

Like the rest of northern Italy, Augusta Taurinorum could not avoid being caught up in these struggles. Around this time we learn of the presence of a new kind of official in the city: a count or military commander, charged with organizing the defense of the region. His presence is a clear sign that the centralized structure of the empire was beginning to break down, and that power was devolving to local authorities. Augusta Taurinorum had become a military outpost on the dangerous Alpine frontier, increasingly left to fend for itself. And as political horizons narrowed in the twilight of the empire, economic activity also contracted into more localized units. Agriculture and commerce were disrupted by the continual warfare. Recent research suggests that the economic decline in the region around Turin was not as serious as was once thought, and that the increasingly localized economy was more resilient than has been assumed, but it is nonetheless clear that population and trade were contracting. The cities seem to have fared rather better than the countryside. As the waves of barbarian invaders marched through northern Italy, plundering and destroying wherever they went, the rural population abandoned the countryside and fled to the safety of the walled cities. Some of the invaders stayed to repopulate the partially deserted countryside, and bands of foreign mercenaries in the service of Rome, or *foederati*, were invited to settle on empty land by the Roman authorities themselves. Since Constantine's reign, various foreign troops had been given land from time to time in the area around Augusta Taurinorum, in return for aiding in local defense. This trend would accelerate through the climactic period of barbarian invasions in the fifth century, when Piedmont became a primary theater of conflict. In 400-401 the Visigoths under their king Alaric overran Liguria and Piedmont, until they were defeated at Pollenzo by the Roman general Stilicho. Four years later it was the turn of the Ostrogoths under Radagaisus; they crossed the Mont-Genèvre pass and ravaged the north Italian plains until they too were overcome by Stilicho. Rebellious peasants from Gaul – the so-called Bagaudae – spread their insurrection across the Alps into northern Italy. In 410 the usurper Constantine III crossed the Alps from Gaul with the ostensible intention of attacking Alaric and his Visigoths, who had just sacked Rome. Soon afterwards Alaric died, and his people migrated through northern Italy into Gaul, probably once again through the Mont-Genèvre pass.

The marching and counter-marching of armies and the migrations of peoples through the Alpine passes and over the northwestern Italian plain continued until the middle of the fifth century, although the record is fragmentary and the sequence of events is far from clear. The cumu-