloth workers of a

²² Falconi, e Peveri, *Il Registrum Magnum*; Solmi, "Le leggi più antiche;" Güterbock, "Alla vigilia della Lega Lombarda." Racine, *Plaisance*, has dominated the historiography for forty years, but is very weak for the 12th century. Fugazza, *Diritto, istituzioni* is a good institutional analysis. The new thesis by Valente, *Vescovi, consoli e assemblee*, which appeared when this article was in press, however transforms our understanding of the city in this period.

²³ For the capitals and other evidence for cloth, see Racine, *Plaisance*, 122, 293-300. For Folco Stretto, see Racine, 301-4; *LI*, I/1, nn. 121, 132, cf. 249 for his sons (and 174, 178 for the Genoa debt). For 1128-30, *LI*, I/1, n. 3.

²⁴ Beyer, *Die lombardische Briefsammlung*, nn. 56-7; Drei, *Le carte degli Archivi parmensi*, n. 171; Güterbock, "Alla vigilia della Lega Lombarda," 68, 71, 73-4.

²⁵ For the dyers and the cotton-workers, see the citations in Wickham, *L'asino e il battello*, chapter 6, notes 317, 320.

wide variety of types. There are complex rules about the size of long pieces of cloth and pieces of fustian, and about the proportion of cotton thread in the latter. The workshops seem to be run at least in part with a putting-out system, a *Verlagssystem*. Fustian and its cotton base are the most important in this text, but woollens also play a significant role. Probably, these statutes reflect the level of cloth production in Milan as well, which by then had come to match that of Piacenza; a clause dated to 1199 requires wool weavers, both male and female, to weave in the style of the cloth of Monza, one of Milan's satellite towns.²⁶

Politically, Piacenza was also early by northern Italian standards in the development of some of its institutions. Its city assembly is documented from 1093, its consuls from 1126, and its consular courts begin in 1133, these being dates typical of the central Po Plain and rather later than Genoa and Pisa. But as early as 1135 the city was legislating as a public body, shortly after Genoa (1130) and just before Pisa (1140); other cities are not documented as legislating until a generation later.²⁷ And, especially for our purposes, as noted above, it is also one of the same three cities with early documentation of taxation based on an *estimo*, dating back to the early 1160s; the witnessing about the oppressions of imperial officials shows that an *estimo* was already being collected regularly by the city in 1162-4. The *estimo* also appears in all three of the surviving *brevia consulum* for Piacenza, dated to the years 1167-81, and we have several documents from the last decades of the century that attest to its apparently regular collection, at least inside the city itself.²⁸

I have doubted that the early institutionalisation of the commune of Genoa was related to its economic activities; but the situation was different in Piacenza. It is not coincidental that Piacenza, which had the closest economic links with Genoa before the Barbarossa wars and unusually early evidence of cloth weaving on a substantial scale, some of which was exported through Genoa, had such a similar course of development to Genoa in its institutions. The lines of economic connections in this case facilitated political imitation. The development of the *estimo* in Genoa was a response to expensive military challenges; in Piacenza it was not, and here it is more likely that it was simply associated with new ideas about how to manage economic resources needed for city government, which came from the port city to which it was most closely linked. It is true that in 1162 the military danger posed by Frederick Barbarossa was very present, not least in Piacenza, an ally of Milan, which was destroyed that year. But most other Lombard cities faced this danger with less complex financial measures – compulsory military service, compulsory

²⁶ Castignoli, e Racine, *Corpus statutorum mercatorum Placentiae*, especially 66, 100-4, 136, 158, 168-9, 179-89, 195, 202, 248.

²⁷ Fugazza, *Diritto, istituzioni*, 6, 20; Solmi, "Le leggi più antiche," 55-7; Falconi, e Peveri, *Il Registrum Magnum*, n. 53; vol. 3, n. 804.

²⁸ Güterbock, "Alla vigilia della Lega Lombarda," 65 ff. for *ipso ultimo estimo*; Solmi, "Le leggi più antiche," 60-81; Racine, *Plaisance*, 1374-97.

labour service to build defences, simpler taxes, ad hoc requisitions. Milan itself did not establish an *estimo* until 1240; nor, for that matter, is there any communal legislation documented there before 1170.²⁹

We could ask why economic ties with Genoa, which Milan certainly already had as well, did not have the same effect on Lombardy's largest city. It is a question that can only have hypothetical answers, but it may be that Milan was sufficiently self-confident that it did not need to follow the institutional paths traced by others; it may also be – we do not have the data to say – that Piacenza's economic ties with Genoa were more organic than Milan's, as indeed perhaps Folco Stretto's career might suggest. In any case, Piacenza had no parallels in its early communal institutionalisation in the Po Plain, and, again, this seems significant. A city had to choose to follow this path, and other cities did not choose it; and they would not choose it for at least another generation. And even in Piacenza we have no sign in this period of the reverse causal relationship, that is of political actions by the city government to structure or develop the economy, of the type we have seen in Genoa – apart from the making of trade treaties with other cities, as was common in Italy from the 1140s onwards, which had its roots in the 11th century in the requests to kings for toll rights, already mentioned. It must be concluded that the signs discussed here of the influence of economics on politics and vice versa, even if they exist, were still few.

In the 13th century, there is no doubt that city governments throughout communal Italy were very capable of making infrastructural and other policy interventions to help urban economic growth, and examples of conscious actions of this kind are numerous. I do not wish to revive the old image of a consular government so simple in structure that the appearance of podestà could be interpreted as a radical change; Paolo Grillo dismantled this idea in an important article in 2009.³⁰ But the development of communal institutions was not immediate. That economic opportunities could lead to changes in the organisation of cities before 1150 is perhaps only visible in Piacenza. Nor was the emergence of the idea that one of the roles of urban government was to help promote the economy an early development; we see only the beginnings of this before 1150, and only in Genoa. We need to follow the institutional development of city communes in the 12th century more carefully than we have done so far; but I believe that when we do, we will find that their involvement in promoting the economy was one of the last developments to appear.

²⁹ Milan's legislation in 1170: Manaresi, *Atti*, n. 75; for the *estimo*, Biscaro, "Gli estimi del comune di Milano," 350-73; Grillo, *Milano*, 522-9.

³⁰ Grillo, "La frattura inesistente."

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