

MARTIN V. MELOSI

A Journey of Body, Mind, and Spirit

Four Years in Fascist Italy, 1937-1941

foreword by Federico Paolini

ZENIT

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È vietata la riproduzione, anche parziale,
con qualsiasi mezzo effettuata, compresa la
fotocopia, senza l'autorizzazione dell'editore.
Tutti i diritti sono riservati.

*I dedicate this book to la mia famiglia,
who made me what I am today*

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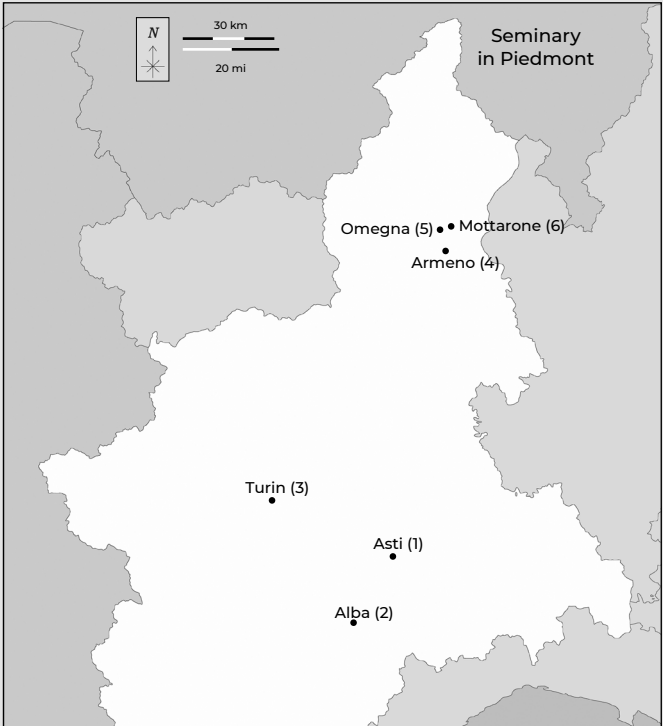
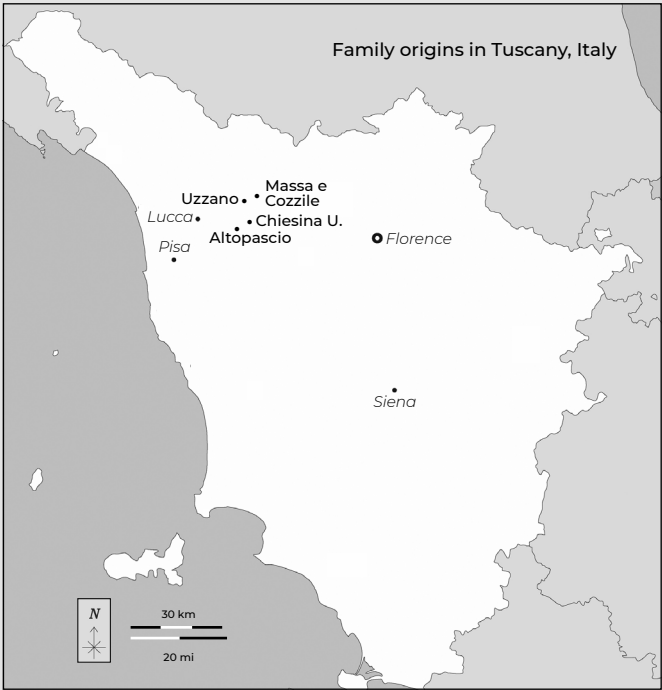
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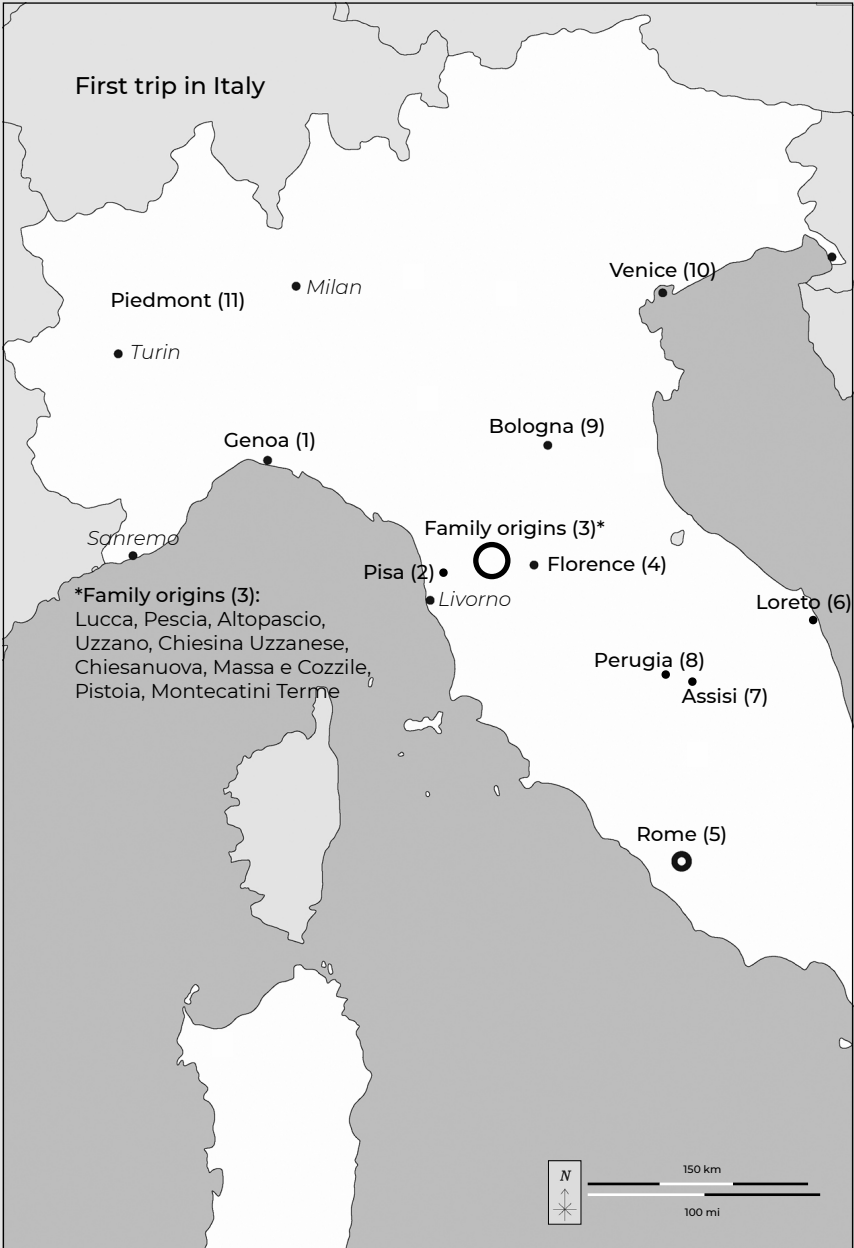
Foreword

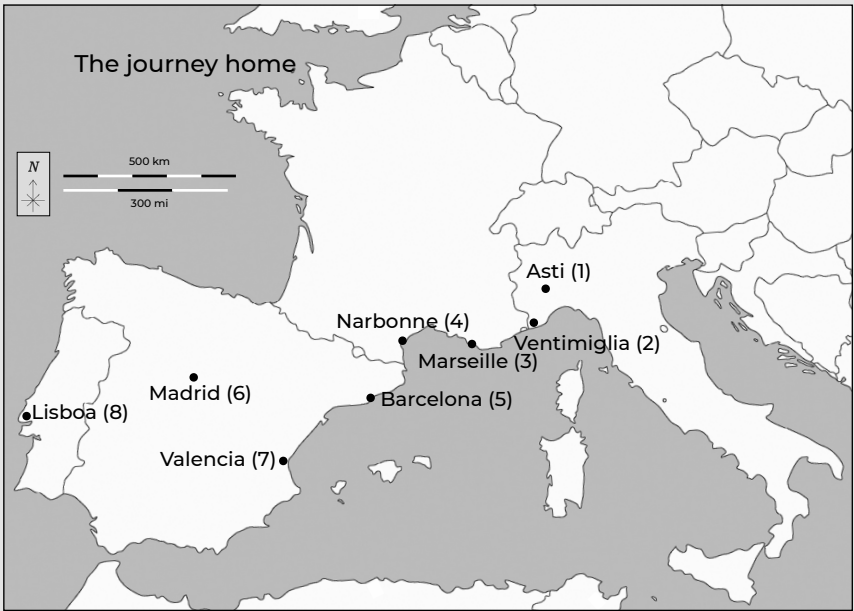
The encounter with Martin belongs to that rare category of events that can change your life. Our first meeting took place exactly twenty years ago in June: I had just obtained my PhD and I was starting to take the first steps in my university career, while Martin was an accomplished scholar hosted in Siena on the occasion of the Third International Round Table on Urban Environmental History of the 19th and 20th Century ('The Making of European Contemporary Cities: an Environmental History').

It is difficult to understand and explain why with a person you immediately create a chemistry different from the others—I think it counted the fact of having both Apennine ancestors and that our families have lived similar experiences (my great-grandfather also emigrated to California, also departing from Le Havre, then returning to Tuscany as an old man and buying a piece of land and the house where my father was born)—but with Martin it happened just like that and it was the beginning of a friendship that still lasts today.

I remember, after my speech (the first in English, for which I had spent the night sleepless...), Martin talking with Joel Tarr (the author of a landmark such as *Devastation and Renewal*) of the opportunity to publish my work in the Editorial Series directed by them at the University of Pittsburgh Press; still today I am surprised and grateful that this has really happened, sixteen years after that day.







Maps credits: *d-maps.com*. P. 16 top: Tuscany region, Italy (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=8358&lang=it); p. 16 bottom: Piedmont region, Italy (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=8252&lang=it); p. 17: Italy (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=2328&lang=it); p. 18: South-West Europe (https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=2232&lang=it).

Prologue

Because of the obvious distractions of youth and living life in general, I paid little attention to two small diaries and a weathered 315-page unpublished book, entitled *My Education*, sitting on an out-of-the-way bookshelf in my folks' living room. The diaries and the book were written by my dad, Elmo Victor Melosi. One diary depicts his life in Italy's Piedmont region (specifically Alba and Armeno) where he studied in preparation to become a Roman Catholic priest. The diary begins on July 22, 1937—just before his departure—and ends upon his return to the states a little more than a month before the Pearl Harbor Attack on December 7, 1941. The other, briefer diary has entries only for 1945 when he was back home in San Jose, California, about the time he began courting my mother, Nancy Corina Rossi.

The longer diary and *My Education* tell a rather exceptional story of a young American—seventeen when he left California—living the arduous seminary life in Benito Mussolini's Fascist Italy during the Spanish Civil War and the early years of World War II. He spent his first year in Italy as a novitiate in Alba and the final three years in Armeno before fleeing Italy for home as the war in Europe kept closing in on him and his seminary colleagues and teachers. I begin my narrative in this book before Dad's Italy years with the immigration of his parents from Tuscany to the San Francisco Bay Area, and then continue with his childhood and early education in the Santa Clara Valley and Santa Cruz.

Dad's book—its full title being *My Road to a Higher Education, 1937-1941*—covered many of the diary entries with annotations for several of them through October 16, 1941. It was written in the early 1960s some time before the death of John F. Kennedy which took place in November 1963. Dad wrote the volume on a typewriter, well before he had a computer, but never sought to publish it. On the first page of the book is a Guarantee: "Any errors in grammar or spelling should be attributed to poor typing, not poor education. E.V.M."

My Education was bound by hand (bookbinding being one of the skills he learned in Italy) and was covered in old road maps of California and the Midwest and edged with red leather or vinyl. Why road maps? That's anybody's guess, especially since they had no direct relationship to the contents. Maybe they were the only materials laying around, and he used them because he was very practical about matters like this. I can't think of any other reasonable justification.

I came into possession of the diaries and the book soon after Dad died in 1990. Several years before then I had read *My Education*, but never looked at the original diaries themselves being too preoccupied with my own activities and obligations I suppose and assuming, incorrectly, that they might be unnecessarily redundant. Now I realize how fortunate I was in having acquired all these treasures—and the precious memories that went with them. As I discovered, the diaries had entries that were quite terse and matter-of-fact, but sometimes curiously different in content from those transcribed in *My Education*. That volume, although painfully lacking in the full names of many people, in geographic locations, and even in specific dates concerning key events, was nevertheless indispensable. Without many of the long explanations and asides included in the book, the diaries themselves would not have provided enough grist for my own work. Some of Dad's most personal thoughts and experiences are revealed in *My Education*, and despite its limitations I could never have written *A Journey of Body, Mind, and Spirit* without it.