Monika Poettinger, Piero Roggi (eds.), *Florence. Capital of the Kingdom of Italy, 1865-1871*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York-London, 2017, pp. 362.

A "cup of poison" was how Baron Bettino Ricasoli, the most prominent Florentine politician of the day, described the proposal to move the capital of the new Kingdom of Italy from Turin to Florence in accordance with the agreement signed in September 1864 by the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, and the Emperor of the French, Napoleon III.
The poison would produce its effect if Florence's period as the capital was not long enough to allow the amortization of the massive investments necessary to adapt the small and tranquil capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany to its new role and become the symbol of a nation that aspired to become one of the great powers of Europe.
Historians have studied Florence's years as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy mainly because of its profound urban transformation, planned and organized by the architect Giuseppe Poggi, who was inspired by Haussmann's model for the renovation of Paris. Among the major changes involved were the demolition of the city's walls, the construction of wide avenues and prestigious buildings, and the levelling and subsequent "rehabilitation" of some of the most degraded areas inhabited by the lower classes.

The migration of Italians to the new capital significantly increased Florence's population. The newcomers belonged to the upper-middle class, to an administrative and political aristocracy, and to a lower class of service workers.

Historians have only recently begun to study the effects of the transfer of the capital to Florence on the city's demographic, economic and social conditions. Some studies have focused on the event as a turning-point of recovery, giving fresh impetus to a series of traditional activities that subsequently elevated the city to a role of national importance during the Fascist period, long after the capital had been moved to Rome.

The volume edited by Monika Poettinger and Piero Roggi is part of this new stream of studies. It examines, on the one hand, the political and cultural role played by Florence during its years as the capital, and on the other, the social and economic dynamics that connected the city to some circuits of international credit and finance.

The book consists of fifteen essays and a long and meaty introduction (Poettinger), and is divided into three sections.

The first, "Culture and Politics", examines the different political and ideological camps (from the Mazzinian democrats to the moderates) and their role in local and national politics (Cosimo Ceccuti). Florence was the nation's cultural capital not only because it was the historic home of the Italian language but also because it was a place of convergence for major Italian writers and, what is more, was in the forefront in the field of education (Sergio Caruso).

The civic dynamism of the Florentine literary and artistic world made the city "a veritable crossroads of fruitful interactions between literature, visual arts and psychological science" (Gino Tellini).

Florence also performed a significant function at national level in the popularization of scientific knowledge (Sergio Caruso, Fabio Bertini). Moreover, this had an international dimension, as we learn from the essay by Paolo Brenni, Laura Faustini and Elena Mechi focusing on a visit to the 1867 International Exposition in Paris by a group of students from the Technical Institute of Florence.

The two central essays of the first part analyze the activity of Bettino Ricasoli, with some interestingly divergent opinions regarding that important Tuscan politician. Piero Roggi in particular examines Ricasoli's character and the relationship between Ricasoli's ideas in the economic field and his deep religious sentiment. For Ricasoli, religion was as an instrument of social cohesion and stability, a notion that contrasted with Cavour's idea but was consistent with Ricasoli's status as a landowner. Yet, Ricasoli's views were not without considerable ethical tension.

The social problems relating to the conditions of the city's poor are analyzed in the second part of the volume ("A Stroll around Florence, Capital of Italy"), which includes an essay by Zeffiro Ciuffoletti and Maria Grazia Proli on the conditions of extreme poverty in Florence during the time it was the capital: overcrowding in the central districts, indigence, malnutrition, extremely anti-hygienic conditions and poor sanitation.

The third and final part of the book covers the economic problems that expenditure on the capital caused for Florence, resulting in the failure of the city administration. After the defeat of Napoleon III at Sedan, the King of Italy no longer considered himself bound by the September 1864 agreement and ordered his generals to occupy Rome. Thus, Florence was capital for only a very brief span of time and the chalice did indeed prove to be poisoned: the newcomers left, taking their resources with them, while the debts remained. The editors of the book are both economic historians, and this subject is treated in depth and with great attention to detail in essays reflecting the complexity of the topic and the difficulty of offering a decisive and unequivocal picture of a process so abruptly interrupted.

The 1865-1871 cycle appears to have been rather sterile, according to Andrea Giuntini, whose essay stresses that those few years were insufficient to truly renew the productive fabric. The period was characterized more by an urban than by an economic revolution, also owing to a certain lack of cultural openness and industrial and entrepreneurial

spirit in such a "sleepy" city. Instead, Daniela Manetti, Marco Cini and Simone Fagioli, in their respective essays, underline the relationships that Florence's role as capital city allowed Florentine entrepreneurs to cement with European business and financial groups; Monika Poettinger, in turn, highlights the significance of the real shock, also a culture shock, of the arrival of the court and parliament and the resulting "de-provincialization" of the old capital of the Grand Duchy.

In conclusion, for the 150th anniversary of the capital in Florence, the volume offers an up-to-date overview of the progress of studies and some ideas for an open discussion on a classic subject in the historiography of Florence: the relationship between the city's years as the national capital and the subsequent configuration of the identity of Florence, which has remained one of the capitals of European culture (and tourism).

The volume's merits also mark its limits. It offers us important insights into the historical setting and the period of the event, but these almost inevitably overshadow some longer-term dynamics.

For example, at the time of Italy's unification a reconsideration of Florence had been under way for decades and the Tuscan capital (like those of all the pre-unification states) already reflected evident signs of the new "national" hierarchies (e.g. the effects of railways, travel and tourism, the relegation of the port of Livorno). Becoming the national capital accelerated these developments, it did not disrupt them.

Similarly, the role of cultural factors in relationships in the international sphere receives insufficient attention compared with the immediate impact of urban transformation or political and economic changes, even though Poettinger does conclude by signaling their importance in the ongoing memory of the Tuscan city as Italy's capital: "Florence would forever represent, in its new neoclassical appearance, the mythos of a nation built from culture, language and moral values more than of race and military force."

Anna Pellegrino
European University Institute, Florence