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**CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE IN MEDIEVAL ITALY:
SOME REFLECTIONS ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY
HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Abstract

The nature of the relation between city and countryside in medieval Italy was unique by comparison with the rest of Europe. Precisely for this reason, the question has drawn the attention of historiography, particularly starting in the early twentieth century, with the scholarship of Gaetano Salvemini and Gioacchino Volpe, and especially Romolo Caggese, the author of *Classi e comuni rurali nel Medio Evo italiano* (Rural classes and city communes in the Italian Middle Ages). This work long stood as a critical touchstone: it did so at least until the 1960s, when a new historiographical season set in – with monographs, essays, and conference proceedings – that gave us a much richer frame of understanding, while opening a larger debate on the question, which to this day remains a central concern of historiographical investigation.

Keywords: Italy, Middle Ages, communes, city, countryside, historiography, *contado*

A central place in the historiography of the Italian Middle Ages is occupied by the question of the relation between city and countryside – the latter understood as the *contado* (Lat. *comitatus*, Eng. *county*), meaning the territory which was dependent on the city or which the city otherwise claimed as its own, starting from the area encompassed by a diocese. This topic has classically been an object of investigation at least since the late nineteenth century, in what Benedetto Croce once described as economic-legal historiography.¹ In reality there are antecedents that can be found in much earlier times: in Renaissance historiography, in the work of Ludovico Antonio Muratori, and especially in the famous 1858 essay by Carlo Cattaneo

¹ See Benedetto Croce, *Storia della storiografia italiana nel secolo decimonono*, 2 vols. (Bari, 1921), ii, 237–52, and Enrico Artifoni, *Salvemini e il Medioevo: Storici italiani tra Otto e Novecento* (Napoli, 1990), 13–14.

titled *Le città considerate come principio ideale delle istorie italiane* (Cities considered as an ideal principle of Italian histories).²

Needless to say, the locus of analysis for this question has always been the communal Italy of city-republics, with its peculiarities, not the southern kingdom of Italy – that of the Normans, the Staufen, the Angevins – even if the historiography of southern Italy has recently highlighted some commonalities among cities in these two parts of Italy (which certainly did exist), while playing down the differences, which remained profound.³ Even without discounting the variety of situations that distinguished the different cities in southern Italy, one common feature can be identified – which is that the urban powers in the southern countryside never constituted themselves in such a way that they could exercise full authoritative power, be it military, fiscal, judicial, or otherwise.

By the same token, the relation between city and countryside was different in Italy than it was in the rest of Europe – a point that was underscored quite some time ago by Ernesto Sestan.⁴

As we were saying, then, the question of the relation between the city and its own *contado* came front and centre in the study of medieval Italy in the decades straddling the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This renewed interest was owed especially to Romolo Caggese's study of rural classes and city communes in medieval Italy,⁵ a vast survey

² The longevity of this topic of inquiry forms the subject of Pierre Toubert's essay 'Città et contado dans l'Italie médiévale: L'émergence d'un thème historiographique entre Renaissance et Romantisme', *La Cultura*, xxii (1984), 219–48.

³ This is an orientation that developed particularly under the impulse of Giovanni Vitolo, who has edited *Città e contado nel Mezzogiorno tra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Salerno, 2005) and has written *L'Italia delle altre città: Un'immagine del Mezzogiorno medievale* (Napoli, 2014), along with previous works on the cities of southern Italy.

⁴ See Ernesto Sestan, 'La città comunale italiana dei secoli XI–XIII nelle sue note caratteristiche rispetto al movimento comunale europeo'. This is a talk that Sestan originally delivered at the 11th International Historical Sciences Congress held in Stockholm in 1960. It was then republished in his book *Italia medievale* (Napoli, 1968), 91–120, where he makes the following argument: "From the peculiar relation between city and countryside, and from the Italian cities peculiar social makeup, there ultimately stem the traits that distinguish the Italian city commune from its transalpine counterparts, as well as its subsequent institutional developments, which increasingly augmented these initial differences" (pp. 107–8).

⁵ Romolo Caggese, *Classi e comuni rurali nel Medio Evo italiano: Saggio di storia economica e giuridica*, 2 vols. (Firenze, 1907, 1909; 2nd ed. Reggello, 2010 as photo-offset reprint edited by Giuliano Pinto).

of Italian countryside without precedent. For much of the twentieth century, the many authors who concerned themselves with the same topic referred to this work as a source, sometimes finding fault with it, and sometimes, albeit more rarely, subscribing to its core theses. Caggese had written it at just twenty-six. He was born in 1881 in Ascoli Satriano, in Apulia, from which he found his way to Florence, where he studied at the Istituto di Studi Superiori, where he earned a degree in 1904, defending a dissertation supervised by Pasquale Villari. *Classi e comuni rurali* was not the first work he had sent to press. In 1905, his bachelor's thesis had been published.⁶ The same year also saw the publication of a work he wrote on the origins of rural communes in Italy;⁷ and some other studies on Siena and Pistoia also came out – all works that, with the emphasis they placed on the origin of rural communes, and especially on the relation between city and countryside, lay the groundwork for his magnum opus, and they clearly outlined the object of his investigations.⁸

The question of rural communes and the relation between city and countryside had previously drawn the attention of scholars a few years his elder. Thus, in 1901, Gaetano Salvemini published an essay on the small rural commune of Tintinnano (located in Val d'Orcia, in the outskirts of Siena) in the thirteenth century. But this was a case study from which Salvemini sought to extract conclusions of general scope, his aim being to show how the conditions of peasants worsened in the transition from seigneurial domination to the domination of cities.⁹

⁶ Romolo Caggese, *Un comune libero alle porte di Firenze nel secolo XIII: Prato in Toscana* (Firenze, 1905).

⁷ This was an essay titled 'Intorno alle origini dei Comuni rurali in Italia'. It was published in 1905 in *Rivista italiana di sociologia*, and with a few corrections and revisions it became a chapter in the first volume of *Classi e comuni rurali*.

⁸ In a letter sent to Gaetano Salvemini in late 1902, Caggese, who at the time was in his third year of study, emphatically states that the question had pressed itself on his attention from the very start of his university studies. See Artifoni, *Salvemini e il Medioevo*, 33–4.

⁹ Gaetano Salvemini, 'Un comune rurale nel secolo XIII', in *Studi storici* (Firenze, 1901), 1–37, republished in Salvemini, *La dignità cavalleresca del Comune di Firenze e altri scritti*, ed. Ernesto Sestan (Milano, 1972), 274–97. It is striking that even though this essay, in the framing of its object and in its conclusions, is functional to Caggese's *Classi e comuni rurali*, it barely receives any notice in this latter work: there is no mention of it in the introduction, where reference is made to the literature devoted to the medieval countryside (p. VII); it is only cited in the footnotes on page 296, as well as on pages 299–300, where Caggese, turning to the case of

A year later, in a book on the communal institutions of Pisa, Gioacchino Volpe devoted to the Pisan countryside some pages of seminal import, especially in the first, long chapter, significantly titled ‘Città e contado nel secolo XII’ (City and countryside in the twelfth century), in which he offered a more balanced assessment of relations between city citizens and county dwellers (*comitatini*), moving away from the position taken by Salvemini.¹⁰ In addition to the works of these two authors, there also came those of a sizable group of historians of law, including Enrico Besta, Alessandro Lattes, Giuseppe Salvioli, Arrigo Solmi, Carlo Calisse, Silvio Pivano, and Pier Silverio Leicht, almost all of whom, were medievalists, at a time in which university chairs in the history of Italian law were much more numerous than those awarded to pure historians.¹¹

Although the question of the relation between city and *contado* had already been investigated by historians of the time, there had yet to be written a work providing a summarizing overview of the subject matter. The two volumes making up *Classi e comuni rurali*, running to over 800 pages, set out to give systematic treatment to the history of Italian rural society from the early Middle Ages to the fourteenth century. The first volume examines the precommunal period, with a focus on the birth of the rural commune and on the relations between the local communities and their lords; the second volume looks at the cities’ takeover of the *contado* and their administrative organization – and it is this second volume that more closely concerns us here. Caggese’s analysis reaches the end of the thirteenth century and essentially stops there, with only a few sporadic fourteenth-century sources being used (and these sources are mostly legal). As a result, the work leaves in the shadow a period that was critical in shaping the administrative organization of the *contado* and the dominant cities’ food and fiscal

Tintinnano, directly references the version of the text of the *Carta libertatis* and the Tintinnano communal charters edited by Lodovico Zdekauer. Much more widely noted, by contrast, and approvingly, are generally the works of Gioacchino Volpe.

¹⁰ Gioacchino Volpe, *Studi sulle istituzioni comunali a Pisa (Città e contado, Consoli e Podestà): Secoli XII e XIII* (Pisa, 1902), followed by a new edition (Firenze, 1970) with an introduction by Cinzio Violante (pp. 1–123). It is on page 121, note 3, that we can find a judgment on the essay by Salvemini.

¹¹ Mauro Moretti, ‘Appunti sulla storia della medievistica italiana tra Otto e Novecento: Alcune questioni istituzionali’, *Revista de Historia Jerónimo Zurita*, lxxxii (2007), 155–74, digitally distributed on Reti Medievali at <http://www.rmoa.unina.it/1045/> (Accessed: 27 March 2019).

policies. In fact, Caggese simply extends to this period the analysis he makes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

It was in a bold, unnuanced manner that Caggese advanced his theses, and these are well known. What he offers is a 'strong' interpretation of the relation between city and countryside: the privileges and resources of the rural communities were "violated when the cities occupied their territories"; the city "extracted great bundles of forces and enormous riches [from the countryside] and treasured these gains in their own exclusive interest".¹² Rural communities formed into communes by strengthening their ties to neighbouring communities, acting to protect their collective interests in response to the oppression they faced at the hands of the nobility, and in Caggese's reconstruction that history develops along two main junctures: in the centuries that span from the Early Middle Ages to the twelfth century, peasant masses engaged in a struggle against the feudal landed estates (*latifundia*), evil incarnate (and here we can sense the lived experience of a historian reared in a smalltown in Apulia);¹³ then, having wrested themselves from the 'feudal yoke', the rural communes enjoyed a short season of freedom and economic development, which came to an end with their enservment to the cities.

What is striking about this account is the schematism and oversimplification of some of its representations, first among them the broad-brush depiction of rural society as an indistinct whole,¹⁴ an image that gets tempered only when a distinction is introduced between rural communes proper and communes tied to a court or castle. Other considerations also seem far-fetched, a case in point being the rigid classification of cities into three buckets – according as they were mercantile, manufacturing, or agricultural communes – from which there derived different policies to which their countryside was subject.¹⁵

¹² Caggese, *Classi e comuni rurali*, i, XIV.

¹³ Quite interesting, in this connection, is the description that, in *Foggia e la Capitanata*, Caggese provides of the Apulian peasant world in the early twentieth century. The book was first published in Bergamo in 1910, and a facsimile edition followed (Foggia, 2008) with an introduction by Francesco Capriglione.

¹⁴ Caggese, *Classi e comuni rurali*, i, 169: "Quanti non erano città, erano Comuni rurali!" (What was not a city was a rural commune!).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ii, 11–14. Under this description, Genoa, Venice, and Pisa were classed as mercantile communes, Florence and Bologna as manufactural ones, and Brescia and Orvieto as agricultural ones.

Other oversimplifying, if not truth-stretching, claims include the notion that in fourteenth-century Florence, like in other cities, the land fell entirely into the hands of the citizens, and that in Florence, as elsewhere, the forms of land lease consisted almost exclusively of two forms of sharecropping arrangements: *mezzadria* and *colonia parziaria*.¹⁶ In reality, these processes were much slower and drawn out: they continued to unfold in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and did so showing a marked degree of differentiation among different territories. Then, too, in the matter of the cities' levying of taxes in the countryside and their food policy, what Caggese offers is a summary analysis sometimes relying on questionable interpretations of the sources – an analysis designed to support the thesis that the *contado*, “the servant, defender, and mainstay of the city's life”, was subject to wholesale exploitation by the city itself, and that this was “without precedent in the history of the ruinations of human labour”.¹⁷

Despite these theses – overblown even in their rhetorical flourish, and questionable on the merits – Caggese did manage to put his finger on certain peculiarities of Italian history, pointing out, for example, the early break-up of the rural nobility by comparison with what happened in many transalpine countries, the specificity of the relation between city and *contado* in Italy, the role of the city as a source of law-making, or the importance ascribed to the commons.¹⁸ Also remarkable was his ability to shed light on some fundamental historical junctures, grasping their evolution over the long course, and using his words effectively, without affecting a declamatory style.

The first volume of *Classi e comuni rurali* immediately sparked great interest, and within a couple of years two important reviews of it came out.¹⁹ The first review was by Gino Luzzatto, a budding scholar three years older than Caggese who would go on to have a lustrous career as an economic historian.²⁰ Luzzatto pointed out “some omissions

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, 269–70.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ii, 18, 358.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, i, 298; ii, 17–18, 243, 275–82.

¹⁹ A third, less involved review came out in 1907 – written by Luigi Cesare Bollea and published in *Rivista storica italiana* (162–7) – where Caggese is judged to be ‘a man of learned and insightful wisdom’.

²⁰ The review appeared in the ‘Rassegne analitiche’ section of *Rivista italiana di sociologia*, xi (1907), 649–59. On Luzzatto, see Paola Lanaro (ed.), *Gino Luzzatto storico dell'economia, tra impegno civile e rigore scientifico* (Venezia, 2005).

and some overly stark negations” but regards these as peculiarities within an overall “solid and thought-provoking” reconstruction, with which he found himself in large part in agreement. The work, in his assessment, was “brilliant and very well written”.

The following year, in 1908, an extensive discussion that would go on to achieve fame appeared in a journal founded by Benedetto Croce called *La Critica*. It was penned by Gioacchino Volpe,²¹ who criticized both the method and the substance of Caggese’s work, pointing out, among other things, the scant documentation on which it was based (for the most part relying on Tuscan sources), the contradictions that not infrequently came up in Caggese’s historical reconstruction and interpretation, and above all his deployment of concepts and categories – borrowed sometimes from sociology, sometimes from Marxist theory – that fail to take into account the range of differences which can be observed over time and across space, thereby homogenizing everything by drawing untenable comparisons and analogies.²² We will not enter into these criticisms here, to be sure, but it is worth noting that Volpe, in closing his review essay, highlighted not only the negative but also the positive. In fact in registering his disappointment at a work that fell short of the mark (“the work”, he writes, “is only a half-accomplishment”), and at its unkept promises, he also expressed praise for Caggese, whose “work nonetheless still stands as the only somewhat extensive treatment we have of the subject, such that, for some years to come, anyone looking at that time and those facts ... will have to take it into account”.²³

Volpe was too cautious a prophet: not for “some years” but for many decades the fame that *Classi e comuni rurali* brought to Caggese

²¹ Gioacchino Volpe, review of Romolo Caggese, ‘Classi e comuni rurali nel Medio Evo italiano’, *La Critica: Rivista di letteratura, storia e filosofia*, vi (1908), 263–78, 361–81. The text, with a few edits here and there, was subsequently republished in Gioacchino Volpe, *Medio Evo italiano*, 2nd ed. ([1st ed. Firenze, 1922] Firenze, 1961), 141–88. For some context on the criticism articulated by Volpe, who came down hard on Caggese in his review of *Classi e comuni rurali*, see the considerations made in Artifoni, *Salvemini e il Medioevo*, 173–4, where the review is constructed as an attack on the Florentine school spearheaded by Gaetano Salvemini – a school that in Volpe’s assessment carries the baggage of positivistic scientism, with its pretence to hold together history and the social sciences.

²² See Volpe, *Medio Evo italiano* (1st edition), 146–8, 185–7, and *passim*, of the Florence 1961 edition.

²³ *Ibid.*, 187–8.

made him the main figure with whom anyone had to engage if they wanted to approach the topic of rural communities in the communal era and the relation between city and *contado*.

As concerns the question of the origins and development of rural communities, I will confine myself to pointing out the pages that Chris Wickham has devoted to the historiographical debate from Caggese onward.²⁴ The British historian compares two classic interpretive models: on the one hand is that of Caggese; on the other is that of Gian Piero Bognetti, who specialized in the history of law but was also broadly interested in history *tout court*, and who addressed the question in a series of works published starting in the late 1920s,²⁵ arguing that the medieval rural commune traces its origin to the community that preexisted the Roman conquest itself, and can thus be understood to carry the historical legacy of a primal form of associative life within a territory.²⁶ Wickham finds himself in agreement with Caggese's thesis, but one point he does insist on, namely, that given the geographic, economic, social, and political differences which mark the medieval countryside in Italy, the formation of rural communes is a process that cannot be reduced to any single factor.²⁷

The question of the relation between city and countryside – the question that most directly concerns us here – has attracted the attention of a sizable group of historians who in one way or another have had to measure themselves against Caggese's work. The scholarship saw a lull in the interwar period, when historians tended to take a much greater interest in contemporary history, but in the last quarter of the twentieth century, as we will see, it intensified.

²⁴ Chris Wickham, *Comunità e clientele nella Toscana del XII secolo: Le origini del comune rurale nella Piana di Lucca* (Roma, 1995), Eng. trans. *Community and Clientele in Twelfth-Century Tuscany: The Origins of the Rural Commune in the Plain of Lucca* (Oxford, 1998). See also the careful review of the literature in Gabriele Taddei, 'Comuni rurali toscani: Metodologie a confronto', *Archivio storico italiano*, clxi (2003), 717–76.

²⁵ These were subsequently republished, almost all of them, in Gian Piero Bognetti, *Studi sulle origini del comune rurale*, ed. Franca Sinatti d'Amico and Cinzio Violante (Milano, 1978).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁷ There are some interesting judgments he more specifically directs at *Classi e comuni rurali*: "Caggese's infuriatingly vast, sloppy, and rhetorical work is still worth reading, for the force of his argument and the acute insights that appear with regularity across its 600 pages" (Wickham, *Community and Clientele* [n. 24], 186).

As concerns the initial period, there are only a handful of works that are worthy of mention. Among these is a 1929 essay by a historian of law named Giovanni De Vergottini who frontally addressed the question of the relation between city and *contado*, investigating how in the latter half of the twelfth century there emerged a doctrine of so-called *comitatinanza*, referring to the right of the city to exercise control over the territory (*comitatus*) that by administrative or by civil/ecclesiastic tradition was deemed to fall within its jurisdiction.²⁸ The following year another historian of law, Pietro Torelli, came out with a copious investigation devoted to the Mantuan territory in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.²⁹ Through an exactingly minute analysis of the sources, Torelli reconstructed the various forms of land ownership, the variety of agrarian contracts, and the city's intervention in the makeup of the territory. This was in many respects an exemplary work, and though it did not have much resonance at the time, in more recent years it received new appreciation.

In 1934, Johan Plesner, a Danish historian who was trained in Florence in the school headed by Nicola Ottokar, published a book on emigration from the countryside to Florence in the thirteenth century, taking a fresh look at the themes in Caggese's idea of the "takeover of the *contado*".³⁰ On the basis of an accurate and innovative analysis of archival sources, Plesner argued that, paradoxically, it was in fact the countryside that took over the city, owing to the emigration of the countryfolk of high and middle rank. These people, having become citizens, held on to their landed properties, and in fact could often *increase* these holdings. Even more importantly, however, they led Florence's great economic development, soon climbing to the

²⁸ Giovanni De Vergottini, *Origini e sviluppo storico della comitatinanza* (Siena, 1929), subsequently republished in Guido Rossi (ed.), *Scritti di storia del diritto italiano*, 3 vols. (Milano, 1977), i, 5–122. On this question, see also Andrea Degrandi, 'La riflessione teorica sul rapporto città-contado nello scontro tra Federico Barbarossa e i comuni italiani', *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 106 (2004), 139–67.

²⁹ Pietro Torelli, *Distribuzione della proprietà, sviluppo agricolo, contratti agrari*, vol. i of *Un comune cittadino in territorio ad economia agricola* (Mantova, 1930).

³⁰ Johan Plesner, *L'émigration de la campagne à la ville libre de Florence au XIIIe siècle* (København, 1934), translated into Italian as *L'emigrazione dalla campagna alla città libera di Firenze nel XIII secolo* (Monte Oriolo, Firenze, 1979). The Italian translation comes with an interesting foreword by Ernesto Sestan (5–19).

higher echelons of the social hierarchy. Some of the theses advanced by Caggese were thus turned on their head.

Plesner's book, written in French and, above all, published in Denmark, was essentially ignored by Italian historiography, at a time when medieval history and its economic and social aspects were drawing little interest among scholars. After the publication of that book, we have to leap forward almost a quarter-century (albeit making allowance for the intervening period of the Second World War) in order to see the question of the relation between city and countryside come back to the fore as a lens through which to read the history of city communes.³¹

In 1956 an essay came out by Enrico Fiumi on the question of the relation between city and *contado* in the communal era,³² subjecting to close scrutiny the conclusions that Caggese had reached on the cities' food and fiscal policies, and more broadly on the characteristics of rural society in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Moreover, Fiumi underscored that the Italian countryside in the communal era were anything but uniform, punctuated as they were by richly populated hamlets and castles, where only part of the population worked the land for a living, and where a middling class was present and active, made up of members of the professions (especially notaries), as well as by merchants and craftsmen with a workshop.³³

³¹ As concerns the precommunal era, however, it is worth pointing out Cinzio Violante, *La società milanese nell'età precomunale* (Napoli, 1953; Bari, 1974), which stands among the most important studies in medieval history in the wake of the Second World War, when the relation between Milan and its territory came to be seen as a non-negligible factor in the development of society in the city.

³² Enrico Fiumi, 'Sui rapporti economici tra città e contado nell'età comunale', *Archivio storico italiano*, cxiv, 1 (1956), 18–68. These are topics that Fiumi would come back to in subsequent studies, see 'L'imposta diretta nei comuni medioevali della Toscana', in *Studi in onore di Armando Saporì* (Milano, 1957), i, 327–53, and 'Fioritura e decadenza dell'economia fiorentina', *Archivio storico italiano*, cxvi, 4 (1958), 443–510.

³³ This is a theme that has flourished to an extraordinary degree in Italian medieval studies in recent decades. See, at least, Maria Ginatempo, 'Vivere 'a modo di città'. I centri minori italiani nel Basso Medioevo: Autonomie, privilegio, fiscalità', in *Città e campagne del Basso Medioevo: Studi sulla società italiana offerti dagli allievi a Giuliano Pinto* (Firenze, 2014), 1–30, and Giuliano Pinto, 'La "borghesia di castello" nell'Italia centrosettentrionale (secoli XII–XV): Alcune considerazioni', in Giorgio Chittolini, Giovanna Petti Balbi, Giovanni Vitolo (eds.), *Città e territori nell'Italia del Medioevo: Studi in onore di Gabriella Rossetti* (Napoli, 2007), 155–70.

The essay written by Fiumi, a *sui generis* scholar who worked outside academe,³⁴ did not gain much attention in medieval studies at the time. The turning point came in the mid-60s of the twentieth century, when the question of the relation between city and countryside attracted new interest in Italian historiography, at a time when some deep transformations were changing the face of the Italian countryside: sharecropping was falling into demise, the farm fields were being abandoned, people were flocking to the cities, and then agriculture itself became industrialized. It was initially among historians of modern and contemporary history that the question became a subject of investigation.³⁵ Then in 1965 Elio Conti published his seminal studies on the formation of the modern agrarian structure in the Florentine countryside.³⁶ He proceeded from the assumption that it was impossible to understand Florentine history in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance without first gaining a grasp of its rural underpinnings, and his investigative method consisted in sifting through the full gamut of unpublished documents, prominent among which was the Florentine *catasto* (cadastral survey) of 1427, which had hitherto been ignored in the study of the city's history.³⁷

The problem has since occupied a prominent place in the investigations carried out by the newer generation of Italian historians, who made their first forays in the 1970s. I am thinking in particular of Giovanni Cherubini, Giorgio Chittolini, and Paolo Cammarosano:³⁸

³⁴ On the significance of Fiumi, see Giuliano Pinto, 'Presentazione' in Enrico Fiumi, *Volterra e San Gimignano nel medioevo: Raccolta di studi a cura di Giuliano Pinto* (San Gimignano, 1983), V–XII.

³⁵ Cf. Pasquale Villani, 'Storia moderna, 1784–1815', in Luigi De Rosa (ed.), *La storiografia italiana degli ultimi vent'anni* (Milano, 1970) (conference proceedings 1967), i, 585–622, at 592–601.

³⁶ Elio Conti, *La formazione della struttura agraria moderna nel contado fiorentino; i, Le campagne nell'età precomunale* (contains in appendix 'L'evoluzione agraria di un territorio campione dal mille ad oggi'), iii/2, *Monografie e tavole statistiche (secoli XV–XIX)* (Roma, 1965); *id.*, *I catasti agrari della Repubblica fiorentina e il catasto particellare toscano (secoli XIV–XIX)* (Roma, 1966).

³⁷ On Conti's historiographic oeuvre, see Renzo Ninci (ed.), *La società fiorentina nel basso Medioevo: Per Elio Conti* (Roma, 1995), with prefatory essays by Girolamo Arnaldi, Mario Sanfilippo, Tommaso Detti, Anthony Molho, Giovanni Cherubini, and Giuliano Pinto.

³⁸ Also worthy of mention among these scholars is Vito Fumagalli, whose interest was in the medieval countryside, with a focus on the Early Middle Ages,

Cherubini devoted assiduous attention to the social dynamics in the countryside and to the great swell in land ownership by the city, with all the consequences that followed, and his focus was on the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries;³⁹ Cammarosano was more interested in the affairs of the rural nobility (especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) in its relations with the rural communities and the city;⁴⁰ and Giorgio Chittolini, for his part, was more oriented toward the Late Middle Ages, with a specific emphasis on their institutional aspects.⁴¹

The question also elicited interest from non-Italian historians of medieval Italy. One of the first of these, and certainly among the most important, was Philip Jones, who in a few articles that came out between 1956 and 1968, subsequently collected into a 1980 book,⁴² as well as in some works providing overviews of the economy and society of medieval Italy,⁴³ devoted considerable space to the relation between city and *contado*. Not incidentally, the work that students and

and who was therefore less interested in the problem of the relation between city and *contado*. From his teaching in Bologna there sprang up a school of students of the medieval countryside. On this new crop of historians, see the insights that Ovidio Capitani offers in *Medioevo passato prossimo: Appunti storiografici tra due guerre e molte crisi* (Bologna, 1979), *passim*.

³⁹ See especially Giovanni Cherubini, *Signori, contadini, borghesi: Ricerche sulla società italiana del basso Medioevo* (Firenze, 1974). In Cherubini, and to a greater extent in some of his pupils, there reemerged, however much in cautious and nuanced forms, the line of interpretation according to which the *contado* was being subjugated and exploited by the city. See, for example, Giovanni Cherubini, *L'Italia rurale del basso Medioevo* (Roma and Bari, 1984), 65 ff., 118 ff.

⁴⁰ See Paolo Cammarosano, *La famiglia dei Berardenghi: Contributo alla storia della società senese nei secoli XI–XIII* (Spoleto, 1974). But see also his important essay 'Città e campagna: Rapporti politici ed economici', in *Società e istituzioni dell'Italia comunale: L'esempio di Perugia (secoli XII–XIV)* (Perugia, 1988), 303–49. And also noteworthy, even though it was conceived as a primer for his university courses, is *Le campagne nell'età comunale (metà sec. XI – metà sec. XIV)* (Torino, 1974).

⁴¹ See Giorgio Chittolini, *La formazione dello stato regionale e le istituzioni del contado, secoli XIV–XV* (Torino, 1979) and *Città, comunità e feudi negli stati dell'Italia centro-settentrionale (secoli XIV–XVI)* (Milano, 1996), as well as his survey essay 'Città e contado nella tarda età comunale (a proposito di studi recenti)', *Nuova rivista storica*, liii (1969), 706–19.

⁴² Philip Jones, *Economia e società nell'Italia medievale* (Torino, 1980), in which there stands out his essay on the passage in Tuscany from manor to *mezzadria*.

⁴³ Philip Jones, 'Italy', in Michael M. Postan (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1: *The Agrarian Life of the Middle Ages*, chap. VII ('Medieval Agrarian Society in Its Prime'), 340–431. Italian trans.

friends dedicated to him at his retirement was given the title *City and Countryside in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy*.⁴⁴

The amount of scholarship that non-Italian historians devoted to the relation between the city and the *contado* began to surge in the late 1960s. We need only consider the *thèses* on communal Italy that came from French historians: these include Charles de La Roncière (Florence), Pierre Racine (Piacenza), François Menant (Lombardy), Gerard Rippe (Padua), Elisabeth Carpentier (Orvieto), and Odile Redon (Siena), among others.⁴⁵ Next to these, in the Anglosphere, came a series of monographs devoted to specific cities, with authors such as David Herlihy (Pisa, Pistoia, Florence), William Bowsky (Siena), Christine Meek (Lucca), and Trevor Dean (Ferrara). And, finally, it is worth mentioning Hagen Keller, whose inquiries into the origins of Italian communes have had much resonance in Italian historiography.⁴⁶

Of course the relation between the city and its territory is subject to interpretation and in anything but a settled matter. Thus, for example, while the Soviet historian Ljubov' A. Kotel'nikova wrote a book on the peasant world and the city largely subscribing to Caggese's theses,⁴⁷ the American historian William Bowsky, a student of Siena in the

'La società agraria medievale all'apice del suo sviluppo', 'L'Italia', in *Storia economica Cambridge*; vol. I, *L'agricoltura e la società rurale nel Medioevo* (Torino, 1976), 412–526.

⁴⁴ Trevor Dean and Chris Wickham (eds.), *City and Countryside in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Essays Presented to Philip Jones* (London, 1990).

⁴⁵ I should point out in particular that the part of the *Florence, centre économique regional au XIV siècle* (Aix-en Provence, 1976) in which de La Roncière canvassed the Italian countryside would subsequently become a book published directly in Italian. See Charles-Marie de La Roncière, *Firenze e le sue campagne nel Trecento: Mercanti, produzione, traffici*, extracted and trans. by Isabel Chabot and Paolo Pirillo (Firenze, 2005).

⁴⁶ See especially Hagen Keller, *Adelsherrschaft und städtische Gesellschaft in Oberitalien. 9. bis 12. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1979), translated into Italian as *Signori e vassalli nell'Italia delle città (secoli IX–XII)* (Torino, 1995). The Italian edition is supplemented with an extensive new introduction (pp. XI–XLVIII) in which Keller takes stock of the work he published from 1979 to 1995 and of the debate his book sparked in Italian historiography.

⁴⁷ Ljubov' A. Kotel'nikova, *Ital'janskoe krest'janstvo i gorod v XI–XIV v.v.* (Moskva, 1967), translated into Italian by Luciana Sandri Catozzi as *Mondo contadino e città in Italia dall'XI al XIV secolo: Dalle fonti dell'Italia centrale e settentrionale* (Bologna, 1975). The Italian edition is prefaced by an important extensive foreword by Cinzio Violante (pp. IX–XXX).

thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, takes a highly critical stance, especially as concerns the city's fiscal policy.⁴⁸

Attesting to the degree to which the relation between city and countryside remains a topical issue is the publication of a spate of writings that over the last two or three decades have keyed in on individual cities or investigated specific aspects of that relation, such as the landed properties held by the cities, taxation, food policy, immigration and the citizenry, and mentalities. In some cases these writings attempt to call into doubt, or at least temper, the central role assigned to cities in accounting for the surrounding territories' organization, even in the final stages of the Middle Ages, underscoring the presence of broad swaths of independent territory that escaped the cities' control.⁴⁹ In other cases it has rightly been argued that the rural communities need to be studied in themselves, quite apart from their relation to the dominant city.⁵⁰

It is a vast body of scholarship that we are looking at, and we cannot take it all into account here in a single sweep, except by pointing out a few works that can provide a through-line in a particularly vital historiographic season on which we cannot yet have a properly reasoned perspective. I will thus confine myself to pointing out the proceedings of three important conferences.

The first one was held in 1997 under the title *Medievistica italiana e storia agraria* (Italian medieval studies and agrarian history).⁵¹ It was organized into two parts. The first, 'Regional Itineraries', presented the findings made in the historiography devoted to the different geographical areas of the Italian peninsula; the second one, 'Intersections', looked at the relation between agrarian history and other

⁴⁸ William M. Bowsky, *The Finance of the Commune of Siena, 1287–1355* (Oxford, 1970), translated into Italian by Katherine Isaacs and Gaetano Salinas as *Le finanze del Comune di Siena 1287–1355* (Firenze, 1976).

⁴⁹ See in this regard the works of two historians who studied under Giorgio Chittolini, namely, Marco Gentile, *Terra e poteri: Parma e il Parmense nel ducato visconteo all'inizio del Quattrocento* (Milano, 2001), and Andrea Gamberini, *La città assediata: Poteri e identità politiche a Reggio in età viscontea* (Roma, 2003).

⁵⁰ See, for example, the research that Massimo Della Misericordia has done on the Valtellina area, starting from *Divenire comunità: Comuni rurali, poteri locali, identità sociali e territoriali in Valtellina e nella montagna lombarda nel tardo medioevo* (Milano, 2006).

⁵¹ Alfio Cortonesi and Massimo Montanari (eds.), *Medievistica italiana e storia agraria: Risultati e prospettive di una stagione storiografica* (Bologna, 2001).

'histories': economic, institutional, urban, and so on. Of course, central to the discussion was the question of the relation between the city and its territory.

The second conference, held in 2004, went under the title of *La costruzione del dominio cittadino sulle campagne* (The construction of the cities' domination over the countryside).⁵² The related book (more than 700 pages long) is organized under four headings, namely (i) 'Control and Organization of the Territory'; (ii) 'Dynamics and Organization of Landed Estates'; (iii) 'Agrarian Policies and Economic Elites'; and (iv) 'City and Countryside: Mental Outlooks'. Just from these headings we can appreciate that the discussion covers significant aspects of the relation between city and countryside, but it almost invariably does so within the scope of geographically circumscribed analyses.

It is finally worth recalling the conference held in Spoleto in 2008 under the title *Città e campagna nei secoli altomedievali* (City and countryside in the Early Middle Ages, though the analysis extends to the twelfth century). This conference is significant in view of the range of topics and issues addressed in it, as well as for its comparative approach, which encompasses much of Europe and the Mediterranean world.⁵³

If we size up this impressive amount of research devoted to the question of the relation between city and countryside – a relation that in many respects has played a central role in shaping the history of medieval Italy – we should expect to find a comprehensive overview monograph attempting to give it cohesion. But to this day no one has made any such attempt, embarking on an enterprise like the one that, with much grit but with questionable results, Romolo

⁵² Roberta Mucciarelli, Gabriella Piccinni, and Giuliano Pinto (eds.), *La costruzione del dominio cittadino sulle campagne: Italia centro-settentrionale, secoli XII–XIV*, with a foreword by Giuliano Pinto (Siena, 2009). This conference was the final result of a national research project (PRIN, short for Progetto di ricerca di interesse nazionale) involving six Italian universities. The same project also produced *Contado e città in dialogo*: Luisa Chiappa (ed.), *Mauri Comuni urbani e comunità rurali nella Lombardia medievale* (Milano, 2003). An extensive discussion of the relation between city and countryside in the Lombard area can also be found in an important work by Paolo Grillo, *Milano in età comunale (1183–1276): Istituzioni, società, economia* (Spoleto, 2001).

⁵³ *Città e campagna nei secoli altomedievali*, 2 vols. (Spoleto, 2008). The keynote lecture was delivered by Paolo Cammarosano under the title 'Città e campagna prima del Mille: Un percorso comune', *ibid.*, 1–21.

Caggese undertook at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁴ Therein, perhaps, lies a challenge for historians in the coming generations.

trans. Filippo Valente

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⁵⁴ What we can find are only vignettes, examples being the works by Paolo Cammarosano mentioned at footnote 40 or Giuliano Pinto, 'I rapporti economici tra città e campagna', in Roberto Greci, Giuliano Pinto, and Giacomo Todeschini (eds.), *Economie urbane ed etica economica nell'Italia medievale* (Roma and Bari, 2005), 3–73, conceived as a university textbook.