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GIUSEPPE FELLONI

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# Italy

## 1.1 Population

Italy in early modern times was both larger and smaller than today: larger because it covered an area of some 310,500 square kilometres (about ten per cent larger than its present size and including Corsica, Savoy and other territories later swallowed up by France and Austria); smaller because this considerable area was politically fragmented to an extraordinary degree. In 1559, although almost half the peninsula was subject to foreign powers (Spain controlled 144,000 square kilometres, France 5000 and the Empire 2700), the rest was split up among over a score of independent sovereign states. However, in the course of time, there was some unification. By 1790 there were only eleven sovereign states covering 287,000 square kilometres (headed by the House of Bourbon with 102,800). Spain's dominion had disappeared, the Empire now controlled about 11,000 square kilometres and France about 17,000 square kilometres (including the isle of Corsica).

This political fragmentation is of fundamental importance for the economic historian, because the multiplicity of political divisions has caused both the dispersal of statistical records and a lack of concordance in the periods to which they refer. The problems this creates are particularly evident in the estimates of the population of Italy during the early modern period: data are seldom available for all political units at the same time. However, a general picture emerges from Table 1.1<sup>1</sup>. It would seem from that data and from Figure 1.1 that the total population of Italy almost doubled between 1550 and 1790, from 11 million to over 19 million, while the population density increased from 35.5 to almost 62 people per square kilometre.

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\* *An Introduction to the Sources of European Economic History 1500-1800. I: Western Europe.* Edited by Charles Wilson and Geoffrey Parker, London 1977.

<sup>1</sup> The principal source for Tables 1.1 and 1.2 and for Figure 1.1 is K. J. BELOCH, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens*, Berlin 1937-61, supplemented by my own research.

Table 1.1: Italian population 1550-1790 by states (boundaries of 1790)

State	c. 1550	c. 1600	c. 1650	c. 1700	c. 1750	c. 1790
STATE OF THE HOUSE OF SAVOY	?	?	?	?	2,643,341	3,350,859
Principality of Piedmont	700,000	800,000	750,000	920,000	1,084,593	3,006,344
Duchy of Savoy	280,000	300,000	?	?	351,032	
Duchy of Monferrat	200,000	230,000	150,000	191,120	219,638	
Other territories of Terra-firma	?	?	?	?	627,686	
Kingdom of Sardinia	200,000	266,444	285,000	260,486	360,392	344,515
REPUBLIC OF VENICE (without Istria)	1,590,040	1,820,000	1,340,000	1,700,000	2,060,000	2,354,066
REPUBLIC OF GENOA	290,700	355,800	400,900	?	451,100	491,300
DUCHY OF MODENA AND REGGIO	222,000	244,000	?	277,005	283,680	341,668
DUCHY OF PARMA AND PIACENZA	283,590	314,500	?	418,000	413,425	442,351
REPUBLIC OF LUCCA	100,000	?	110,000	?	118,000	123,000
DUCHY OF MASSA AND CARRARA	12,500	15,000	13,000	16,000	?	21,156
GRAND DUCHY OF TUSCANY	729,781	?	754,837	?	901,149	983,522
PAPAL STATE	?	?	1,810,216	1,997,340	?	2,385,596
Territories of central Italy	1,150,000	1,360,000	1,260,000	1,419,474	1,500,000	1,688,236
State of Bologna	?	207,795	225,434	228,779	?	280,832
Duchy of Ferrara	?	?	165,000	184,711	206,780	223,485
Duchy of Urbino	?	150,000	140,000	144,376	?	166,575
Other territories (Castro and Ronciglione)	?	?	19,000	20,000	?	26,468
PRINCIPALITY OF PIOMBINO	6,000	6,000	5,000	6,500	6,515	8,000
STATE OF THE HOUSE OF BOURBON OF NAPLES	3,226,253	4,148,326	3,937,013	3,670,588	4,786,021	6,617,937
Kingdom of Naples	2,373,253	3,045,326	2,813,013	2,521,588	3,461,021	4,954,770
Kingdom of Sicily	850,000	1,100,000	1,121,000	1,143,000	1,319,000	1,660,267
State of Presidi	3,000	3,000	3,000	6,000	6,000	2,900
IMPERIAL FIEFS	105,000	125,000	130,000	?	140,000	155,000
FRENCH DOMINIONS (Isle of Corsica)	?	?	118,510	?	120,389	152,342
DOMINIONS OF THE HOUSE OF AUSTRIA	?	?	?	?	1,145,914	1,384,279
Duchy of Milan	271,000	?	?	?	582,223	?
Principality of Pavia	?	?	?	?	74,567	?
County of Cremona	120,000	148,000	?	?	145,769	?
Duchy of Mantua	116,502	130,000	106,000	130,000	156,732	?
Other territories	?	?	?	?	176,623	?
STATE OF MALTA	30,000	35,000	?	60,000	65,000	95,000

Italy was one of the most highly urbanized areas of Europe, possibly of the world, in early modern times. In 1550 there were 30 cities with over 10,000 inhabitants; at that time the Low Countries had 20 or more cities of this size, the entire Holy Roman Empire had only 19 and the British Isles had 4. The rest of Europe only overtook Italy in the eighteenth century (cfr. the first sections of the other contributions in this book). At the same time, the large towns gradually declined in relation to the total population: between 1550 and 1790 the population of the 36 largest towns (that is, those which attained a size of 20,000 inhabitants at least once during the period) rose by an average of 60 per cent, but the population of the rest of the country rose by an average of 80 per cent.

Figure 1.1: The demographic evolution of Italy, 1550-1790  
(population in millions)

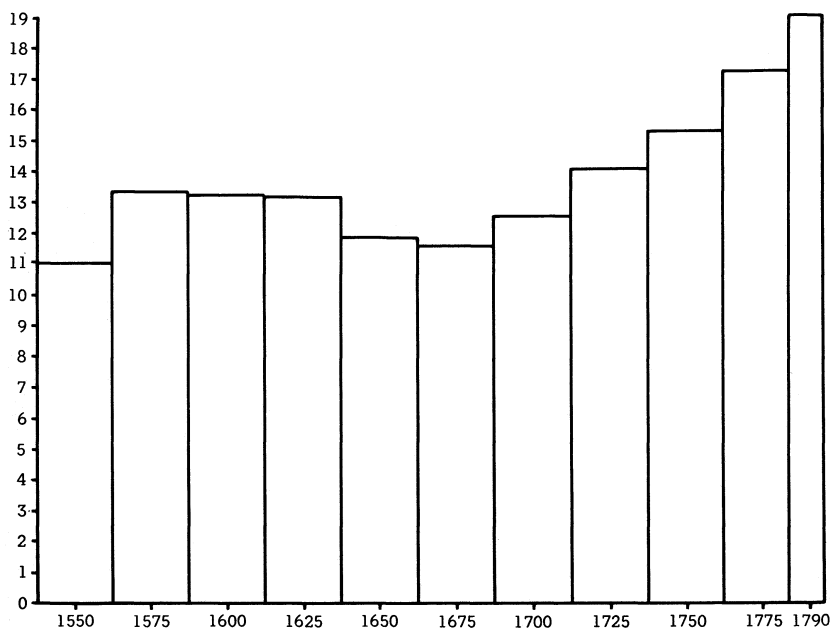


Table 1.2: Size of the principal Italian cities, 1550-1790

	10-20,000	20-30,000	30-40,000	40-50,000	50-60,000	60-70,000	over70,000
1550          (30 cities)	Bari	Catania	Cremona	Brescia	Bologna	Genoa	Naples
	Bergamo	Lucca	Mantua	Ferrara	Florence	Milan	(227,000)
	Modena	Parma	Messina	Rome	Verona		Palermo
	Modica /	Piacenza	Padua				(80,000)
	Pozzallo	Turin					Venice
	Nicosia	Vicenza					(158,000)
	Pavia						
	Reggio C.						
	Siena						
	Trapani						
1600          (32 cities)	Alessandria	Bergamo	Cremona	Brescia	Messina	Bologna	Genoa
	Ancona	Catania	Ferrara		Verona	Florence	(71,000)
	Bari	Lucca	Mantua				Milan
	Modena	Turin	Padua				(130,000)
	Modica /		Parma				Naples
	Pozzallo		Piacenza				(289,000)
	Nicosia		Vicenza				Palermo
	Pavia						(105,000)
	Reggio C.						Rome
	Siena						(102 000)
Trapani						Venice (139,000)	
1650             (35 cities)	Alessandria	Bergamo	? Messina		Bologna	Florence	Genoa
	Ancona	Brescia	Padua				(90,000)
	Bari	Catania	? Turin				Milan
	Cagliari	Cremona	Verona				(109,000)
	Leghorn	Ferrara					Naples
	Marsala	Lucca					(265,000)
	Modena	Mantua					Palermo
	Modica /	Parma					(100,000)
	Pozzallo	Piacenza					Rome
	Nicosia	Vicenza					(121,000)
	Pavia						Venice
	Reggio C.						(120,000)
	Siena						
Trapani							

	10-20,000	20-30,000	30-40,000	40-50,000	50-60,000	60-70,000	over70,000
1700	Alessandria	Catania	Bergamo	Turin		Bologna	Florence
	Ancona	Cremona	Brescia				(72,000)
	Bari	Ferrara	Padua				Genoa
	Cagliari	Lucca	Parma				(80,000)
	Leghorn	Mantua	Piacenza				Milan
	Marsala	? Messina	Verona				(120,000)
(36 cities)	Modica /	? Modena	? Vicenza				Naples
	Pozzallo	Pavia					(232,000)
	Nice						Palermo
	Nicosia						(100,000)
	Reggio C.						Rome
	Siena						(142,000)
	Trapani						Venice
							(138,000)
1730	Alessandria	Bergamo	Brescia	Padua	Turin	Bologna	Florence
	Ancona	Catania	Leghorn	Verona			(74,000)
	Cagliari	Cremona	Parma				Genoa
	Marsala	Ferrara	Piacenza				(87,000)
(36 cities)	Modena	Lucca					Milan
	Nice	Mantua					(124 000)
	Nicosia	Messina					Naples
	Reggio C.	Modica/Pozzallo					(315,000)
	Siena	Pavia					Palermo
	Trapani	Vicenza					(107,000)
	? Bari						Rome
							(158,000)
							Venice
							(149,000)
1790	Bari	? Alessandria	Bergamo	Catania	Verona		Bologna
	? Cagliari	Ancona	Brescia	Leghorn			(71,000)
	Modica /	Cremona	Parma	Padua			Florence
	Pozzallo	Ferrara	? Piacenza				(81,000)
	Nicosia	Lucca					Genoa
	Reggio C.	Mantua					(91,000)
	Siena	Marsala					Milan
(36 cities)		? Messina					(131,000)
		Modena					Naples
		? Nice					(436,000)
		Pavia					Palermo
		Trapani					(130,000)
		Vicenza					Rome
							(163,000)
							Turin
							(82,000)
							Venice
							(138,000)

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 are based on census data which are extremely numerous in Italy and contain a wealth of detail on the ages, sex, and sometimes also the property of the population surveyed. To take two examples – the town of Carpi in 1591 and the town and countryside of Pesaro in 1689. Both censuses show the enormous number of children in each community, compared with the number of adults: 28 per cent of all males and 26 per cent of all females at Carpi were under 10, and 52 and 50 per cent were under 20. At Pesaro, a century later, younger people were slightly less numerous, but they still constituted almost half the total population. Only about 15 per cent of the population was over 50 years of age. These censuses also reveal “generations” in the population (see Table 1.3). Thus at Carpi, the 1-5 age “cohorts”, born in 1586-91, were unusually small (no doubt due to the harsh economic climate of these years) as were those aged 30-35, 40-45 and 50-55 (those born in 1556-61, 1546-51, and 1536-41, all periods of war, plague or famine)<sup>2</sup>.

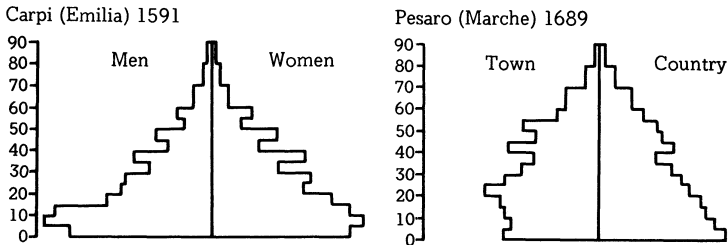
Table 1.3: The distribution of population by age groups:  
Carpi (1591) and Pesaro (1689)

Ages	Carpi (Emilia) 1591		Pesaro (Marche) 1689	
	Men	Women	Town	Country
81 and over	0.3	0.1	0.5	0.7
71-80	0.6	0.4	2.4	3.7
61-70	1.8	1.4	5.9	5.9
56-60	3.1	3.5	3.9	3.8
51-55	2.8	2.4	6.7	5.4
46-50	5.1	5.7	5.8	5.5
41-45	4.1	4.1	8.2	6.6
36-40	7.1	8.7	6.0	5.0
31-35	5.9	5.9	7.1	6.6
26-30	8.1	9.1	8.4	7.7
21-25	8.2	8.6	10.4	8.2
16-20	9.8	11.0	9.1	9.5
11-15	14.4	12.5	8.7	9.7
6-10	15.5	13.8	8.2	10.4
0-5	13.0	12.8	8.7	11.3

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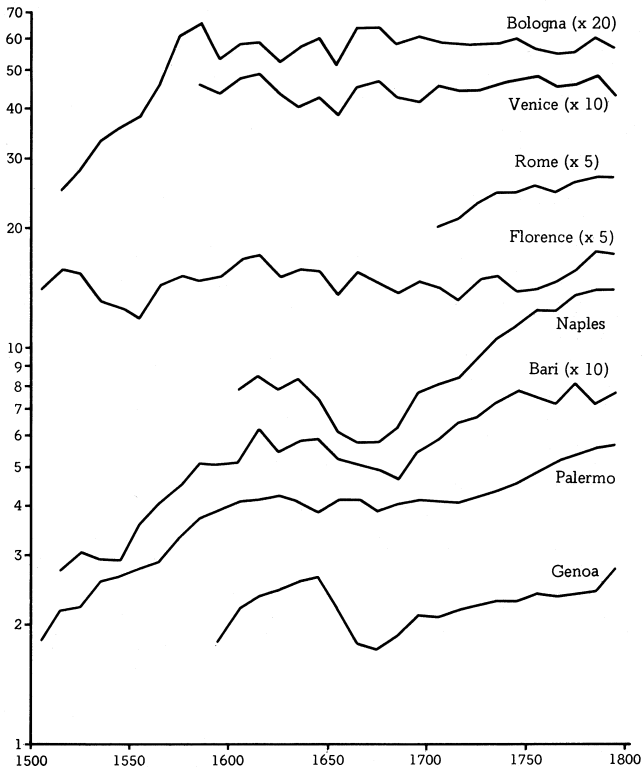
<sup>2</sup> Taken from R. MOLS, *Population in Europe*, in C. M. CIPOLLA (ed.), *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, London 1974, II, pp. 49-50.





The fluctuations in the levels of Italy's population can be studied in more detail through surviving parish registers. As yet, however, this has only been done for certain towns. Moreover, because of incomplete burial statistics, we have only baptismal data to use.

Figure 1.2: Annual averages of births in selected Italian towns (in thousands)



These reflect, to some extent, the overall changes in the level of population, and Figure 1.2 we can see the steady growth of the towns of southern Italy – Palermo, Bari and Naples – contrasting with the more sluggish performance of the towns of the north and centre<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.2 Agriculture

There are very few records of agricultural production, which was concerned chiefly with cereals and to a lesser degree with vines and olives. The surviving figures are limited to the last decade of the eighteenth century and relate to a few zones only of the peninsula; moreover they are based for the most part on the declarations of the producers themselves or on the reports of food commissioners. Those relating to wheat are the fullest, but even for this crop they are uneven. Some yield ratios have been interpolated to give an idea of productivity (see Table 1.4), but almost always they stem from a single estate (the “yield ratio” is the number of grains harvested for each grain sown).

On the whole it is the diversity of the results that stands out: very high yield ratios in Sicily in the early eighteenth century (8 or 9 to 1); very low in Monferrat and Modena from 1660 to 1790 (2 or 3 to 1 and less). In most of the peninsula during the eighteenth century the yield appears to have been between 4 and 5 to 1, rather more on good soil rather less on poor land. Apart from the sharp decline in Sicilian productivity after 1750, it is possible to discern few salient trends during the period. There was clearly an improvement in the yield of *quintals* per hectare between the late sixteenth and the late eighteenth century on the mainland (see Table 1.5), but there was probably a drop in the seventeenth century<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The sources for Figure 1.2 are as follows: D. BELTRAMI, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia dalla fine del secolo XVI alla caduta della repubblica*, Padova 1954, p. 144; A. BELLETTINI, *La popolazione di Bologna dal secolo XV all'unificazione italiana*, Bologna 1961, pp. 88-96; A. ZUCCAGNI ORLANDINI, *Ricerche statistiche sul granducato di Toscana*, Firenze 1848, I, pp. 419-473; O. CASAGRANDI, *La popolazione, le nascite, le morti nel duecentennio 1702-1903 a Roma*, Roma 1903, pp. 6-9; C. PETRACCONE, *Napoli dal '500 all'800*, Napoli 1974, pp. 31 and 149; *Le nascite a Bari dall'inizio del XVI secolo all'unificazione del regno d'Italia*, in « Studi di demografia », 8 (1971), pp. 68-86; F. MAGGIORE PERNI, *La popolazione di Sicilia e di Palermo dal X al XVIII secolo*, Palermo 1892, pp. 545-547; for Genoa I used the results, as yet unpublished, of my own researches.

<sup>4</sup> The sources for Tables 1.4 and 1.5 are as follows: G. DORIA, *Uomini e terre di un borgo collinare dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, Milano 1968 (about the village of Montaldeo), p. 29;

Table 1.4: Italian wheat yield ratios, 1510-1799 (grains harvested per grain sown)

	Monferrat	Vercelli	Modena	Romagna	Sienna	Puglia	Sicily
1510-19				7.9			
1520-9				6.9			
1530-9				6.4			
1540-9				6.5			
1550-9				5.9			
1560-9			2.4	5.6			
1570-9				5.7	4.1		
1580-9				5.9			
1590-9			3.3	4.8			
1600-9				5.9			
1610-19				6.2			
1620-9				5.4			
1630-9				5.5			
1640-9				5.5	5.0		
1650-9			2.7	5.4			
1660-9	3.0			6.4			
1670-9	2.3			5.9	5.1		
1680-9	2.7			6.4		8.0	7.1-9.0
1690-9	1.8			6.1	5.4	6.3	
1700-09	2.9			5.7		6.3	
1710-19	2.2	3.6		6.1			9.8
1720-9	3.0			6.2		6.2	
1730-9	2.3			5.7		5.7	
1740-9		3.9		5.6		6.8	8.2-8.8
1750-9	0.9		2.6	6.0		5.9	
1760-9				5.7	6.4	6.3	6.0-8.0
1770-9			3.2	5.5			5.3
1780-9	3.6	4.6		5.9			5.6
1790-9				6.2			

S. PUGLIESE, *Due secoli di vita agricola. Produzione e valore dei terreni, contratti agrari, salari e prezzi nel Vercellese nei secoli XVIII e XIX*, Torino 1908, pp. 90-94; G. L. BASINI, *L'uomo e il pane. Risorse, consumi e carenze alimentari della popolazione modenese nel Cinque e Seicento*, Milano 1970, p. 140; MINISTERO DI AGRICOLTURA, *Monografia della città di Roma e della campagna romana*, Roma 1881, I, pp. 334-337; G. PARENTI, *Prezzi e mercato del grano a Siena, 1546-1765*, Firenze 1942, p. 118; A. LEPRE, *Feudi e masserie. Problemi della società meridionale nel 600 e nel 700*, Napoli 1973, pp. 138-139; M. AYMARD, *Rese e profitti agricoli in Sicilia, 1640-1760*, in «Quaderni storici», 14 (1970), p. 423; A. DE MADDALENA, *Il mondo rurale italiano nel Cinque e Seicento*, in «Rivista storica italiana», 76 (1964), p. 425; C. DE CUPIS, *Le vicende dell'agricoltura e della pastorizia nell'Agro romano*, Roma 1911, p. 341.

Table 1.5: Italian wheat production, 1580-1799  
(in metric quintals of grain harvested per hectare)

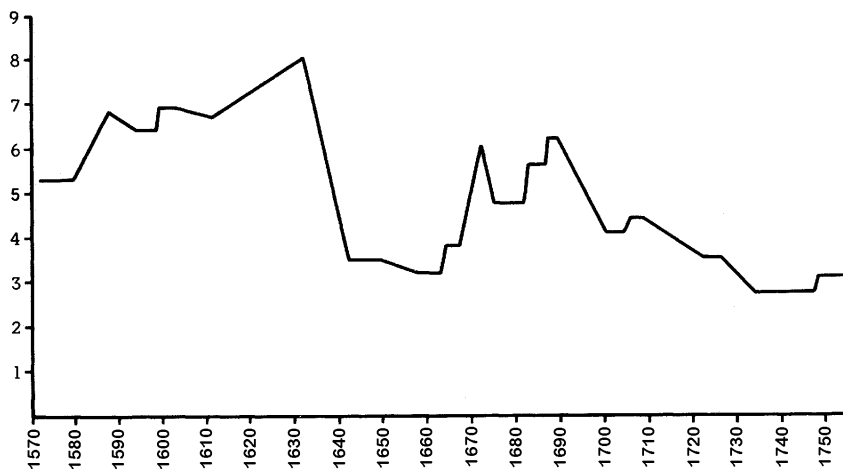
	Vercelli	Lombardy	Agro Romano	Sicily
1580-9		4.5		
1590-9				
1600-9		5.5-5.7		
1660-1709				10.7-16.2
1710-19	6.1			14.7-17.6
1720-9			8.0	
1730-9		5.0-12.0	8.0	
1740-9				10.1
1750-9	6.7		9.8	12.3-15.8
1760-9			10.8	
1770-9		8.5-10.5	8.7	
1780-9		6.5-8.5	8.7	
1790-9	7.3		8.3	

Information on the productivity of animal husbandry is even harder to obtain, although some isolated figures from Lombardy reveal an average daily milk yield of between seven and nine litres a day (with a maximum of twelve to thirteen litres) in the late sixteenth century, and an average of nine to twelve litres (with a maximum of fifteen to eighteen) in the mid-eighteenth century. In both periods, yields were significantly higher than in areas with less well developed farming, including the less favoured regions of Italy.

Data like these necessarily come from farm account books which record input and output faithfully. The same sources also noted income and expenditure on each estate and, therefore, profit and loss as well; but such material has been studied only for a very few farms. Foremost among these are the records of the Montaldeo estate in Piedmont, for which a long series of incomes has been calculated and expressed as a percentage of the land's value. Although the data of the years 1572-1632 seem too high (probably because the estate's value has not been increased in proportion to monetary devaluation), they point to a rise in the last decades of the seventeenth century, followed by a long decline (see Figure 1.3). Notwithstanding its limits, this series illustrates the usefulness of farm accounts in deepening

our understanding of European economic development in the preindustrial period<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 1.3: Agricultural profits at Montaldeo, Piedmont, 1570-1755  
(estate's income as percentage of the land's value)



### 1.3 Industry

Textile production was the major industry in the peninsula throughout early modern times and, happily, we possess quite good statistics concerning the output of many major centres. The four series of woollen cloth figures given in Figure 1.4 all tell the same story: strong growth during the sixteenth century – and at Venice until 1620 – then prolonged and catastrophic decline to a minimal production in the eighteenth century. There were several reasons for this collapse. One was the competition of English and Dutch “new draperies”, which were lighter, cheaper and more colourful than the traditional “broadcloths”. Another was the growth of cloth production in the smaller towns and villages of Italy, less regimented by the guilds and therefore operating on lower wages and undercutting the prices of woollens manufactured in Venice and other cities. Finally, there was the string of misfortunes that afflicted Italy: plague in 1575-6, famine in the

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<sup>5</sup> Source: G. DORIA, *Uomini e terre* cit., pp. 133-134.

Figure 1.4 - Woollen cloth production (Venice, Florence and Padua) 1520-1795  
(thousand pieces of woollen cloth per year)

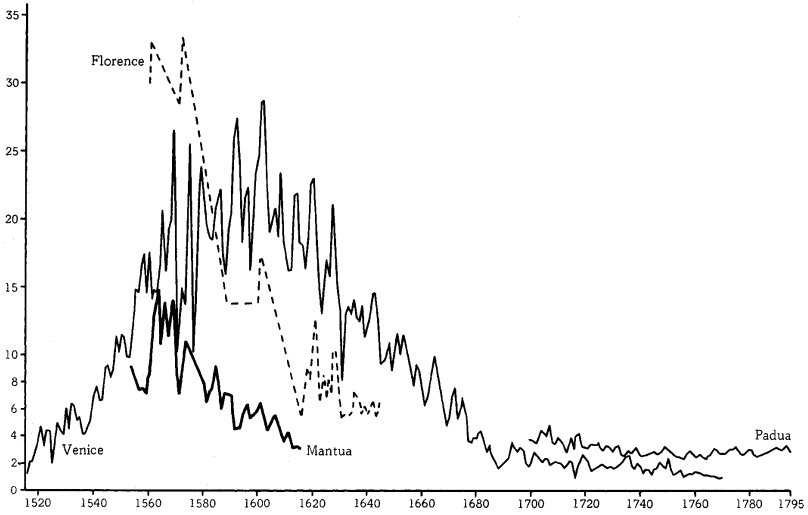
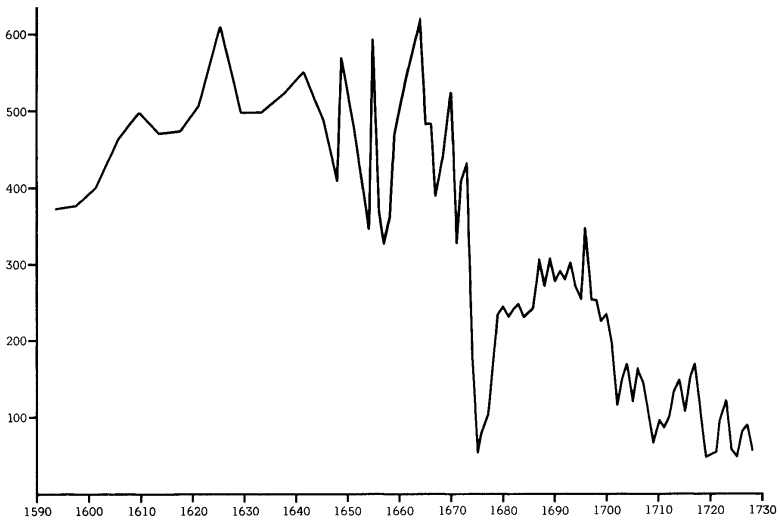


Figure 1.5 - Silk exports from the port of Messina  
(in thousand lbs)



1590s, plague again in 1630-1, war from 1635 to 1659 – all these disasters undoubtedly reduced consumption in one way or another and thus contributed to the decline in textile production <sup>6</sup>.

Another important aspect of the Italian textile industry was silk cultivation and manufacture. In Florence, around 1600, about three times as many people were employed in producing silk goods as in producing woollens (although the value of woollen exports was larger). Sicily had an even larger silk industry and it exported massive quantities of both raw and manufactured silk through Messina and Palermo (see Figure 1.5). Once again, however, there was a period of stagnation which lasted from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century <sup>7</sup>.

#### 1.4 Trade and transport

Although there are sundry figures about trade in individual commodities such as silk, the subject of Figure 1.5, these do not reflect the collective trade balance of the peninsula. Ironically, the only overall view that we have is the fruit of the labour of the French Treasury, which noted the balance of trade between their country and Italy for almost the entire eighteenth century. Two salient features stand out in Table 1.6: first, the enormous growth in the value of the trade carried on, from around 20 million *livres* in the second decade to 80-100 million in the penultimate decade of the eighteenth century; and second, the contrast between the Kingdoms of Savoy and the Two Sicilies on the one hand, which regularly had a favourable balance with France, and the rest of Italy on the other, which after 1738 was regularly in deficit. Most of the fluctuations (e.g. the drop in Savoy's overall trade 1743-7) were largely the result of war <sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Sources: D. SELLA, *Commerci e industrie a Venezia nel secolo XVII*, Venezia, Roma 1961, pp. 117-118 (Venetian pieces of cloth measured from 34 to 38 metres in length); A. DE MADDALENA, *L'industria tessile a Mantova nel '500 e all'inizio del '600*, in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, Milano 1962, IV, p. 652 (Mantuan pieces measured 32 metres); M. CARMONA, *Sull'economia toscana del '500 e del '600*, in « Archivio storico italiano », 120 (1962), pp. 38 and 44; R. ROMANO, *A Florence au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Industries textiles et conjoncture*, in « Annales E.S.C. », 7 (1952), p. 511; B. CAZZI, *Industria e commercio della repubblica veneta nel XVIII secolo*, Milano 1965, pp. 50 and 59.

<sup>7</sup> Source: M. AYMARD, *Commerce et production de la soie sicilienne aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in « Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'Ecole française de Rome », 77 (1965), table 5.

<sup>8</sup> Source: R. ROMANO, *Documenti e prime considerazioni intorno alla "Balance du Com-*

Figure 1.6 assembles some figures concerning the composition of merchant fleets flying the flag of Italian states in 1786-7, taken from an inquiry by French consuls abroad<sup>9</sup>. While it is clear from these figures that the chief ports of the peninsula in the early modern era were Livorno, Naples, Venice and Genoa, it is not easy to establish their order of importance owing to limitations in the records. At Naples, for example, movements of ships at the port are known only for 1760 (when there were 1009 larger ships, with a total tonnage of 109,000 metric tons, as well as 555 smaller crafts). This isolated figure puts Naples at the top of the list by a long way – but how typical was the year to which it refers? At Genoa we have more data. Around 2000 ships used the port in the 1640s; by the 1780s this figure increased to 4000 ships per annum and more, which probably made it the busiest port of the peninsula by the time France took it over in 1797<sup>10</sup>.

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merce» della Francia dal 1716 al 1780, in *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori*, Milano 1957, II, pp. 1282-92.

<sup>9</sup> Source: R. ROMANO, *Per una valutazione della flotta mercantile europea alla fine del secolo XVIII*, in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani* cit., V, pp. 584-6. Sources of other figures on Italian states' merchant fleets: M. BARUCHELLO, *Livorno e il suo porto. Origini caratteristiche e vicende dei traffici livornesi*, Livorno 1932, pp. 468-9; M. CALEGARI, *Navi e barche a Genova tra il XV e XVI secolo*, in *Guerra e commercio nell'evoluzione della marina genovese tra XV e XVI secolo*, Genova 1970, p. 26; E. GRENDI, *Traffico portuale, naviglio mercantile e consolati genovesi nel Cinquecento*, in «*Rivista storica italiana*», 80 (1968), p. 612; R. ROMANO, *La marine marchande vénitienne au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in *Les sources de l'histoire maritime en Europe du Moyen Age au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1962, p. 34; D. SELLA, *Commerci e industrie a Venezia* cit., pp. 104-5 and 109, U. TUCCI, *La marina mercantile veneziana nel Settecento*, in «*Bollettino dell'Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano*», II (1960), pp. 169 and 192-3.

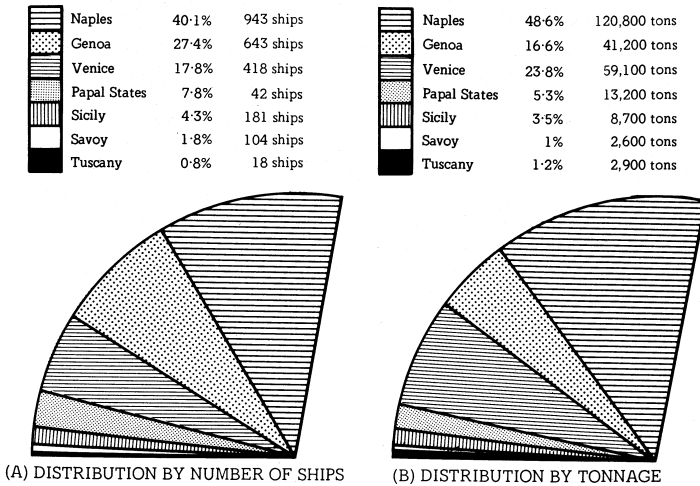
<sup>10</sup> For Naples cfr. L. DE ROSA, *Navi, merci, nazionalità, itinerari in un porto dell'età pre-industriale. Il porto di Napoli nel 1760*, in *Studi sul Settecento italiano*, Napoli 1968, pp. 331-91. For the movement of the port of Genoa cfr. E. GRENDI, *Traffico portuale* cit., p. 637; IDEM, *I Nordici e il traffico del porto di Genova, 1590-1666*, in «*Rivista Storica Italiana*», 83 (1971), pp. 65-6; L. BULFERETTI, *Il regresso del commercio di Genova nel periodo napoleonico*, in *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori* cit., II, p. 1372, and H.-T. NIEPHAUS, *Genuas Sechandel von 1745-1848. Die Entwicklung der Handelsbeziehungen zur Iberischen Halbinsel zur Westund Nordeuropa sowie den Uebersseegebieten*, Köln, Wien 1975, pp. 31-108. One could also provide a similar trend for the port of Livorno (Leghorn), taken from F. BRAUDEL and R. ROMANO, *Navires et marchandises à l'entrée du port de Livourne 1547-1611*, Paris 1951; P. SCROSOPPI, *Il porto di Livorno e gli inizi dell'attività inglese nel Mediterraneo*, in «*Bollettino storico livornese*», I (1937), p. 380; and G. SONNINO, *Saggio sulle industrie marina e commercio sotto i primi due Lorenesi 1737-1790*, Cortona 1909, pp. 128 and 132-3. For Venice the overall movement of port activity is charted by F. C. LANE, *La marine marchande et le trafic maritime de Venise à travers les siècles*, in *Les sources de l'histoire maritime en Europe du Moyen Age au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1962, p. 16, 20-1 and 28-9.



Table 1.6 - Trade between Italy and France, 1716-89 (yearly averages in million *livres tournois*)

	State of Savoy		Republic of Venice		Republic of Genoa		Kingdom of Naples and Sicily		Other Italian states		Total	
	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>
1716-19	6.5	7.7							3.4	3.9	9.9	11.5
1720-4	8.2	10.2							5.9	4.3	14.1	14.5
1725-9	7.3	5.2							4.6	3.3	12.0	8.5
1730-4	6.6	3.8							5.5	4.6	12.1	8.5
1735-9	5.0	2.4							8.0	8.6	13.0	10.9
1740-4	3.0	2.6							13.7	25.8	16.7	28.3
1745-9	2.0	2.3							15.9	24.6	17.9	26.8
1750-4	7.4	3.5							19.3	32.3	26.7	35.8
1755-9	10.5	7.7							17.2	19.5	27.7	27.2
1760-4	11.5	7.6		0.2		5.7	2.8	8.9	1.8	5.4	31.5	27.8
1765-9	8.4	8.4	0.9	1.3		5.1	6.8	11.9	4.3	8.6	35.0	47.1
1770-4	5.3	7.7	1.8	1.7		3.9	5.0	11.0	5.7	9.3	31.3	45.7
1775-9	11.2	6.6	0.1	0.1		3.0	2.5	7.7	2.8	17.4	39.4	35.0
1780	26.0	6.8	0.1	—		2.5	1.4	5.9	0.7	15.9	50.5	27.8
1787-8	23.6	19.2	0.4	1.3		9.9	6.2	15.2	5.6	5.5	54.6	47.2
1789								26.9	7.1			

Figure 1.6 - Mercantile fleets of the Italian states, 1786-1787



### 1.5 Currency and finance

The monetary system of Italy was binary: there were on the one hand gold and silver coins with considerable purchasing power (known as *monete grosse*), and there was on the other hand the “small change” coins of base silver and copper (known as *monete piccole*). Because of the number of different coins in circulation at any one time (several hundreds were current simultaneously in many areas), it was necessary to have a common denominator and this was known as “money of account”: such were the *lira*, the *ducat* and the *oncia*. An actual coin would be worth so many *lire* or parts of a *lira*. These units of account almost never existed as specific coins, but they were divided up into minor units, materially represented by the *monete piccole*; thus the *lira* always had 20 *soldi* or 240 *denari* of account and although the *lira* rarely took the shape of a coin, the *soldi* and *denari* did. This relationship between real money and money of account meant that any change in the value of the *monete grosse* inevitably affected the *monete piccole*. Throughout the early modern period, in Italy and indeed all over Europe, the real value of the *monete grosse* increased as a result of scarcity and this necessarily devalued the copper coins used by the poor. Where the gold coin would once have been exchanged for 240 *denari*, it now exchanged for 300,400 or even more. The rising price of gold and silver coins was thus in itself a powerful inflationary agent.

There are an almost infinite number of coins to choose from, but the changing value of the Spanish gold doubloon and of the Milanese silver ducat on the Milan exchange market (Figure 1.7) illustrate as well as any the rising price of *monete grosse* all over Italy. It will be noted that the price of gold coins rose faster than that of silver; this was mainly because gold was scarcer in Europe, especially after 1550. Then, as now, gold was a good investment in times of inflation <sup>11</sup>.

In early modern times Italy possessed many institutions similar to modern banks which accepted deposits and operated current accounts. However, few lent money to private clients. With the exception of the Monti di Pietà (which advanced small loans to the poor, secured by pledges) and the corn banks (which specialized in loans to farmers at seed-time), only private commercial bankers gave credit to individuals, often using sums deposited by other clients. By the late sixteenth century, we find institutions guaranteed by the state, termed “public banks”, which served as a depository for funds and performed the functions of a central clearing bank. But they too usually did not lend. The Banco di San Giorgio opened as a public bank in Genoa in 1584, the Rialto Bank in Venice in 1587, the Banco di San Ambrosio in Milan in 1593, with equivalents springing up in Naples, Rome and other major cities. However, the centre of Italian banking was undoubtedly Genoa. In the sixteenth century the city’s financiers were denounced for their massive loans to the Spanish Crown. Between 1580 and 1620 their “Fairs of Exchange” – the “Fairs of Besançon” – handled transactions worth around fifty million *escudos* every year, most operations being of an international character. After the 1620s, the activities of the Genoese bankers, severely crippled by the bankruptcy of the Spanish Treasury (1627), remained largely restricted to Italy, but the eighteenth century saw their operations flourishing once again in Europe on an even more influential scale. The Genoese nobility, of mercantile stock, needed no encouragement to take every opportunity of expanding their financial capitalism (Figure 1.8).

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<sup>11</sup> The gold doubloon, or double escudo, had 6.20 grams of pure gold, the large silver ducat just under 31 grams of pure silver. Their fluctuating value has been taken from F. ARGELATI, *De monetis Italiae variorum illustrium virorum dissertationes*, Milano 1750, II, *passim*; C. M. CIPOLLA, *Mouvements monétaires dans l'état de Milan (1580-1700)*, Paris 1952, pp. 65-7; J. G. DA SILVA, *Banque et crédit en Italie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1969, I, pp. 342-3; A. DE MADDALENA, *Prezzi e aspetti di mercato in Milano durante il secolo XVII*, Milano 1949, pp. 149-53.

Figure 1.7 - Value (in Milanese soldi) of two “monete grosse” at Milan, 1580-1730

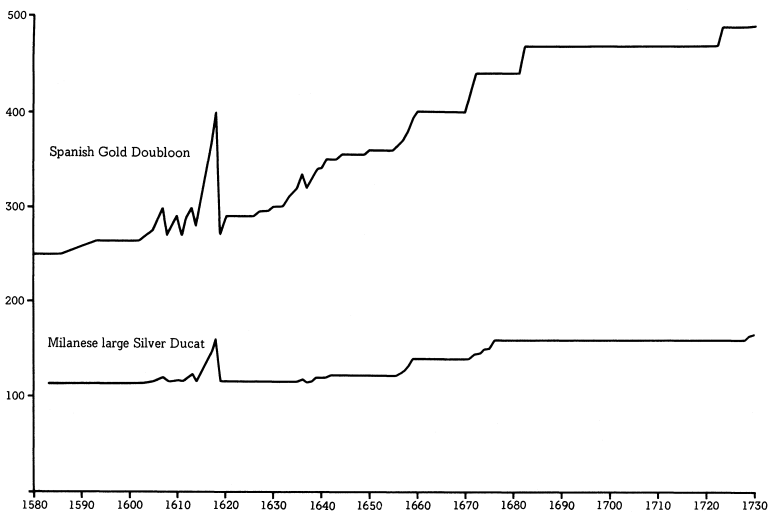


Figure 1.8 - Distribution of wealth of the Genoese aristocracy, c. 1785

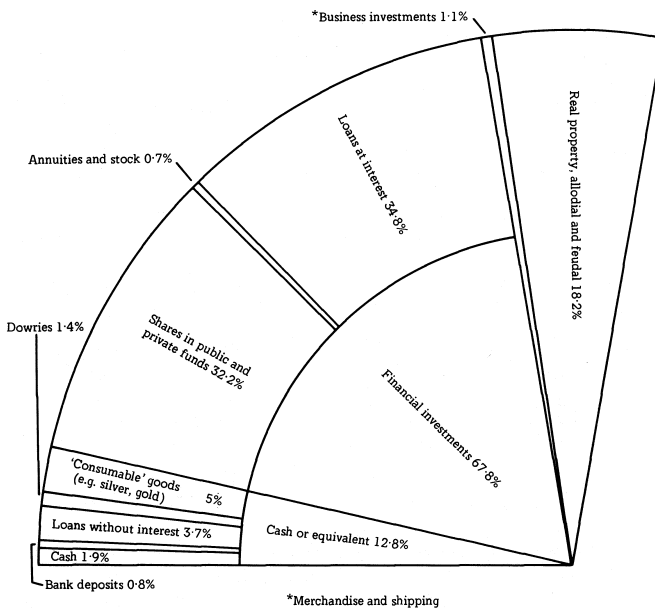


Table 1.7 - Genoese investments in home and foreign bonds and in foreign loans in the eighteenth century (nominal capital in million Genoese lire)

	1 January 1725	1 January 1745	1 January 1765	1 January 1785
<i>Government and private bonds</i> (i.e. long-term borrowing)	270.8	287.8	300.9	246.8
Republic of Genoa	127.7	141.9	150.7	133.6
Republic of Venice	56.2	60.8	58.0	22.8
Papal State	45.0	44.0	35.6	30.9
States of Austrian Lombardy	14.8	10.6	7.7	6.9
Kingdom of France	7.3	10.0	29.1	38.4
States of the House of Habsburg	5.9	4.7	6.3	5.1
Grand Duchy of Tuscany	3.7	3.1	2.8	—
Kingdom of Spain	3.6	2.8	2.1	2.1
Kingdom of Naples	3.9	3.9	3.1	2.7
Kingdom of Sicily	2.1	2.1	1.5	1.3
Kingdom of Great Britain	0.6	3.4	2.8	2.4
State of the House of Savoy	—	0.5	1.2	0.6
<i>Foreign loans</i> (i.e. middle-term borrowing)	4.7	18.4	31.3	95.7
Papal State	—	—	—	2.0
States of Austrian Lombardy	—	—	1.1	4.5
Duchy of Modena and Reggio	0.9	2.0	0.7	0.2
Duchy of Parma and Piacenza	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.3
State of the House of Savoy	—	1.6	—	0.6
Grand Duchy of Tuscany	—	0.5	—	—
Republic of Venice	—	0.6	—	—
States of the House of Habsburg	—	7.2	19.1	16.2
Duchy of Bavaria	—	—	—	3.5
Duchy of Saxony	—	—	—	5.2
Archbishopric of Trier	—	—	—	0.4
Kingdom of France	2.6	5.8	8.1	50.0
Kingdom of Denmark and Norway	—	—	0.9	5.4
Kingdom of Sweden	—	—	—	5.8
Kingdom of Poland	—	—	—	1.6
State of Malta	—	0.6	—	0.5
Kingdom of Portugal	—	—	—	0.1
Kingdom of Spain	—	—	0.3	0.1
<i>Total</i>	275.5	306.2	332.2	342.5

By 1785 only 18 per cent of their total assets was tied up in real property; over 70 per cent lay in cash, loans and shares. This remarkable pattern of investment was unique among European aristocracies in the later eighteenth century<sup>12</sup>.

The geographical extent of Genoese financial capitalism in the eighteenth century is surprising. The Genoese always invested most heavily in their home government and after that in the government of Venice (another republic), the Papacy and France (Table 1.7). The three million or so lire on long-term loan to Spain represents, no doubt, the sorry legacy of Genoa's financial stake in Habsburg imperialism during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but the interest in the governments of northern and eastern Europe is noteworthy.

State borrowing and public finance is particularly difficult to describe in Italy, since public administration was divided into even smaller units than the very small political subdivisions might suggest. Many municipal and district bodies enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, assuming functions and collecting revenues appropriate to central government. The state administration itself was often made up of different departments, each with its own income and expenditure. In addition, the official accounts of many states do not include revenues managed directly by public creditors. This happened, for example, in the Republic of Genoa, where the Casa di San Giorgio handled the most lucrative revenues of the state, in the Kingdom of Naples, and in the Duchy of Milan. Finally, even where a centrally unified administration existed to control the whole management of public affairs, reports of its finances are scanty and almost always take the form of budget forecasts, not final balance sheets. However, it is reasonably safe to present figures of the consolidated public debt of certain Italian states in the eighteenth century. According to Table 1.8, one fact is immediately apparent: the low interest rates on funded debts (from 2 per cent to 4 per cent). Originally, several loans had been raised at higher rates, but very often those rates were later reduced by forced or voluntary conversions; in many cases capital and interest were paid in gold or

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<sup>12</sup> Source for Figure 1.8 and Table 1.7: G. FELLONI, *Gli investimenti finanziari genovesi in Europa tra il Seicento e la Restaurazione*, Milano 1971, pp. 32-54, 345 and 434.

silver, so that creditors could escape from the depreciation of money of account <sup>13</sup>.

Table 1.8 - Consolidated public debt in some Italian states  
in the eighteenth century

State	Monetary unit in millions	1725		1745		1765		1785	
		Nominal capital	Annual interest	Nominal capital	Annual interest	Nominal capital	Annual interest	Nominal capital	Annual interest
Piedmont-Savoy	Piedmontese lire	6.5	0.3	30.8	1.2	49.2	1.8	52.6	1.9
Duchy of Milan	Milanese lire	110.5	3.3	112.8	2.9	104.3	2.6	114.8	2.9
Venetian Republic	Venetian ducat	73.5	1.8	77.1	1.9	75.9	1.8	43.2	1.4
Genoese Republic	Genoese banklire	127.7	3.1	141.0	3.0	149.3	3.4	132.7	3.0
Tuscany	Florentine ducats	17.2	0.5	12.6	0.4	12.6	0.4	12.5	0.4
Papal States	Roman scudi	52.4	1.7	56.7	1.7	55.7	1.7	58.9	1.9
Kingdom of Naples	Neapolitan ducats	60.0							3.2

### 1.6 Prices and wages

The celebrated price rise of the sixteenth century started late in the Italian states and almost never attained the intensity of the inflation experienced in countries like Spain or England. The decennial averages of market prices at Florence (Table 1.9) show that some prices doubled in the course of a century, but only after a late start and with only one peak: the famine decade of the 1590s <sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Sources: L. BIANCHINI, *Della storia delle finanze del regno di Napoli*, Napoli 1835, III, p. 293; G. FELLONI, *Gli investimenti finanziari genovesi* cit., pp. 112-13, 144, 167, 184-5, 196, 208-9, 287, 301 and 328-30. For earlier periods we have only the highly suspect figures (or rather, guesses) of foreign ambassadors. The “guesstimates” of Venetian ambassadors, for what they are worth, are printed in F. PINO-BRANCA, *La vita economica degli stati italiani nei secoli XVI XVII e XVIII secondo le relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti*, Catania 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Source: G. PARENTI, *Prime ricerche sulla rivoluzione dei prezzi in Firenze*, Firenze 1939, appendix 1.

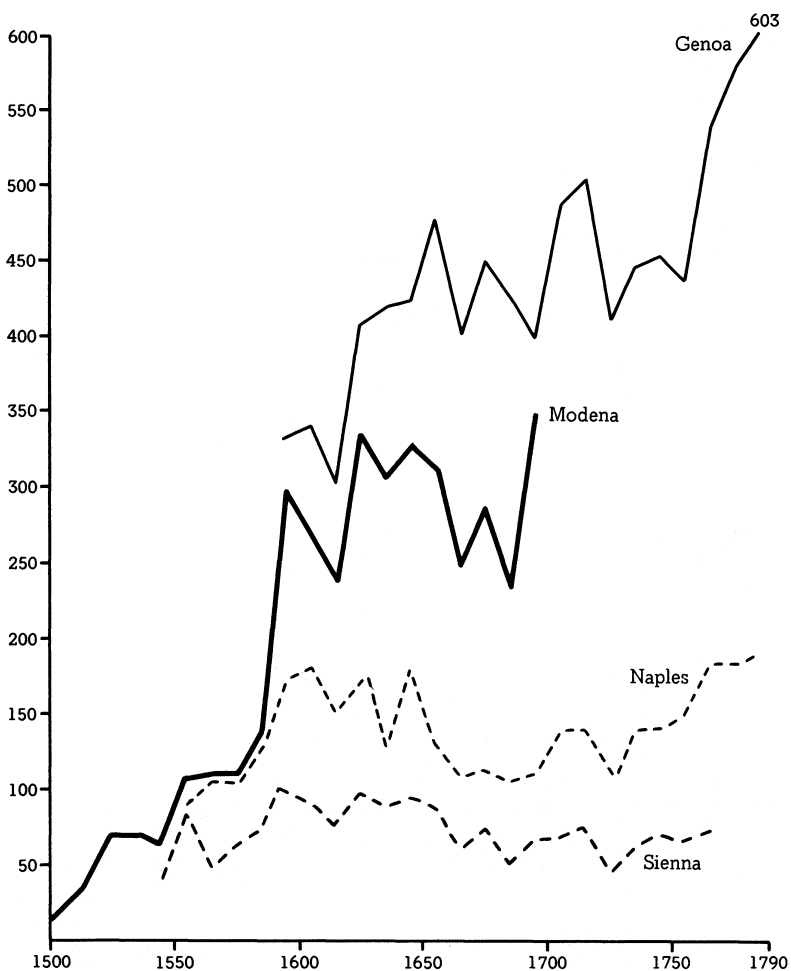
Table 1.9 - Market prices at Florence, 1520-1620 (in grammes of silver)

	Wheat (hl)	Olive oil (l)	Black grape (hl)	Beef (kg)	Tuscan cheese (kg)	Firewood (m)	Raw wool (kg)
1520-9	54.05	1.37	35.46	1.40	2.96	18.27	3.21
1530-9	54.77	2.10	36.11	1.82	3.06	18.43	2.95
1540-9	38.59	1.81	50.20	1.27	2.83	14.29	3.98
1550-9	66.59	2.08	45.70	1.53	2.97	18.26	3.07
1560-9	48.03	2.29	58.77	1.53	3.74	21.05	5.60
1570-9	61.47	2.33	—	2.14	4.33	25.55	6.20
1580-9	67.97	2.42	—	2.00	3.73	25.14	5.21
1590-9	114.94	2.97	—	2.19	4.65	26.03	6.20
1600-9	91.53	3.86	—	2.61	5.00	31.10	8.06
1610-19	76.37	2.75	79.58	2.75	4.83	31.87	6.62

There are two possible reasons for the moderate behaviour of Italian prices, the attractions of each depending on which theory of causation one adopts for explaining the “price revolution”. The first reason, connected with the “bullionist” interpretation, is that Italy did not receive her share of the American treasure until the 1550s, when Spain began to finance Habsburg imperialism through the bankers of Genoa. Vast quantities of silver were certainly injected into the Italian economy from Spain between 1570 and 1620. The second reason, which fits a “demographic” or “consumer-led” price rise model is that the population of Italy did not grow as fast as the rest of Europe: wars and plagues probably kept down the rate of population increase and therefore the demand for food. The period of consumer pressure would thus coincide with the period of inflation. Figures 1.9 and 1.10 show the behaviour of wheat prices in four leading Italian markets throughout the period. Beyond the different curves, due to the various degree of monetary devaluation in each town, all series reveal two phases of strongly rising agricultural prices – 1560-1620 and post-1750; all reveal the long stagnation of the century 1630-1730. We have focused upon the period 1640-60 in Figure 1.10 as a reminder of the violent fluctuations which periodically brought death by starvation to some and acute hardship to many. The three bad harvests of 1648-50 were



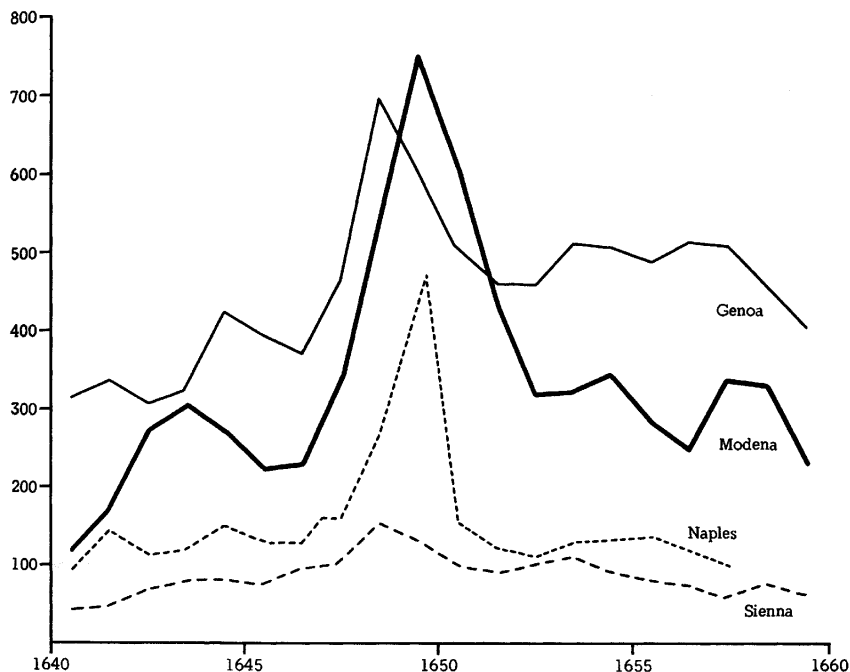
Figure 1.9 - Italian grain prices, 1500-1790 (decennial totals)



Note: Genoa: in Genoese soldi per *mina* of 117 litres  
 Modena: in Modenese soldi per bushel of 63 litres  
 Naples: in Neapolitan *grana* per *tomolo* of 55 litres  
 Sienna: in Florentine soldi per bushel of 23 litres

the worst of the century, in Italy as elsewhere in Europe, and in Naples the rise in the price of bread coincided with the rebellion of Masaniello <sup>15</sup>.

Figure 1.10 - Italian grain prices, 1640-60  
(annual average price; same units as Figure 1.9)



<sup>15</sup> Sources for Figures 1.9 and 10: for Genoa - G. CALÒ, *Indagine sulla dinamica dei prezzi in Genova durante il secolo XVII*, Genova 1958 and M. CARRARA-CAGNI, *I prezzi sul mercato di Genova nel secolo XVIII*, Genova 1958; for Modena - G. L. BASINI, *L'uomo e il pane*, Milano 1970, pp. 155-6, for Naples - N. F. FARAGLIA, *Storia dei prezzi in Napoli dal 1131 al 1860*, Napoli 1878, pp. 211-12 and 296-8, and R. ROMANO, *Prezzi salari e servizi a Napoli nel secolo XVIII*, Milano 1965; for Siena - G. PARENTI, *Prezzi e mercato del grano a Siena 1546 1765*, Firenze 1942, pp. 27-8. Long price series have also been produced for Bassano - G. LOMBARDINI, *Pane e denaro a Bassano tra il 1501 ed il 1799*, Venezia 1963, pp. 58-65, for Pavia - D. ZANETTI, *Problemi alimentari di una economia preindustriale*, Torino 1964, pp. 155-9, for Catania - A. PETINO, *Primi assaggi sulla "rivoluzione dei prezzi" in Sicilia*, in *Studi in onore di Gino Luzzatto*, Milano 1950, II, pp. 207-9; and for many other places too numerous to mention.

Table 1.10 - Daily wages of building and agricultural workers in Italy,  
1500-1799

Decade	<i>Monferrat (Montaldeo)</i>	<i>Vercellese (Larizzate)</i>	<i>Milan</i>	<i>Modena</i>	<i>Genoa</i>	<i>Florence</i>		<i>Naples</i>	
	Agric. labourer (soldi)	Agric. labourer (soldi)	Master mason (soldi)	Master mason (soldi)	Master mason (soldi)	Master mason (soldi)	Agric. labourer (soldi)	Master mason (grana)	Agric. labourer (grana)
1500-9					8				
1510-19					9	15-20	8	?25	
1520-9					9				
1530-9				14	11-12	21		20	
1540-9					13		10	20	10
1550-9				14	13	21-28			14
1560-9				14-15	14		10	?15	14
1570-9	?10			18	15	35-40	10	?25	
1580-9				20	18-20	35	10		?19
1590-9	10			24	22	40	10	?20	
1600-9	10		35	27	24	40	10	30	?10
1610-19	?12		40	27	24	40-50		40	20-22
1620-9	12		40	27	26			38	
1630-9	?10		40	35	30				?25
1640-9			40	38	34			37½	
1650-9	12		40	43	34				
1660-9	12		40	43	36				
1670-9	12		40	43	40				
1680-9	12		40-35	45	40				
1690-9	12		35	50	36				
1700-9	12	13	35		36				
1710-19	12	13	32½		36-40				
1720-9	12	12	32½		36				
1730-9	12	13	32½		40			35	20
1740-9	12	13	32½		38			35	20
1750-9	12	13	32½		40			35	?27½
1760-9	12	13	32½		40				20
1770-9		13	32½		40			40	20
1780-9	14	13	29		40				
1790-9		20	29		40				

Researches into the level and variations of wages have been concerned chiefly with building construction work and to a lesser extent with agriculture and textiles. A few of the longest and most satisfactory series of daily wages for agricultural and building workers are given in Table 1.10. They are from edited sources except for the Genoese figures which are from researches still in progress. Whatever the method of computation used in each case, for the sake of consistency the figures here denote the wage rate mentioned most often in any year. Even if we consider the building labourers' wage which were fixed almost everywhere at 50-70 per cent of those of master masons, we can say that the nominal rates of wage reflected secular trends, but were not sensitive to short- and middle-term movements (with the exception of seasonal changes)<sup>16</sup>. These figures, interesting as they are, take no account of inflation. The real test is to see how much food the common man's money wages could buy, although it must be remembered that wages were sometimes supplemented by payments in kind. For this purpose, we have taken five series of builders' monetary earnings and we have converted the nominal rates into the number of kilograms of bread that could be purchased with a day's wage. Although it must be remembered that for the seventeenth century the "real wages" of Milanese workers have been calculated from the price of corn at Pavia, which could be somewhat lower than the price in Milan, the series from all the northern towns show increasing real wages for almost all the seventeenth century but a sharp decline after the 1760s. Apart from that, there is a surprising stability in the real wages paid during our period. In the five towns here considered, there does not appear to have been that catastrophic erosion of the

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<sup>16</sup> Sources: Monferrat - G. DORIA, *Uomini e terre* cit., p. 427; Vercellese - S. PUGLIESE, *Due secoli di vita agricola* cit., appendix, pp. 23-8, Milan - D. SELLA, *Salari e lavoro nell'edilizia lombarda durante il secolo XVII*, Pavia 1968, pp. 94, 103-4 and 106-10, and A. DE MADDALENA, *Prezzi e mercedi a Milano dal 1701 al 1860*, Milano 1974, p. 419; Modena - G. L. BASINI, *L'uomo e il pane* cit., p. 169, Genoa - G. SIVORI, *I salari della manodopera edilizia a Genova nel secolo XVII* (unpublished manuscript study; I am very grateful to Dr. Sivori for permission to use her material); Florence - G. PARENTI, *Prime ricerche sulla rivoluzione dei prezzi in Firenze* cit., pp. 201 and 205-6; Naples - G. CONGLIO, *La rivoluzione dei prezzi nella città di Napoli nei secoli XVI e XVII*, in *Atti della riunione scientifica della Società italiana di statistica*, Roma 1950, pp. 234-5, and R. ROMANO, *Prezzi salari e servizi a Napoli* cit., pp. 49-52. Other series of wages are printed in A. FANFANI, *Storia del lavoro in Italia dalla fine del secolo XV agli inizi del XVIII*, Milano 1959, pp. 311-46, and L. DAL PANE, *Storia del lavoro in Italia dagli inizi del secolo XVIII al 1815*, Milano 1958, pp. 200-19.

standard of living that occurred in France during the later sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries<sup>17</sup>.

### 1.7 *Wealth and social structure*

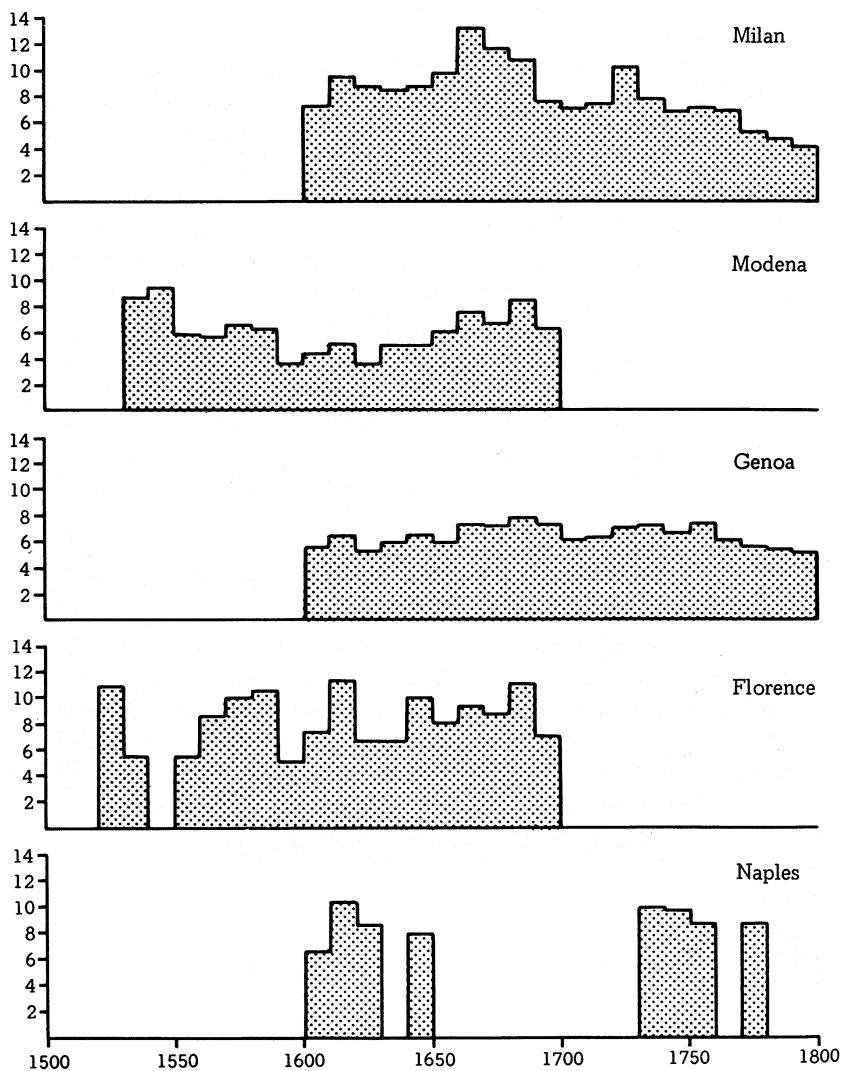
In Italy, as in all countries, the population was made up of groups that possessed very different political, social, judicial and fiscal rights. The most privileged class was the nobility, whether of ancient feudal origin or of recent purchase, which represented about 1 per cent of the total population. There were, however, considerable local variations in this figure: 0.5 per cent in the Republic of Genoa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 1.3 per cent in the state of Venice 1766-70, perhaps 0.3 percent in Tuscany and 1 per cent in Piedmont in 1760. In the city-states the percentage was far higher in the *dominante* town where the nobles tended to live: between 3 and 5 per cent of the populations of Venice, Milan, Genoa and Florence were noble. By contrast, in the states of feudal origin, or where there was no powerful city, the aristocracy was less concentrated and its distribution between town and country was more even: analysis of the social origins of newly married couples shows 1.4 per cent nobles in the first half of the sixteenth century at Naples and 2 per cent at Turin in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This relatively even distribution is also found in the small rural towns of southern Italy: 2.4 per cent in Castellamare di Stabia in 1754 and 3 per cent in Bronte in 1756<sup>18</sup>. The clergy was another privileged class. In the eighteenth century its numbers ranged from 1 per cent in the

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<sup>17</sup> Sources in notes 15 and 16 above; cfr. also G. VIGO, *Real wages of the working class in Italy: building workers' wages (14th to 18th century)*, in «Journal of European Economic History», 3 (1974), pp. 396-9.

<sup>18</sup> The principal sources for the percentages of nobility are as follows: Genoa - M. NICORA, *La nobiltà genovese dal 1528 al 1700*, in «Miscellanea storica ligure», II (1961), pp. 270-1, and G. FELLONI, *Gli investimenti finanziari genovesi* cit., p. 473; Venice - D. BELTRAMI, *Forze di lavoro e proprietà fondiaria nelle campagne venete dei secoli XVII e XVIII*, Venezia, Roma 1961, p. 41; Florence - R. B. LITHFIELD, *Caratteristiche demografiche delle famiglie patrizie fiorentine dal sedicesimo al diciannovesimo secolo*, in *Saggi di demografia storica*, II (1969), p. 21; Piedmont - L. DAL PANE, *Storia del lavoro in Italia* cit., p. 119, and M. RICCIARDA DUGLIO, *Alfabetismo e società a Torino nel secolo XVIII*, in «Quaderni Storici», 17 (1971), p. 504; Naples - C. PETRACONE, *Napoli dal '500 all'800*, Napoli 1974, pp. 64-5; Castellamare di Stabia - G. DE MEO, *Saggi di statistica economica e demografica sull'Italia meridionale nei secoli XVII e XVIII*, Roma 1962, p. 92; Bronte - G. LO GIUDICE, *Comunità rurali della Sicilia moderna. Bronte (1747-1853)*, Catania 1969, pp. 86-8.

Figure 1.11 - Real wages in Italy, 1500-1799  
 (expressed in kilograms of bread)



Duchy of Mantua to 3.6 per cent in the Kingdom of Naples, with a “national average” of about 1.8 per cent. Clergymen generally lived in the towns, where they might comprise as much as 5 or even 10 per cent of the population. In central Italy, which was closest to Rome, percentages of 12 and more are recorded<sup>19</sup>.

Information on the distribution of land and wealth between the various groups is sparse. Nevertheless, for the eighteenth century, at least, it is possible to make some general observations about the relative assets of the broader social divisions: “the nobles”, “the clergy”, “citizens” and various institutions. The picture is far from clear or uniform. In Piedmont, for instance, the nobles held about 10 per cent of the allodial estates and an unknown part of the feudal lands in 1697-1711; in other countries they controlled over 50 per cent of real wealth (see Figures 1.12 and 1.13). A constant feature was the position of the secular clergy, who seem to have held about 3 per cent of the land in every area – even in the Papal States – although the landed wealth of the religious institutions varied considerably, being predictably high in the Papal States and predictably low in the Veneto<sup>20</sup>.

A complementary picture appears from an analysis of investments in the public debt of some of the same states. In Piedmont, the landed wealth of the noble and middle classes underwent a slight rise and their investments in government securities a slight diminution; an opposite evolution was

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<sup>19</sup> Source: K. J. BELOCH, *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens* cit., I, pp. 73-84.

<sup>20</sup> Sources: for Piedmont: L. EINAUDI, *La Finanza sabauda all'aprirsi del secolo XVIII e durante la guerra di successione spagnuola*, Torino 1908, p. 64; G. PRATO, *La vita economica in Piemonte*, Torino 1908, pp. 62 and 187. For Lombardy: S. PUGLIESE, *Condizioni economiche e finanziarie della Lombardia*, Torino 1924, pp. 72-3. For Milan: M. ROMANI, *Note sul patrimonio edilizio milanese intorno alla metà del Settecento*, in *Studi in onore di Armando Saporì* cit., II, p. 1311. For the Veneto: D. BELTRAMI, *Forze di lavoro e proprietà fondiaria*, Venezia, Roma 1961, pp. 123 and 142-5. For the Bolognese: R. ZANGHERI, *Prime ricerche sulla distribuzione della proprietà fondiaria nella pianura bolognese (1789-1835)*, Bologna 1957, pp. 87 and 91. For Ravenna: G. PORISINI, *La proprietà terriera nel comune di Ravenna dalla metà del secolo XVI ai giorni nostri*, Milano 1963, pp. 23, 27, 31, 35 and 39. For the Roman plain: M. RAFFAELI CAMMAROTA, *1770: la divisione della proprietà terriera nell'agro romano*, in « Clio », 2 (1971), pp. 303-28. For Calopezzati: F. ASSANTE, *Calopezzati: proprietà fondiaria e classi rurali in un comune della Calabria (1740-1886)*, in « Annali dell'Istituto di storia economica e sociale dell'Università di Napoli », 4 (1965), p. 153.

experienced by religious and charitable institutions. The transfer of the wealth of these bodies from land into public debt was perhaps connected with the struggle against properties collected by the Church and with anti-clericalism in general<sup>21</sup>.

Below the level of landholders and bondholders, however, lay the poor, and about this sombre slice of humanity we still know tragically little. The earliest statistics on pauperism reflect only the exceptional situations arising from war, plague or famine. Thus in February 1580, during a plague, 57 per cent of the total population in Genoa was dependent on public charity. During the war of 1625, 17 per cent of the population of the same city was on poor relief; the same was true of 11 per cent of the people of Modena during the famine of 1620-1 and of 7 per cent of the inhabitants of Milan during the crisis of 1629 (war, plague *and* famine). These figures represent the upper limit. The lower limit was the hard core of people who were old or poor' must have normally made up between 40 and 50 per cent of the total population of Italy in the eighteenth century and beyond<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Sources: L. DE ROSA, *Studi sugli arrendamenti del regno di Napoli. Aspetti della distribuzione della ricchezza mobiliare nel Mezzogiorno continentale, 1649-1806*, Napoli 1958, pp. 266-331; L. EINAUDI, *La finanza sabauda* cit., p. 273; G. FELLONI, *Gli investimenti finanziari genovesi* cit., pp. 114-15, 145, 151, 176 and 334.

<sup>22</sup> Sources: Genoa - my researches and E. GRENDI, *Introduzione alla storia moderna della repubblica di Genova*, Genova 1973, pp. 76-7; Modena - G. L. BASINI, *L'uomo e il pane. Risorse, consumi e carenze alimentari della popolazione modenese nel Cinque e Seicento*, Milano 1970, p. 81; Milan - C. M. CIPOLLA, *Storia economica dell'Europa pre-industriale*, Bologna 1974, p. 38; Venice - D. BELTRAMI, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia dalla fine del secolo XVI alla caduta della repubblica*, Padova 1954, p. 204; Piedmont - G. PRATO, *Censimenti e popolazione in Piemonte nei secoli XVI, XVII e XVIII*, in « Rivista italiana di sociologia », 10 (1906), pp. 367-9, and *La vita economica in Piemonte a mezzo il secolo XVIII*, Torino 1908, pp. 330-1; Bologna - N. LA MARCA, *Saggio di una ricerca storico-economica sull'industria e l'artigianato a Roma dal 1750 al 1849*, Padova 1969, p. 21, and A. BELLETTINI, *La popolazione di Bologna dal secolo XV all'unificazione italiana*, Bologna 1961, p. 74.



Figure 1.12 - Distribution of real estate among the social classes of eighteenth-century Italy

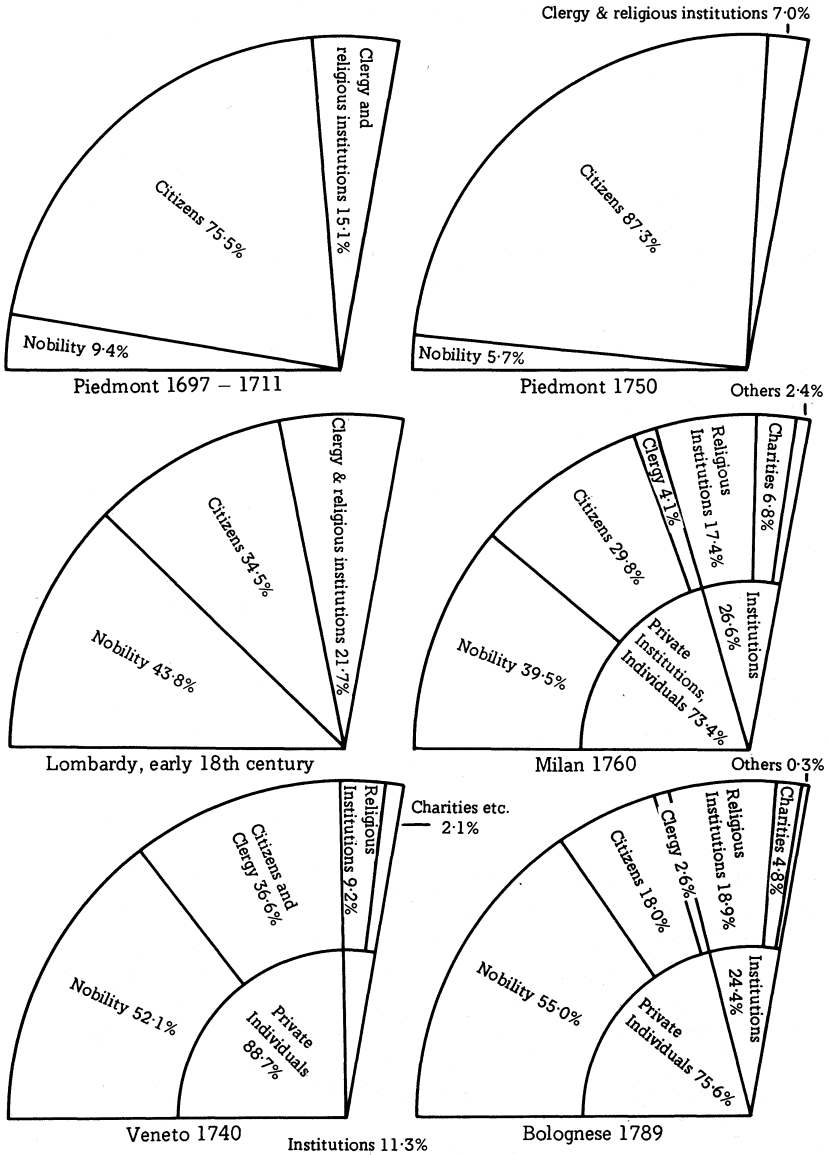


Figure 1.12 - Distribution of real estate among the social classes of eighteenth-century Italy - continued

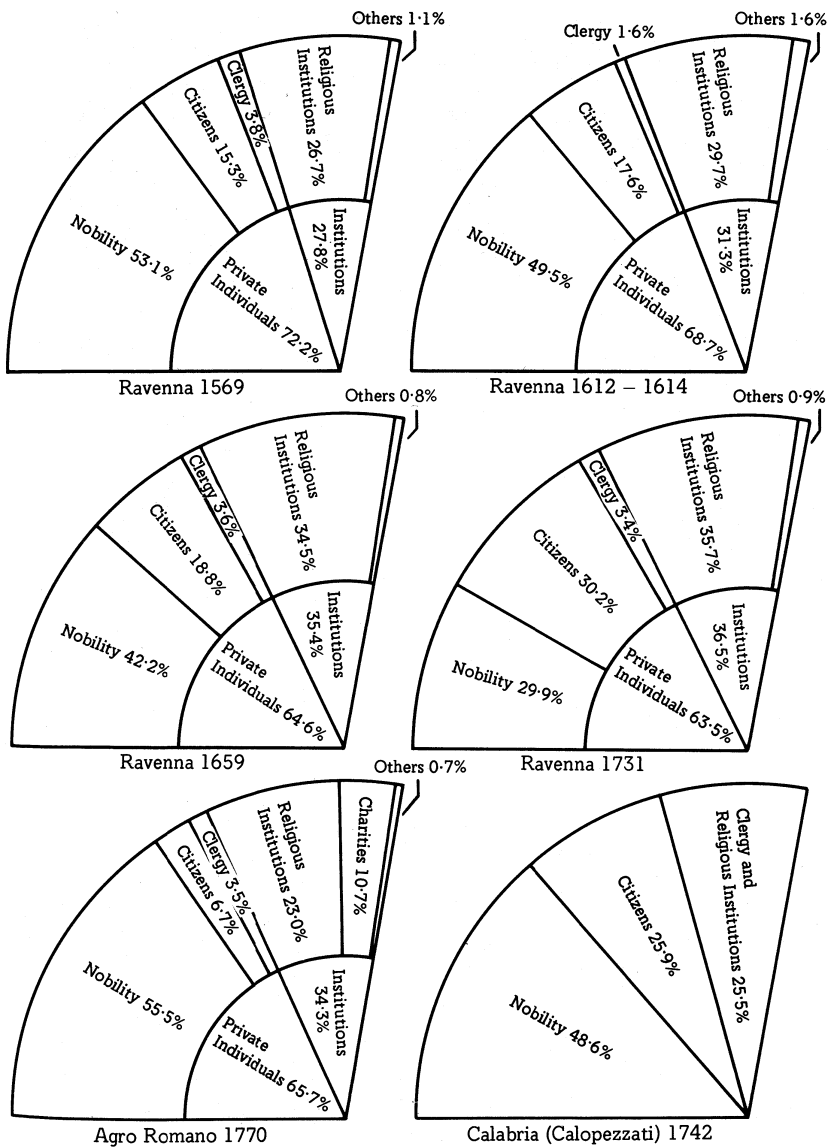


Figure 1.13 - Distribution of personal wealth among the social classes of eighteenth-century Italy

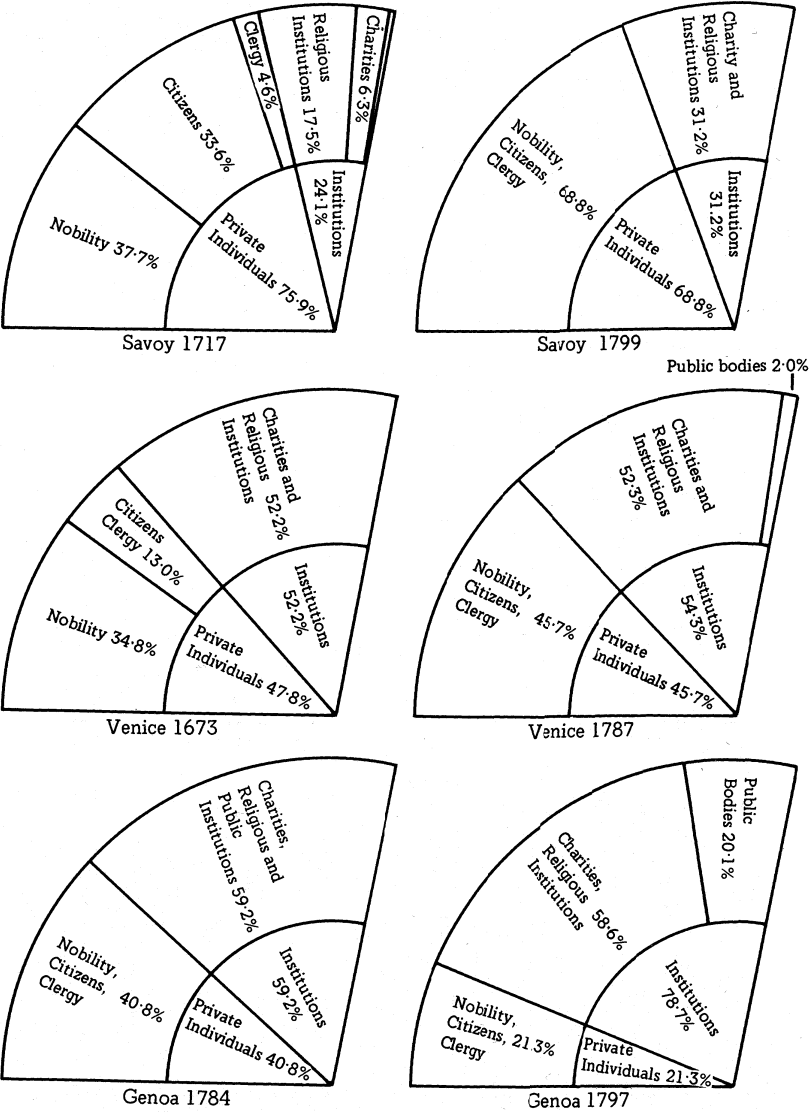
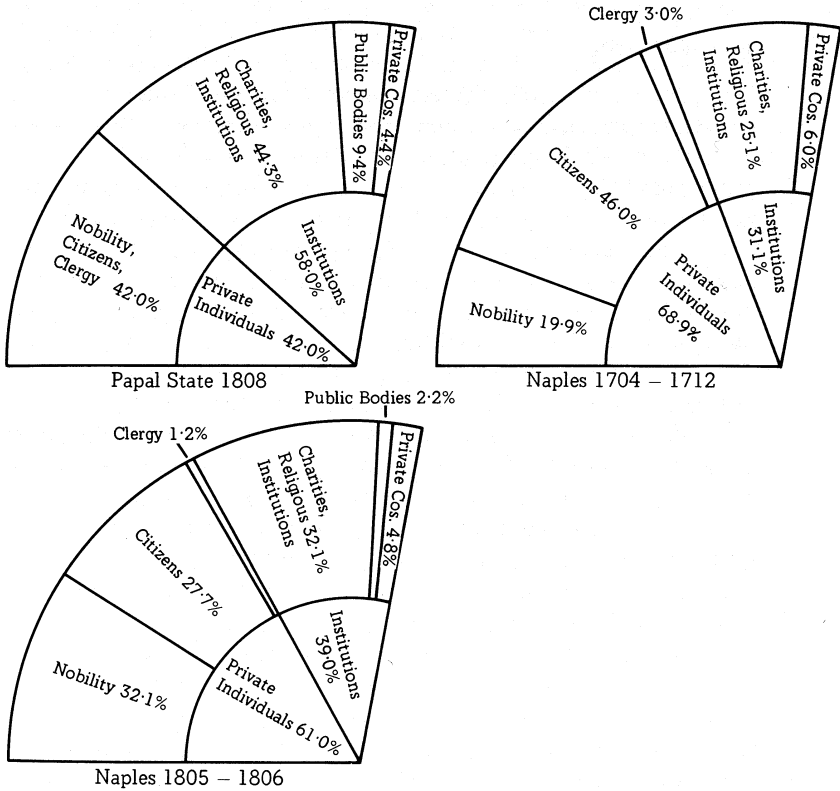


Figure 1.13 - Distribution of personal wealth among the social classes of eighteenth-century Italy



### 1.8 Conclusions

When we examine the historical series contained in the preceding pages, we must always remember that they come from the separate endeavours of a large number of individual researchers. They were not inspired by a common purpose; they were not carried out according to a common plan. For this reason, it often happens that the same subject has been studied in depth for one region but remains almost unknown for another. Our knowledge is unequal, and the mosaic of evidence cannot permit a sure and detailed reconstruction of the economic history of all Italy for the early modern period.

At the same time, we do have enough data to make certain generalizations. There is no doubt here that in almost the whole of Italy the overall population trend was upward in 1550-1600, declining in 1600-75, then increasing again, at first very slowly but becoming more rapid as the eighteenth century advanced. One can distinguish two areas of different demographic performance: between 1550 and 1790 the largest population increases were registered in a crescent of territories stretching from the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily through Sardinia and Genoa to Piedmont and Lombardy; growth was far more sluggish in the Venetian territories, in the small states of Emilia, in Tuscany and in the Papal States. In both of these broad demographic "regions" the increase in population was much more variable in the towns than in the countryside. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, famines, plagues and wars ravaged with particular severity urban populations, which depended for their subsistence on the surplus food produced by rural areas. They were also more exposed to epidemics because of their higher density of people and they might become primary military targets subjected to blockades, sacks and destruction. These were all short-term factors restraining natural urban growth. In the longer term, the capacity of the towns to increase depended on their ability to offer economic opportunities which would attract a steady flow of immigrants from the countryside. When their economic activity slowed down, their ability to attract and absorb immigrants diminished and the growth of their population therefore stopped.

There were several other influences on urban growth in Italy. Towns might expand because they became a government capital, or because of the growth of central administration in the state, as at Turin, Naples and especially Rome, the spiritual centre of the Counter-Reformation as well as capital of the Papal States. In contrast, the political decline of small states (like Modena, Parma or Lucca) or the absorption of one state by another (like Mantua Ferrara or Sienna) naturally caused the economic and demographic decline of their 'capital cities'. The development of certain other towns was linked to special economic activities. Thus the amazing and sustained expansion of Leghorn (Livorno) was a consequence of its status as a 'free port' (no transit dues); the rise of Genoa in the early seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries was aided by its important financial operations and its fine port; the decline of Messina resulted from the collapse of Sicilian silk exports. The more famous 'decline of Venice' was the fruit of more complex developments, including the loss of overseas possessions to the

Turks, the growing problem of building enough sound ships and the poor social mobility between Venice and its dominion. Urban demography in our period thus had its successes and its failures, but the overall picture was not positive: between 1550 and 1790 the population of the thirty-six “biggest towns” rose from 1.3 million people to 2 million, but in relative terms the town-dwellers continued to make up only 11 or 12 per cent of the total Italian population. The urban economies were unable, in the long run, to increase their share of the economic product and of economic rewards. On the other hand, the series of prices and wages show that, if one excludes the consequences of monetary depreciation, the inhabitants of the Italian towns enjoyed a standard of living that held fairly stable throughout the period. This stability must be attributed to the towns’ guild organizations, to the charitable institutions and to the development of local government which created more jobs in the public sector.

A very different situation existed in rural areas, where almost 90 per cent of the population lived throughout early modern times. From 1550 until 1790 an extra 7 million inhabitants were added to the 9.2 million already living on the land. Their ‘arrival’ was concentrated to a large extent in the eighteenth century and it increased the existing tensions within the rural world. Various solutions were attempted. In the plain of Lombardy and around Vercelli, for instance, efforts were directed to increasing agricultural productivity by improving farming techniques. In other areas there was a switch from traditional crops to more profitable ones: vines and mulberries (for the silkworms) in the hills of Piedmont, mulberries and maize in some Venetian territories, hemp in the Romagna, mulberries again in Calabria, olives in Liguria. Not all of these new developments prospered, however; several were crippled by the tariff barriers erected by neighbouring states or by the high costs of transport. Another only partially successful answer to the growing demand for more land and more food was the reclamation of marshes and estuaries and the exploitation of previously uncultivated territory. But land reclamation, even when it succeeded, provided few new farms, while the exploitation of new land produced more food, but yield ratios remained very low. These improvements, such as they were, did nothing to relieve the social instability of the rural community or to reduce the growing opposition to feudal exactions. Plans by some governments to organize a redistribution of landed property came to nothing. Everything suggests that, for most Italians living in villages and small towns, the general standard of living deteriorated, especially during the eighteenth century.

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