PART I

THE TEMPLE IN NORTH-WEST ITALY:
A GENERAL PICTURE
1. The first Templar houses (1142–1160)

The Templar Order was a peculiar institution, not only because it brought together religious profession and the use of arms, but also because it existed on both sides of the Mediterranean, with different yet complementary aims. The role of the Western provinces in the Military Orders active in the Holy Land was a vitally important one, as they were the source of the essential resources needed for pursuing the struggle against the infidel, their primary task.¹ Ensuring that their Western houses were firmly established at local level was thus a vital condition for contributing to the recruitment activities and funding of the Order. From this perspective it would seem natural that the Temple’s first Western houses were located in areas that already had links with the Latin East or that were involved in the flow of goods and men (crusaders, pilgrims and merchants) to the Levant.

The earliest records of a Templar presence in North-west Italy concern houses established at important junctions on the road network, such as (in chronological order) Milan (1142), Albenga (1143), Bergamo (1145) and Vercelli (1145). Unfortunately, the 1142 reference to the Genoese church of Santa Fede does not say which order it belongs to. Its ownership by the Temple is not stated until twenty years later. What seems likely, though, is that it already belonged to the Order in 1142:² the position of the building outside the city walls, a typical Templar choice of location, and its proximity to an area of potential develop-

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