Emperors of Rome: Italy and the "Roman-German" monarchy, 1308-1452[1]

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This paper seeks to establish what, if anything, the Empire's Italian territories meant for its late-medieval rulers and for other northern adherents of the *Reich*, beyond a tempting, if troublesome, source of ideological and material resources to exploit in pursuit of cisalpine goals. It argues that the tendency, deeply rooted in the older German (and Italian) scholarship, to ignore or disparage the activities of late-medieval emperors in the south, reflected, and has served to perpetuate, misleading views of the nature of the late-medieval Empire itself. It contends that more recent approaches, no longer intent on viewing the *Reich* only as a kind of precocious but ultimately failed German "state", offer the potential for more illuminating insights, not least into the place and the continuing importance of Italy in imperial politics and ideas. And it urges the benefits of going still further, to examine more fully the role of transalpine interactions and exchanges in the shaping of late-medieval imperial political culture.

Keywords: Holy Roman Empire, Italy, historiography, cultural exchange

Writing towards the close of the fourteenth century, the South German chronicler Heinrich von Diessenhofen remarked that "the seat of Empire, which once passed to Rome, afterwards to Constantinople", was now in Prague.2 From early in his reign, the Luxembourg king and emperor Charles IV (r. 1346-1378) had worked tirelessly to develop the principal city of his Bohemian dynastic kingdom as an imperial seat, with striking and apparently deliberate echoes of the city on the Tiber.3 An ambitious programme of urban planning and development not only massively extended Prague physically, but transformed the city and its environs into a complex matrix of interconnecting sites of sacral monarchy and imperial, as well as Bohemian-regnal, memory. The new Constantine (as Charles was remembered) was engaged, it seemed, in an act of Christian-Roman imperial relocation hardly less ambitious than the one associated with his fourth-century exemplar.4 Italy was plundered for sacred treasures to equip a new Christian capital: the head of St Vitus from Pavia, those of St Luke and St Victor from Padua and Feltre, holy blood from Mantua, and much more besides.5 Rome's legendary store of relics was mined particularly deeply.6

1 I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust and to Freie Universität Berlin, Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 2615 (Rethinking Oriental Despotism), with whose generous support I undertook much of the research on which this essay is based.

2 Diessenhoven 1868, p. 116. All translations are by the author.

3 See generally Kubínova 2006.

4 Bauch 2015, p. 79, 160-161, 190-192.

5 Bauch 2007, p. 113; Bauch 2015, p. 229, 248, 260.

6 Bauch 2008, p. 756-757.

Italians had for centuries denounced the rulers of the medieval western Empire as alien (and barbarous) interlopers.7 In the later Middle Ages, however, northerners too appear increasingly to reach a realistic acknowledgement that their *Reich*, whatever else it may have been, was scarcely "Roman" in any geographical sense. The more successful later medieval kings and emperors seem to share a healthy scepticism towards old-style imperial ventures south of the Alps. Charles IV himself was famously quick to dampen Petrarch's over-heated enthusiasm on the matter.8 Several German chroniclers depict the Habsburg *rex Romanorum* Rudolf I (r. 1273-1291) edifying his followers with the fable of the cunning fox that would not go into the mountain which other beasts entered, never to reappear.9 Italy was like the mountain: Few who went there returned without harm to themselves or their *patria*.

The fox and the mountain: northern kings and the allure of the south

The evidently popular late-medieval view of the cautious Habsburg king admittedly loses some of its force when it is noted that Rudolf in fact spent his entire reign attempting, although without success, to organize an expedition to Rome.10 But the underlying premise of the anecdote, that he was a northern monarch with northern perspectives and priorities, surely still stands. All the signs are that Rudolf – the first Habsburg to rule in the Empire – sought imperial coronation above all in the hope of persuading the German princes to allow his son to succeed him on the throne. The same consideration weighed heavily with Charles IV, who, unlike Rudolf, did undergo coronation in Rome and, also unlike Rudolf (and before the late fifteenth century, uniquely for a late-medieval monarch), gained his son's succession in the Empire. The absence of dynastic continuity, and the decisive importance of the German princes in making a late-medieval king of the Romans, helped to ensure that receipt of the imperial crown in Rome, at least in the eyes of its recipient, was an event with inescapable *northern* significance. So it appeared to the new dynasties – Habsburg, Luxembourg, Wittelsbach – whose members competed for the throne between the mid-thirteenth and the mid-fifteenth centuries, and for the trappings of legitimacy that in troubled times promised to strengthen their hold on it. Ventures south of the Alps continued to offer rich cultural capital, which might be spent in the north.

Going south also held out the prospect of riches of a more tangible kind. These seemed particularly attractive to late-medieval monarchs, whose dynastic resources were in some cases distinctly modest,

7 For this image in Italian and German sources, see Scales 2003.

8 Bayley 1942, p. 329. Ironically, Charles's words were probably provided by Petrarch's fellow-Roman revivalist Cola di Rienzo: Seibt 1978, p. 215.

9 Mathias von Neuenburg 1924, p. 548; Closener 1870, p. 56; Twinger 1870/1871, p. 451-452.

10 Redlich 1903, p. 170-202, 385-426, 683-728.

and all of whom were faced with a shrinking body of imperial rights, properties, and incomes in the north.11 What that might mean in concrete terms is suggested by a tax-list for the Lombard towns from 1311, anticipating a total annual yield of 300,000 florins.12 This is around fifteen times as much as the imperial towns in Germany were at that time expected to pay. Converting theoretical obligations into hard cash was another matter, of course, and few late-medieval kings and emperors departed Italy richer than they had arrived. A graphic although extreme example is provided by Rupert of the Palatinate (r. 1400-1410), whose ill-judged Italian venture of 1401-1402 left his German backers badly out of pocket and the king himself in such dire financial straits as to inspire mockery in popular rhymes.13 Nevertheless, the allure of resources to strengthen their hand at home was strong for the Empire's late-medieval rulers, and such hopes were not always misplaced. It was partly in recognition of Charles IV's rich takings, not least from his native Florence, that Matteo Villani mocked him, during his 1354-1355 expedition, as presenting the appearance not of an emperor but "a merchant hurrying to the next fair".14

The present paper seeks to establish what, if anything, the Empire's Italian territories meant for its late-medieval rulers and those around them, beyond a tempting, if troublesome, source of ideological and material resources to exploit, when opportunity arose, in pursuit of cisalpine goals. It argues that the tendency, deeply rooted in the older German (and Italian) scholarship, to ignore or disparage the activities of late-medieval emperors in the south, reflected, and has served to perpetuate, misleading views of the nature of the late-medieval Empire itself. It contends that more recent approaches, no longer intent on viewing the *Reich* only as a kind of precocious but ultimately failed German "state", offer the potential for more illuminating insights, not least, into the place and the continuing importance of Italy in imperial politics and ideas.15 And it urges the benefits of going still further, to examine more fully the role of transalpine interactions and exchanges in the shaping of late-medieval imperial political culture.

Any attempt at a reconsideration of the subject must, however, face the fact that, on almost any statistical measure, Italy mattered far less to late-medieval kings and emperors "of the Romans" than it had to their high-medieval forebears. Between 962 and Frederick Barbarossa's death in 1190, the Empire's rulers undertook twenty-seven expeditions into Italy, amounting to some fifty years

11 Krieger 1992, p. 34.

12 Thomas 1993, p. 122-123.

13 Schubert 1987, p. 178-180; Isenmann 1999, p. 257.

14 Villani 1858, p. 139; and see Pauler 1996a, p. 196, 202; Widder 2016, p. 232.

15 For some recent developments, see Dartmann – Jörg 2014b, p. 8-12. An important harbinger of changing perspectives was Trautz 1963.

altogether, or roughly a quarter of the total length of their reigns.16 Between 1254 and 1410, by contrast, kings and emperors spent in total less than nine years south of the Alps, or not much more than five per cent of their aggregated time on the throne. Barbarossa, who spent thirty-four per cent of his reign in the south, easily overshadows Charles IV, one of the most venturesome late-medieval emperors, with well under ten per cent.17 From 962 to 1190, all but one of the Empire's rulers had entered Italy and been crowned in Rome by the pope – and the sole exception, the Hohenstaufen Konrad III, was preparing to set off south at the time of his death. But of the thirteen monarchs who can realistically be said to have ruled during the roughly equivalent period, between Konrad IV's death in 1254 and that of the Habsburg Frederick III in 1493, only six entered Italy, of whom five secured a coronation in Rome. The last ruler of the Empire to leave his bones in Italy was Henry VII, in 1313. This is in contrast to the seven Hohenstaufen monarchs who ruled the Empire, between 1138 and 1254, the remains of five of whom lie at locations south of the Alps and close to the Mediterranean. And no late-medieval emperor would develop a programme for ruling the Empire *from* Italy in the manner of an Otto III in the tenth century or a Frederick II in the thirteenth.18

Against such facts must, however, be set the belief, asserted throughout the late Middle Ages by natives of the Empire's cisalpine lands, when they reflected or pronounced on the matter, that Italy was and must remain a core, constitutive element of the *Reich*. Plans for the Empire's reform emphasized the importance of safeguarding and recouping its southern territories. For the Cologne canon and imperialist treatise-writer Alexander von Roes, writing in the 1280s in the entourage of a Roman cardinal, the welfare of the Church required that its four "walls" – namely the four principal sites of the Empire: Rome, Milan, Aachen, and Arles – be preserved intact.19 A century later, another German polemicist with knowledge of the south, Dietrich von Niem, was even more outspoken in defending the emperor's Italian lordship and denouncing what he saw as its recent erosion.20 Indeed, the indispensability of Italy to the *Reich* was a recurrent theme in fifteenth-century German treatise literature.21 As late as 1495, Hans von Hermansgrün, in a dream-vision of reform composed for the

16 Fuhrmann 1994, p. 348.

17 For Barbarossa, Brühl 1968, p. 583, Voltmer 1995, p. 21; for Charles IV, Widder 1993, p. 358.

18 Had he reigned for longer, Henry VII may have sought to do so, but the shortness of his time in the south precludes definite judgements.

19 Alexander von Roes 1958, p. 127, cap. 25.

20 Dietrich von Nieheim 1956, p. 16; Heimpel 1932, p. 61-62.

21 Märtl 1996, p. 102.

Worms *Reichstag*, could still conjure up a spectral Frederick Barbarossa, manifesting himself in Magdeburg cathedral to urge his imperial successors to reconquer Italy militarily.22

Such concerns were not limited to high-minded tracts. Even the generally well-remembered Rudolf I was censured by a German chronicler, looking back from the fourteenth century, for ceding the Romagna to the papacy: that had been "to the grave harm of the Empire".23 The grant, in return for large payments, of a ducal title to the Milanese *signore* Giangaleazzo Visconti by Charles IV's son and successor Wenceslas (r. 1376-1400) was high on the list of charges drawn up by the German princes, justifying his deposition.24 Only towards the close of the fifteenth century did opinions start to be voiced in some circles, contrasting "German" political interests with those of the Habsburgs south of the Alps.25

Bounded by the Alps: German historians and the late-medieval imperial monarchy

The conviction, repeatedly expressed by late-medieval German commentators on the Empire, that Italy was fundamental to its nature and understanding, has not, however, always been shared by its modern students. Even the form of reference to the Empire's medieval rulers still widely employed in German scholarship – as "Roman-German" kings and emperors – signals an adaption of medieval titles to modern perspectives and priorities. In their own Latin documents, the Empire's late-medieval rulers invariably styled themselves *Dei gratia Romanorum rex* (prior to Rome coronation) or *imperator* (thereafter). Dynastic titles might then follow, but never any reference to "Germany" or its people.26 Vernacular documentary forms were direct translations from the Latin.

With the development of historical scholarship in nineteenth-century Germany, however, attention turned particularly to evaluating the legacy of the medieval Empire for modern Germans and to assessing its strengths and weaknesses as a template for contemporary German state-making. Opinion polarized between *großdeutsch* and *kleindeutsch* schools, reflecting rival (pro-Austrian and pro-Prussian) programmes for contemporary German politics, underpinned by competing – laudatory and condemnatory – judgments on the involvement of medieval emperors in Italy.27 After 1871, the two

22 Märtl 1996, p. 103; for Hermansgrün, see Honemann 1981. Hermansgrün confuses or conflates Barbarossa with his grandson, Frederick II.

23 Matthias von Neuenburg 1924, p. 37.

24 *Reichstagsakten* 1877, p. 255-256; Thomas 1983, p. 330-339.

25 Whaley 2012, p. 53-54.

26 Schwarz 2003; Scales 2012, p. 210.

27 For the debate, see Schneider 1943.

viewpoints were partially, though never wholly, reconciled in a German-nationalist vision of the *Reich*, which celebrated the deeds of its medieval rulers when (but only when) they could be portrayed as projecting German power and – in a colonial age – subjecting weaker neighbours to their rule.28

The concentration of German scholarship on the Empire thus fell overwhelmingly upon the central Middle Ages, and particularly on the Hohenstaufen era, when images of imperial military endeavour and conquest south of the Alps seemed most richly abundant.29 The deeds of late-medieval kings and emperors in Italy, by contrast, were largely neglected – as were the later Middle Ages generally, with their unappealing connotations of German political fragmentation, and imperial weakness.30 Once established, the high-medieval focus in studies of emperors in the south proved tenacious, long outlasting the discrediting and abandonment of German-nationalist interpretations of the Empire after the Second World War. Even in recent scholarship, which has begun to redress the imbalance, attention has fallen most heavily upon the Italian campaign of Henry VII (r. 1308-1313), the late-medieval emperor whose ideals and actions in the south seem most closely to resemble those of his Staufer forebears.31

The tenacious, although transformed, pull of traditional historiographical concerns goes far to explain why the remarkable and fruitful efflorescence of studies of the late-medieval *Reich* in the closing decades of the twentieth century found so little space for Italy. The work of Peter Moraw, although bringing a new understanding of the nature of the late-medieval imperial monarchy, including its spatial frame of action, focused entirely on the Empire's cisalpine territories. Moraw's celebrated "zonal" model, classifying the *Reich* as a series of regions, in terms of their changing relationship with the monarch and his court – regions "close to the king", "open to the king", "remote from the king", and so on – paid regard to parts of Germany that in the late Middle Ages never saw the monarch at all, but ignored the lands south of the Alps, that saw him at least occasionally.32 Moraw's still-influential scheme found space for towns such as Bremen, Braunschweig, or Vienna, which for much of the late Middle Ages lay entirely outside the king-emperor's itinerary, but not for such centres as Milan, Pisa, or Siena (or indeed Rome itself), which hosted irregular but sometimes lengthy imperial stays. The comparisons and contrasts that Moraw chose to draw, between the northern lands of the late-medieval *Reich* and the relatively centralized kingdoms of England and France, disclose a familiar desire, to

28 For this viewpoint, often referred to as "Ghibelline", see Speth 2000, p. 231-232; Thomsen 2005, part III.

29 See Dartmann and Jörg 2014, p. 4-5.

30 Charles IV is unusual in that his Italian expeditions were the subject of detailed older monographs: Werunsky 1878; Pirchan 1930.

31 Widder 2008a; Heidemann 2008; Penth and Thorau 2016. Among older studies, see Schneider 1940, Bowsky 1960, Cognasso 1973.

32 A point already made by Trautz 1963, p. 53. Moraw's scheme is summarized in Moraw 1985a, p. 175; see Scales 2012, p. 82.

identify the character and limits of pre-modern German "state-making". His study of the Luxembourg proto-capital of Prague, which located the city within various interpersonal networks in the Germanophone north, was silent about the ties linking it to regions and centres beyond the Alps.33 The important case which Moraw made, for continuities between the high- and late-medieval imperial monarchy, likewise focused on the north.34

An age of opportunity: emperors in late-medieval Italy

Only recently has a growth of interest in transalpine connections, interactions, and exchanges begun to offer the prospect of a more nuanced picture, more informed by late-medieval perspectives.35 For the imperial monarchy itself, such a development is long overdue.36 None of its late-medieval bearers about whom we know enough to form a judgment showed themselves uninterested in Italy. Ludwig the Bavarian (r. 1314-1347) remained determined, throughout protracted peace negotiations with the papacy, not to accept exclusion from the peninsula as the price of a settlement.37 Even for those post-Staufer monarchs who did not undertake an expedition, there is often considerable evidence of planning and preparation, which sometimes reached an advanced stage. The protracted efforts of Rudolf I in the matter have already been noted; Wenceslas, too, made detailed although fruitless plans for a journey south.38 All rulers, except for the most short-lived of late-medieval anti-kings, maintained contacts with Italy and sent representatives there. After the start of the fourteenth century, moreover, the protracted period of their absence ends. Of the seven monarchs with reigns of substantial length between 1308 and the mid-fifteenth century, six undertook expeditions to Italy. Three went there more than once.

This period, in which the Empire's rulers were periodically active in the south, before the stabilization of the political map of the peninsula in the mid-fifteenth century, had distinctive characteristics, not all unfavourable to imperial ventures. For several decades in the fourteenth century, the Empire's rulers entered an Italy from which their traditional partner and contestant, the pope, was absent. Even after the papacy's return to Rome, the pope's position long remained weak and contested. The result of this was to open up for a time a potentially broader stage for imperial actions, ideological as well as material, in Italy. What was achievable, at least temporarily, is illustrated by Ludwig the Bavarian's spectacular

33 Moraw 1980b.

34 Moraw 1972.

35 For key works, see Dartmann and Jörg 2014b, p. 7-8.

36 Though continuities across the Middle Ages were emphasized by Voltmer 1995, p. 19.

37 Offler 1956, p. 25-26.

38 Favreau-Lilie 2001, p. 335-336.

public staging of his emperorship, aided by Marsilius of Padua, in Rome in April 1328.39 The brief, dramatic ascendancy of the tribune Cola di Rienzo in the city further demonstrated both the potential opportunities and the accompanying risks in a time of flux.40 Ludwig's successor in the Empire, the talented diplomat Charles IV, was able to exploit the shifting political constellations in Italy to put pressure on the absent Innocent VI to assent to his imperial coronation.41 Charles's skilful staging of his own entry into Rome in October 1368 – praised even by Coluccio Salutati, who took a hard-headed Florentine view of the imperial monarchy – and his reception of Urban V there two days later, suggests a monarch at least as attuned to the world of Roman political theatre as was his papal counterpart.42

There is no doubt that, on the whole, late-medieval Roman kings and emperors found themselves compelled to move on a narrower, more bounded and more densely crowded, political chessboard in the south than had their forebears between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. But the fragmented, contested, and shifting political landscapes of northern and central Italy, which now rendered any expedition by a king of the Romans such a perilous and uncertain venture, also helped to make such a project feasible at all.

The skills required to negotiate the treacherous political topography of imperial Italy were not very different from those that the Empire's rulers were accustomed to employ north of the Alps. Both north and south, rule was primarily personal, itinerant, and face-to-face. Here as there, it demanded of the ruler and those around him quick wits, local knowledge, and an ability to respond swiftly and flexibly to situations as they arose. In Italy, even more than in the late-medieval north, the setting for negotiating and enacting imperial authority was urban, concentrated in public spaces and buildings, which constituted the sites of local political legitimacy: city gates, piazzas, communal palaces, major churches.43 And in Italy, too, as recent studies have shown in detail, imperial authority was negotiated, conceptualized, and given expression, particularly via ritualized public performances:44 ceremonial entries, assemblies, judicial tribunals, banquets and festivals; and through actions by the monarch himself, such as ennoblements, knightings, and the pardoning of prisoners, which gave his lordship

39 Thomas 1993, p. 206-210; Godthardt 2009; Schwarz 2014, p. 130-138.

40 See generally Collins 2002 and also the contribution of Anna Modigliani in this volume.

41 Pauler 1996a, p. 192-193; and with more detail, Pauler 1996b, ch. 5. For Charles as diplomat, Kintzinger 2016, p. 402.

42 Bauch 2008, p. 760-764. For Coluccio's changeable and at times lukewarm views on the Empire, see Lee 2018, esp. p. 169-176.

43 Widder 2008b; Widder 2016, p. 252.

44 For this approach: Schenk 1996; Favreau-Lilie 1997, esp. p. 215-219; Schenk 2006; Dartmann 2006.

visible public form.45 Such situations favoured the ruler who understood how to read the local signs, to master the symbolic topography of his urban surroundings (or recollect it from previous visits), and to manipulate these to his advantage.

Some late-medieval monarchs proved to be remarkably good at this. When Charles IV entered Lucca in September 1368, attempts appear to have been made, originating with the city's Pisan governor, to suppress public acclamations and to conduct the emperor and his entourage directly to their accommodation.46 There was to be no opportunity for Charles to visit the cathedral, in traditional fashion, and to venerate the *Volto Santo*, an image of the crucified Christ closely tied to Lucchese civic identity. The emperor reportedly realized what was going on while processing through town, and immediately commanded the procession to halt, to turn around, and to make for the cathedral – as was duly done, now with loud acclamations. Pisan fears about Charles's intentions towards Lucca proved well-founded: shortly after his visit, he raised the commune to the status of an imperial city, guaranteeing Lucca's independence.47 The Lucchese duly responded by striking coins with the emperor's portrait on one face and the *Volto Santo* on the other.48

Encounters (i): knowledge of Italy

The barrier of the Alps became, metaphorically, somewhat lower in the late Middle Ages, as contacts and exchanges between the Empire's northern and southern lands multiplied across several different spheres. The large number of German knights and nobles present in late-medieval Italy, selling their military services to the regional powers, represented a valuable source of local intelligence, as well as additional muscle, for kings and emperors on campaign in the south.49 Some welcomed particularly the opportunity to serve in the Empire's name.50 Their knowledge of the Italian scene remained useful even when they returned north: Wenceslas, for example, appointed to his council the Swabian nobleman Lutz von Landau, a seasoned campaigner in the south, to advise him in planning his own expedition to Rome.51 The towns of southern Germany were also increasingly closely bound to northern Italy by trade

45 Schenk 2006, p. 179.

46 For what follows, see Bauch, 2007, p. 126-132; Bauch 2015, p. 110-117. For Charles's manipulation to his advantage of the entry of Cardinal Pierre de Colombiers into Pisa in March 1355, see Bauch 2007, p. 117-118.

47 Favreau-Lilie 1999, p. 910.

48 Bauch 2007, p. 132.

49 See generally Selzer 2001.

50 Selzer 2001, p. 165-169.

51 Favreau-Lilie 2001, p. 335.

during this period.52 Contacts and exchanges between Nuremberg, one of the monarch's most frequent places of stay in the fourteenth century, and Venice, if not always cordial, were particularly close. The leading families of merchant-financiers in Nuremberg and other South German centres maintained close ties to the imperial court, which benefited from their store of news and information, as well as from their credit facilities and contacts in the south.53 It is a reflection of these mercantile links, to the court and beyond the Alps, that Rupert of the Palatinate was able to tap South German as well as Tuscan finance for his brief and ill-fated Italian expedition.54

No less important than the multiplying German contacts with the south were the growing numbers of Italians coming north. This was partly in response to a burgeoning demand for skills and expertise, as princely as well as urban centres grew in size and sophistication. Natives of the Tuscan cities, particularly monetary specialists, are found close to the kings of silver-rich Bohemia already in the late thirteenth century.55 Wealthy Ghibelline exiles advised Henry VII on his projected Italian expedition and went south with him.56 The presence of Italians at court was boosted by the passage of the Bohemian crown to the Luxembourg dynasty and by the development, after 1346, of Prague as an imperial metropolis. Charles IV's physicians and apothecaries included natives of Venice and Modena. One of them, Angelus of Florence, evidently enjoyed the emperor's special trust, and attained the status of a *familiaris* and Lateran count-palatine, as well as perhaps becoming a citizen of Prague.57 Charles's court chronicler and a royal councillor was the much-travelled Florentine friar Giovanni de' Marignolli.58

The projection of a Luxembourg dynastic presence into north-eastern Italy helps to account for the keen awareness of, and engagement with, the region's political geography – characteristic particularly of rulers from that family. Charles IV acted tenaciously to protect and extend his dynastic properties on the southern slopes of the Dolomites, while his successful installation of his half-brother Nicholas, in 1354, as patriarch of Aquileia, an ecclesiastical principality of wide territorial extent, further eased his own access to Italy.59 The kingdom of Hungary, held from 1387 by Charles's son Sigismund, another future Roman king and emperor (r. 1410/1411-1437), laid claim to coastal properties in Dalmatia,

52 See generally Fuhrmann 2016.

53 Stromer 1978; for merchants as information sources, see Moraw 1980a, p. 162; for the court as a centre of communication, see Eisenzimmer 2014.

54 Stromer 1971.

55 Beinhoff 1995, p. 36; for Italian bankers in the north, see generally Reichert 2003.

56 Bowsky 1960, p. 26; Widder 2016, p. 229-230.

57 *Constitutiones* 2017, no. 748, p. 672-673; Beinhoff 1995, p. 37 with n. 141.

58 Baumgartner 1993.

59 Widder 1993, p. 360.

guaranteeing close if often hostile contacts with the main regional competitor, Venice. The commander of Sigismund's forces against the maritime republic was the distinguished Florentine soldier Filippo Scolari (Pippo Spano), whom the king ennobled as count of Temesvár.60 By the late fourteenth century, Italian families were present in Buda, engaged in trade, banking, and exploiting the kingdom's mineral resources on behalf of the crown.61 Italians formed an especially dominant group at the remarkable polyglot court that Sigismund maintained following his election to the Empire, and some played major diplomatic roles during his expedition to Rome from 1431 to 1433.62 The Luxembourgs' successors on the imperial throne, the Habsburgs, with their patrimony in the far south-east of the Empire's German lands, displayed a similar alertness to the political landscape of north-east Italy.63

The fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were especially rich in the kinds of contact that allowed emperors and their followers to accumulate essential political knowledge about Italy – and Italians to gain knowledge of the imperial court and how to deal with it. First, there was the fund of memory and experience available to the kings and emperors themselves. Despite the elective character of the late-medieval Empire, and the consequent appearance (and, for a time, reality) of discontinuity on the throne, its history between the early fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth century was largely dominated by the Luxembourg dynasty. Luxembourg kings and emperors occupied the throne for eighty-six of the hundred and twenty years after Henry VII's accession in 1308. Not only Charles IV's grandfather, Henry, but also his father, King John of Bohemia, had undertaken an expedition in the south.64 Of his sons and successors in the Empire, Sigismund went repeatedly to Italy, while Wenceslas was only thwarted by circumstances. Henry VII's brother, Archbishop Balduin of Trier, who had fought his way into Rome alongside the emperor, lived on until 1354 and was a significant influence on Charles.65

A comparison of the ventures of the earlier and later Luxembourg monarchs in the south makes clear that lessons were learned. Henry VII's expedition was dogged by misjudgments, reflecting the king's lack of local knowledge and understanding of Italian political culture and practice, and his consequent over-reliance on the self-interested advice of the exiles who thronged to his court.66 Henry's grandson, by contrast, was able to reflect in detail in his autobiography upon his own youthful experiences in the

60 See Prajda 2010.

61 Beinhoff 1995, p. 34-36; for Buda as a seat of rule, see Elbel 2016, p. 291-293.

62 Proske 2018, ch. 2.

63 Koller 2005, p. 120, 126.

64 For John, see Goez 1978, p. 213-214.

65 Seibt 1985, p. 92-93.

66 Bowsky 1960, p. 67-68.

south while participating in his father's ill-fated military ventures in the early 1330s.67 He made clear the formative importance of his time in Italy for his own elevated conception of monarchy. Not only Charles's words but the cautious conduct of his campaigns, attests to the lasting impact on him of the lessons of his youth.68 Paternal guidance doubtless explains at least in part the deeper grasp of Italian affairs displayed by Sigismund, and to some degree even by Wenceslas.69

Of fundamental importance to imperial engagements with Italy is the already noted development of Prague: after 1346, for more than half a century, the Empire possessed, for the first time in its history, an urban centre with many of the characteristics of a capital.70 The city, along with local, associated sites such as the castle of Karlstein, developed quickly after mid-century as a centre for the projection of imperial doctrine and imagery, a base for court and administration, and a focus for the exchange of news and information. If the development of Prague did indeed, as Heinrich von Diessenhofen claimed, represent the symbolic foundation of a new, northern Rome, it marked no breach with the old one but was in many ways an indication of, and stimulus to, the ramification of transalpine links. Prague occupied a nodal position within Charles IV's ambitious plans to redirect Venice's trade with northern Europe eastwards, through the Luxembourg dynastic lands.71 The *Verdichtung* – the "thickening" of ties of all kinds – that Peter Moraw thought so characteristic of the late-medieval *Reich*, was not confined to its northern territories.72 Charles's new university foundation was visited by men of learning, particularly lawyers, from the south. Uberto da Lampugnano, professor of law at Pavia and Visconti envoy to Wenceslas's court, lectured there during his stay in 1385, offering legal judgments favourable to Wenceslas on the Empire's extent and on the constitutional powers of the king of the Romans.73

Encounters (ii): diplomacy

The concentration of governmental expertise in the new imperial metropolis was reflected particularly in the growth of the chancery.74 Although its personnel was drawn heavily from the Empire's northern

67 *Autobiographie* 2016, esp. cap. 4-8; Seibt 1978, p. 121-124.

68 Goez 1978, p. 214.

69 A list of imperial properties in Tuscany, compiled in 1376/1377, was appended to Wenceslas's luxurious copy of the Golden Bull: Favreau-Lilie 2001, p. 317.

70 Elbel 2016, p. 285-291.

71 Erkens 2017, p. 97-98.

72 For this concept, Moraw 1985a, p. 21-25.

73 Ott 1913, p. 95-96; Favreau-Lilie 2001, p. 323.

74 Moraw 1985b.

territories, and particularly from the Luxembourgs' dynastic lands, Italians served too.75 It was from the chancery, as well as from among the ruler's closest councillors, that the envoys were drawn who were sent to Italy on the monarch's behalf. These, too, were mostly northerners – Germans, Bohemians, and Silesians – although Italians are also found.76 Some went repeatedly, travelled widely in the south, and came to know Italy well. One such figure is Lamprecht von Brunn, bishop of Bamberg and an important member of Wenceslas's court. In 1381, for example, Lamprecht is found travelling to Prague in company with envoys from the town of Lucca, with whose government he would subsequently remain in contact.77 The presence at court of nobles and prelates with experience of the south was nothing new: Even the kings of the late thirteenth century, who never set foot beyond the Alps, were able to turn to such advisors. What is striking in the later Middle Ages is rather a new *concentration* of expertise, as settled court centres developed and diplomatic exchanges intensified. This was accompanied by the growing importance of university-trained advisors at court. Although not all such figures had spent time in Italy, the most glittering careers were reserved for men with higher degrees in law from Bologna or, later, Padua.78

These circumstances also favoured an intensification of northward traffic over the Alps. The mostly impermanent titles held by the North Italian powers – typically, vicariates, which needed to be renewed with changes of ruler or regime, or in order to legitimize new territorial gains – necessitated frequent contacts with the court. Other political affairs also brought diplomats north.79 The often lengthy stays while conducting business gave Italian envoys time to become acquainted with developments and personalities, and to pick up news and rumour – and for those close to the monarch to glean information from them. Their reports, admittedly, do not always convey a flattering picture. A notorious case is the account sent by Bonifacio dei Coppi, doctor of both laws, to his Gonzaga masters in Mantua, of several disagreeable weeks spent in and around Prague in the spring of 1383.80 Bonifacio, whose mission was to secure confirmation of the Gonzaga vicariate, harped on the uncomfortable conditions of his stay, the boorishness of the king's attendants, the difficulty of gaining access to Wenceslas, and the unsatisfactory outcome when he finally attained it. Everyone expected to be paid, and the king himself

75 For Italian notaries under Charles IV, see Beinhoff 1995, p. 38.

76 Surveyed in Pichiorri 2009.

77 Favreau-Lilie 2001, p. 330-331. For Lamprecht's career, see Flachenecker – Rapp 2001.

78 Moraw 1969, p. 508-509.

79 For Florentine diplomatic involvement in the deposition of Wenceslas and the election of Ruprecht of the Palatinate, see Trautz 1963, p. 72-73.

80 Knott 1898/1899; Favreau-Lilie 2001, p. 324-327.

was greedy for expensive gifts of weapons.81 Yet, despite the envoy's efforts to paint a picture of barbarous uncouthness, his real problem was clearly to have come up against shrewd and experienced negotiators, determined to maximize their royal master's (and their own) gains from a rich supplicant. This impression is confirmed by Bonifacio's mention of other envoys from the south, including those of the duke of Milan, who were likewise enduring protracted and uncertain stays in Prague while pursuing their lords' business.82 Dealing with the imperial court was not easy or cheap; but, as the Mantuan envoy explained, there was a good prospect of success if the right people were approached (and rewarded).83 Fundamentally, it was a matter of intelligence.

When the king was present in the south, exchanges were still more intensive. The complex diplomatic dealings of Sigismund's court with the powers of northern and central Italy during his expedition to Rome highlight the sophisticated nature of imperial as well as Italian diplomacy by the fifteenth century.84 That northern Italy was itself an intensely interconnected world ensured that news from beyond the Alps, including information and rumour about the monarch's intentions, was widely shared, rapidly disseminated, and quickly acted upon. The intimacy of the exchanges that could occur, as well as the varied channels by which report of them might cross the Alps, is illustrated by the case of the Lucchese exile Guido Passuta.85 Although resident in Prague, Passuta maintained contact with the ruling *Anziani* in his home city, to which he hoped to be permitted to return. It was in the course of this correspondence that he recounted a conversation he had had with Charles IV himself, concerning one of the many saints' relics that the emperor had brought north from Italy, while Guido was riding with imperial forces in eastern Germany.

That Charles was able to converse with the Tuscan exile is a reminder of the formidable linguistic powers of the later Luxembourg kings and emperors.86 Charles's own command of multiple languages was

81 Wenceslas's preferences in the matter of diplomatic gifts were the subject of recurrent speculation and concern among North Italian visitors to his court. Cristoforo de Valle, while travelling south in Wenceslas's service in August 1390, wrote from Trento to Francesco Gonzaga with news from Prague. Cristoforo advised Gonzaga that if he wished to win Wenceslas's favour he should give him, among other things "a large and splendid dog, fierce towards persons [*unum canem magnum et pulchrum, ferocem contra personas*], as this would especially please the emperor": Schmidt 2018, p. 26.

82 Knott 1898/1899, p. 343.

83 *Ibid*.

84 Proske 2018, ch. 2. The fullest narrative of Sigismund's expedition remains Aschbach 1845, chs. 3-5.

85 For what follows, see Favreau-Lilie 1999.

86 See generally Schlotheuber 2016. The Francophone Henry VII, by contrast, had faced communications difficulties in the south: Bowsky, 1960, p. 88.

proverbial, and a matter of proud record in his autobiography.87 Among the several tongues that, according to the Golden Bull of 1356, the sons of the four temporal electors – including the kings of Bohemia – were required to learn was Italian.88 In the case of Sigismund, it seems likely that the humanist Niccolò Beccari, who was close to Charles IV and another intermediary between his court and northern Italy, was appointed as his tutor.89 At any rate, Sigismund's linguistic education was evidently a success: His language skills were the equal of his father's and proved to be a clear advantage in his dealings with his Italian subjects.90

Warlords, pilgrims, and dynasts: changing faces of imperial monarchy in Italy

An old-established and seemingly incontestable view of the late-medieval imperial monarchy's involvement in Italy is that it had a fundamentally different character from previous centuries. That, indeed, in an earlier, bellicose tradition of German scholarship was precisely why it could be dismissed. For Friedrich Baethgen, writing in 1942, late-medieval ventures in the south amounted to "an ever more wretched charade".91 Fourteenth-century monarchs "no longer exercised true lordship" (*Herrschaft*) in Italy.92 Recent studies have tended to reaffirm this view, but with a more positive valuation, for a more pacific age. Imperial ventures in the south were marked by a shift "from battle-cries to dance-music" during the late Middle Ages.93 The bloody slaughter of old gave way to more civil interactions between the monarchs and their southern subjects; from a high-medieval scene dominated by armed and armoured men, we pass to more convivial images, in which women too figure prominently.94 How much actually changed between the first post-Staufer intervention in the south, at the start of the fourteenth century, and the establishment of the Habsburgs on the imperial throne in the mid-fifteenth?

87 *Autobiographie* 2016, p. 148, cap. 8: *Ex divina autem gracia non solum Boemicum, sed Gallicum, Lombardicum, Teutonicum et Latinum ita loqui, scribere et legere scivimus, ut una lingua istarum sicut altera ad scribendum, legendum loquendum et intelligendum nobis erat apta*.

88 *Goldene Bulle* 1972, p. 90, cap. 31.

89 See Benati 1986.

90 Proske 2018, p. 2-3.

91 Baethgen 1960, p. 22 (reprinted).

92 Brühl 1968, p. 584.

93 Favreau-Lilie 1997.

94 Favreau-Lilie 1997, p. 215.

There is no doubt that the military aspect of imperial expeditions became less important over this period. Henry VII's campaign, with its protracted sieges, street battles for control of Rome, and high casualty figures, was to have no successor.95 The memorable illustrations in the *Codex Balduini*, of armies bristling with banners, rebel towers toppling, the monarch sitting in stern judgment, and the archbishop himself splitting enemy skulls with a sword, already belonged to the past at the time of their making.96 Late-medieval kings, faced with shrinking resources from the *Reich* and with northern subjects increasingly unwilling to serve them in arms, were more modestly accompanied on their journeys south.97 The roughly 5,000 men whom it is thought Henry VII took with him – a figure comparable with high-medieval expeditions – can be contrasted with Sigismund's retinue 120 years later, estimated at around a fifth of that number.98 The imperial princes and great nobles who had gone south with high-medieval armies, and a handful of whom still accompanied Henry, were less often to be found on later expeditions.99 The few who did attend were apt to turn around and go home prematurely. The force with which Sigismund entered Italy in November 1431, such as it was, was drawn mainly from his Hungarian kingdom. The contrast with the sanguinary glories of times past was not lost on contemporaries. The author of the *Klingenberger Chronicle* remarked of Sigismund:

> This king did not come to Rome in force, as is proper for a Roman king and future emperor and as law and ancient custom dictate, but he came like a pilgrim, because he had no armed might and only a modest retinue, since no-one of importance accompanied him to Rome, but only his courtiers and a handful of Hungarians.100

Little more than forty years after Henry VII's heroic, if costly, entry into Rome and lengthy stay there, his grandson Charles IV would agree terms with the pope requiring him to vacate the city by the close of his coronation day, 5 April 1355. Charles was forced literally to put on pilgrim's garb, and move across Rome incognito, in order to win himself a few extra days.101 If contemporary comments on the

95 Bowsky 1960, p. 166. See now Görich 2016.

96 *Weg zur Kaiserkrone* 2009; Görich 2004.

97 Jörg 2014; and for the broader picture, Favreau-Lilie 1998.

98 Bowsky 1960, p. 55; Schneidmüller 2006, p. 90; Proske 2018, p. 83-85.

99 Pauler 1996a, p. 56.

100 *Klingenberger Chronik* 1861, p. 206: "Item diser küng zoch nütt mitt gewalt gen rom, als ainen Römschen küng vnd künftigen kaiser zugehört und von recht vnd alter gewonhait tun solt, denn er zoch als ain bilgry, won er hatt kain macht vnd klain volk, won im dienett kain namhaffter her gan Rom, denn allain sin hoffgesind und ettwa manger Unger".

101 Bauch 2008, p. 755-758. For late-medieval expeditions as pilgrimages, see Trautz 1963, p. 49-50.

emperor's actions were more mixed than the scathing judgments of nineteenth-century historians, the contrast with earlier times was nevertheless inescapable.102

Partly effect, partly cause of these numerically depleted late-medieval expeditions was a change in their objectives, and in their conduct in the south. Already during Henry VII's campaign, it became clear that the Empire's ruler, during his inevitably limited time in Italy, had little hope of effecting lasting change to local political institutions or power structures. The imposition of direct rule therefore quickly gave way to a practice of granting titles, particularly imperial vicariates, legitimizing the *de facto* power already exercised by *signori* and communal regimes.103 After mid-century, the emperor seldom acted to challenge the local or regional status quo in the south, and never with the use of military force.

Smaller and less warlike expeditions now also reflected, just as they helped to foster, less troubled relations with the papacy. Although difficulties between the two powers continued to precede and to accompany most imperial ventures in the south, no emperor after Ludwig the Bavarian was denounced as an enemy of the Church and made the subject of papally-backed military action. For this reason, too, reaching Rome became less dependent upon a capacity and readiness to fight.

These circumstances allowed forms of imperial behaviour to find expression that contrasted strongly with the warrior ethos of old. An example of this is Sigismund's famous, and carefully-calculated and politically effective, affability, directed towards women and men of varied social standing in the towns through which he passed.104 Previously-unaccustomed elements could now be incorporated in the traditional journey south, such as the meeting of Frederick III (r. 1440-1493) with his future bride, Eleanor of Portugal, in Siena in February 1452, and their marriage in Rome by Pope Nicholas V a few weeks later.105 If imperial armies in the south were now smaller, the crowds which assembled for important ceremonial moments, such as the monarch's entry into Rome, could still swell to impressive size.106 For the first time in around three centuries, Roman kings and emperors could now enter their titular city in magnificent and peaceful state, amid cheering throngs, and not under a hail of oaths and

102 Gregorovius wrote of Charles's "ignominious promise" (*schimpflichen Gelobnis*) to leave Rome on his coronation day, the "dishonoured crown" (*entwürdigte Krone*) that he thus received, and his "wholly un-emperor-like demeanour" (*ganz unkaiserlichen Auftreten*): Gregorovius 1978, p. 747. Martin Bauch points out, however, that contemporary criticisms of Charles's behaviour in Italy do not relate to his time in Rome but to incidents on the return journey: Bauch 2015, p. 148.

103 Favreau-Lilie 2000.

104 Favreau-Lilie 1997, p. 229-230; Proske 2018, p. 224-227.

105 Koller 2005, p. 123-124; Quirin 1958.

106 For the elaborate welcome accorded to Frederick III for his entry into Rome in March 1452, and for the large numbers involved (with those accompanying the king into the city perhaps numbering 6,000), see Hack 1999, esp. p. 122.

arrows.107 It was this new mood that allowed fifteenth-century Rome to become such a fertile site for the ritualization of the monarch's presence and the invention of imperial tradition.108 Only the lingering shades of an earlier scholarly age, in which the doomed, sanguinary ventures of high-medieval emperors in the south appeared more admirable, because more "heroic", can explain why historians have until fairly recently felt the need to defend such developments against the stigma of "decline".109

Mit des adlers streiffen: Italy as a continuing source of legitimacy and prestige

Yet how far northern understandings of the journey over the Alps, and of imperial lordship in Italy, changed over the period, in line with these changes in the style and scale of the action, should not be overstated. The aura of chivalric adventure and martial endeavour, so well captured in accounts of Henry VII's expedition, seem to have remained alive for those who accompanied later monarchs.110 The grizzled old campaigner Oswald von Wolkenstein (d. 1445) proudly listed among his many deeds his presence in Lombardy (and elsewhere) "with two kings' armies": Ruprecht of the Palatinate's (r. 1400-1410) and Sigismund's, "paid mit des adlers streiffen".111 The military aura of Italian expeditions remained prominent well into the fifteenth century, particularly at ritual high-points on the journey. According to one account, when Frederick III entered Rome in 1452 it was commanded that "all those who accompanied the king of the Romans to Rome were to wear full armour, as if ready for battle".112 Mass-knightings by the newly-crowned emperor became an acknowledged feature of his presence in the city, and attained a special cachet.113 And if levels of violence were now much lower, the prospect that the emperor's companions in the south might be compelled to draw their swords remained real.

If imperial lordship in the south was increasingly delegated, authority to act in the Empire's name remained with the monarch. That this was acknowledged by the powers of Italy is underlined by the lengths to which they were prepared to go to obtain vicariates, and other titles and honours. Nor did

107 For the broad picture, see Schneidmüller 2006, p. 99, 106, 109.

108 For examples of such, purportedly ancient, invented late-medieval traditions, see Hack 1999, p. 108-109 (the future emperor's camp before the gates of Rome); Hack 2004, p. 201-205 (knightings on the Tiber bridge, following the imperial coronation).

109 For reflections on this theme in relation to Charles IV, see Seibt 1978, p. 233-234.

110 Schmid – Margue 2009, p. 117; Margue 2009, p. 123; Proske 2018, p. 82.

111 *Deutsche Lyrik* 2006, p. 566-567 ("both with the eagle's foray").

112 "Pseudo-Enenkel", cited in Hack 2004, p. 221: "das alle die, die mit dem römischen künig gen Rom zogen sind, sich anlegten in gantzen harnasch, als ob sie streiten sollten". See also Hack 1999, p. 125-126.

113 Koller 2005, p. 124; Schneidmüller 2006, p. 111; Proske 2018, p. 82. For the development of the ceremony, see Hack 2004. Although popular, these mass-knightings were not always recognized by established nobles as authentic bestowals of knighthood: Hack 2004, p. 205.

conceptions of the emperor's role in the south change as much as first appearances might suggest. The ideals that had guided Henry VII's actions and pronouncements, that he had been appointed by God to bring justice, peace, and reconciliation to Italy, remained important for his successors, even if their means were mostly different from his. The openly partisan Ludwig the Bavarian was in this respect an isolated exception.114 Forgiving those who had incurred punishments under his grandfather may have suited Charles IV's political ends, but it also gave public demonstration of his powers as a monarch with a universal mission.115 Sigismund, too, was clearly moved in part by a belief in his duty to bring peace to the peninsula, despite the manifest inadequacy of his resources to such a task.116 Fourteenth-century kings and princes are even encountered, in high-medieval imperial style, founding symbolically named settlements as military strongpoints in the south.117 If the emperor's northern subjects were mostly reluctant to support his Italian expeditions with blood and treasure, that did not mean they thought them unimportant. Public festivities and the ringing of church-bells, in Nuremberg and elsewhere, greeted the news of Sigismund's coronation in Rome.118

Magnifying the *Reich*: Italy and the imperial image and ideal

Nor should Italy's contribution to the doctrine, iconography, and self-projection of late-medieval emperorship be underrated. Ideas of sacral, neo-Roman monarchy, supposedly banished for good by the events of the "Investiture Contest" and by the ascendant "papal monarchy" in the centuries that followed, were repeatedly smuggled in again through the back door.119 That back door was Italy. From Italy's law-schools came the Roman legal texts, with their insistence that there was but one true prince, of limitless powers. The giant although troubling shadow of the Hohenstaufen, and particularly of their most Italianate son, Frederick II, would stretch far into the late Middle Ages, and beyond, north as well as south of the Alps. In Italy, a Henry VII could still play the all-powerful *imitator Christi*, whose feet were kissed by devout subjects in scenes unthinkable in the north, where kings and emperors, for all their grand titles, were kept firmly in their place by proud noble peers.120 The memory of Henry's grandiose,

114 Thomas 1983, p. 177.

115 Pauler 1996a, p. 196, 198, 206.

116 Hoensch 1996, p. 274-275; Proske 2018, p. 16.

117 For Henry VII's foundation of Monte Imperiale, see Cognasso, p. 314-315; its founding was deemed important enough to merit an illustration in the *Codex Balduini*: *Weg zur Kaiserkrone* 2009, p. 96-97. Charles IV was sufficiently proud of his role in founding the hilltop fortress-town of Monte Carlo near Lucca in the course of his father's campaigns to claim credit for it in his autobiography: *Autobiographie* 2016, cap. 5, p. 128; Seibt 1978, p. 123. For the Luxembourgs' use of symbolic placenames both north and south of the Alps, see Widder 1989.

118 Hoensch 1996, p. 397.

119 For the endurance of ideas of sacral imperial monarchy, see Erkens 2003.

120 Pauler 1996a, p. 73-74. For the different culture of monarchy in Germany, see Schneidmüller 2000.

doomed Italian adventure was long cultivated and romanticised – not least among his Italian subjects, some of whom were quick to remind subsequent imperial visitors of the illustrious example they had to emulate.121

It is no coincidence that the exaltation of the image of emperorship in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – through more magnificent forms of public ritual and imperial dress, for example – took place at a time when Ludwig the Bavarian, the Luxembourg monarchs, and their Habsburg successors, were recurrently present in the south.122 In specific cases, the influence is clear. The proto-Renaissance realism of the golden bull which a Pisan goldsmith cut for Ludwig the Bavarian, with its careful depiction of the antiquities of Rome, contrasts sharply with the stylized imagery previously habitual.123 No northern monument to an emperor could equal the great tomb of Henry VII in Pisa cathedral; but it is likely that it inspired and influenced his late-medieval successors on visits to the city.124 It is no accident that the only significant mosaic to be created north of the Alps in the fourteenth century was commissioned by Charles IV, almost certainly from Italian craftsmen, and probably reflecting knowledge gained by Charles while in the south.125 The monumental image was set up on the south transept façade of St Vitus cathedral in Prague, which Charles had magnificently rebuilt, and depicts him as a sacral ruler, under Christ. Here, on the most tangible level, Italy probably supplied the materials for a rejuvenated vision of universal monarchy in the north.

Among the more cerebral forms of late-medieval north-south exchange was the access to the imperial court which a succession of Italian imperialist thinkers – Dante, Cola di Rienzo, and Petrarch being only the best known – sought, and usually gained. Their influence should not be underrated. In the case of Marsilius of Padua it is plain to see. But even Petrarch, for all Charles IV's scepticism towards aspects of his Roman imperial revivalism, was encouraged to engage in lengthy correspondence with members of the emperor's circle, where his sophisticated Latinity and antique learning were much admired and his knowledge of Italian affairs valued. Indeed, the differences between Petrarch's conception of emperorship and Charles's own, while in some ways significant, should not be overstated.126 Nor did emperors and their northern allies only wait passively for Italian imperialists to approach them. The chancery of the old Roman campaigner Balduin of Trier was already collecting the pronouncements of Cola di Rienzo before the tribune appeared at the court of Balduin's great nephew in Prague in June

121 Franke 1992; Schmid 2008.

122 Suckale 1993, p. 31-34; Kingzinger 2006.

123 Suckale 1993, p. 31; Schwarz 2014, p. 138-145.

124 Schwarz 1997, p. 130.

125 Schwarz 1997, p. 124, proposing that the mosaicists may have come from Orvieto.

126 See generally Kölmel 1970.

1350.127 Charles IV himself sought repeatedly to recruit Petrarch to his entourage, and he evidently coveted a place in the poet's *De viris illustribus*.128 The lawyer Bartolus of Sassoferrato, appointed a councillor by Charles, declared it heresy not to recognize the emperor's universal jurisdiction.129

Italian writings in favour of the Empire are too easily consigned subconsciously to a distinct and separate, southern, sphere. But, here as elsewhere, we need to envisage a more interconnected world, at a time when northern thinkers too were much engaged by the Empire and the powers of its rulers.130 North-south interactions are nicely illustrated by the introduction of Dante's *De Monarchia* into the circle of Charles IV's court, probably by Cola di Rienzo at the request of a Bohemian patron.131 The transalpine meeting of minds should admittedly not be overstated: there is little sign, for example, that Sigismund took any serious interest in the humanistic learning and traces of antique culture that he encountered in the south.132 On the other hand, there are indications that the circulation of ideas was on occasion a good deal broader than might be expected. A Strasbourg chronicler, writing in German around the middle of the fourteenth century, felt impelled to recount the contents of an evidently remarkable work, of which he had become aware:

> At that time a book was made which is called *Defensor pacis*, which proves with due reference to holy scripture that the pope should be under the emperor, and that he should have no temporal lordship; it also makes clear the avarice of the pope and cardinals, their pride and simony, that are habitual to them and that they excuse with false glosses.133

If the incendiary thought of Marsilius could become known to a vernacular chronicler otherwise largely concerned with news from the Upper Rhine, then the barriers – physical and other – to the circulation of imperialist ideas and doctrines may have been less than often assumed.

Conclusion

New ways therefore need to be found of conceptualizing the late-medieval Empire, paying due regard not only to the continuing, if in some ways changing, importance of Italy, but also to the varied interactions that can be traced between Italy and the north. Tempting though it may seem simply to

127 Seibt 1978, p. 211.

128 Bayley 1942, p. 330.

129 Lindner 2009, p. 124.

130 See, for example, Lepsius 2014, p. 90-94.

131 Seibt 1978, p. 213.

132 Proske 2018, p. 255-266.

133 Closener 1870, p. 70.

extend south of the Alps Peter Moraw's "zonal" model of an increasingly interconnected late-medieval *Reich*, the difficulties in the way of this are obvious. Italy really was different. Zones of relatively stable "proximity" to the monarch, where these can be found at all – in traditionally imperialist cities such as Siena and Lucca, for example – have the character of tiny, vulnerable islands within a shifting, unpredictable sea. More than in the north, acceptance of the Roman king's presence was posited on the expectation not only that he would soon leave, but that he would then not be seen again for many years to come. The impossibility of tracing established travel-routes in Italy of the kind identifiable for the itinerant court north of the Alps tells its own story.134 Reliable staging points were fewer in the south, where more depended upon the hazards and opportunities of circumstance.135

There is benefit in shifting the viewpoint away from territorial zones and their limits occasionally, and in looking instead for strands of connection and for the exchanges that they facilitated. All the signs are that these became richer and more complex during the late Middle Ages. Thinking about the late-medieval Empire not simply as a bounded polity, or a plurality of such polities, but also as a political-cultural sphere (or multiple, overlapping spheres), of variable extent and porosity, can be helpful particularly in evaluating the role of Italy in imperial politics and ideas.136 Nor should we think only in terms of an advancing acculturation of backward northerners through contact with the south.137 That Sigismund of Luxembourg's distinctive dress and physiognomy were adopted by fifteenth-century Italians as visual code for "the emperor" as such is just one indication that something more complex and reciprocal was afoot.138 Ambitions, desires, and (sometimes fantastic) ideas and images were projected onto the Empire and its rulers from both north and south. The routes across the Alps were not only open to a varied traffic in imperialist political culture in the late Middle Ages; they were also very much a two-way street.

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134 Widder 1993, p. 363-364; Nord 2008.

135 The absence of settled and dependable "sites of power" in the south is emphasized by Margue 2008, p. 128-129.

136 I draw inspiration from the model advanced by Jonathan Shepard for characterizing the Eastern Roman Empire: Shepard 2006.

137 Thus Moraw 1985a, p. 23, emphasizing northward cultural transfers.

138 Proske 2018, ch. 6. Also noteworthy in this regard are the foundation-charters sought by nascent Italian universities from Charles IV, at a time when his own foundation in Prague had emphasized his status as a patron of learning with imperial authority: Trautz 1963, p. 67-68.

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