

Bellinzona, the Riviera and Blenio, 1495–1503

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The second wave followed the collapse of the Sforza state. In 1499 King Louis XII of France conquered the Duchy of Milan. Bellinzona, whose burghers feared French rule and French taxes, was under Confederate control from April 1500 and placed itself under the protection of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden.¹ The Riviera, the valley between Biasca and Bellinzona, and the Val Blenio, which leads north-east towards the Lukmanier pass, had been occupied in 1495 by Uri, Schwyz and Lucerne. In the Treaty of Arona of 1503 Louis XII ceded Bellinzona, the Riviera and Blenio to Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden.²

These three territories remained the joint bailiwicks of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden until 1798. The three cantons renamed the three castles of Bellinzona after themselves: Castelgrande became the castle of Uri, Montebello the castle of Schwyz and Sasso Corbaro the castle of Unterwalden. These names lasted beyond the end of Confederate rule until 1818, when the castles received new names, Castelgrande for example that of the castle of San Michele.³ The castles, which Chapter A.I describes as a customs and military barrier of the Milanese dukes, thus changed their function without changing their structure: they now protected the southern frontier of the Confederacy against Milan. Since 2000 they have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List together with the town walls.⁴

1 The Pavia campaign and the four bailiwicks of the twelve cantons, 1512–1516

The third wave came in 1512, when the Confederates, fighting for Pope Julius II and the Holy League he had promoted in 1511 (which they supported in arms without formally joining it), drove the French out of Lombardy in the so-called Pavia campaign and restored Massimiliano Sforza as Duke of Milan.⁵ They took as their reward, or seized as a pledge,

the territories along the northern edge of the duchy: Lugano with its lake valleys, Locarno and the Vallemaggia, Mendrisio and Balerna, and the Val d'Ossola with Domodossola. The Three Leagues of the Grisons (Graubünden) at the same time took the Valtellina, Bormio and Chiavenna.⁶ French garrisons held out for some time in the castles of Lugano and Locarno. Locarno's castle surrendered only after the battle of Novara in June 1513, on the order of Louis XII.⁷

The defeat of the Confederates at Marignano on 13 and 14 September 1515 cost them Milan and the Ossola. In the Perpetual Peace concluded at Fribourg on 29 November 1516, however, King Francis I recognized their possession of the bailiwicks south of the Ceneri and of Locarno and the Vallemaggia. The treaty offered the Confederates 300,000 crowns if they gave up these territories, with the exception of Bellinzona, an offer they declined.⁸ Mendrisio and Balerna, which had been disputed, passed definitively to the Confederates after 1517, and a *landfogto* resided at Mendrisio from 1522.⁹ The Perpetual Peace, which also regulated the pensions paid by France to the cantons and the recruitment of Swiss mercenaries (Chapter B.III), remained the basis of Franco-Swiss relations until the French Revolution and formed the external legal title for Confederate rule in the south for the whole period.

Essentials. The eight Italian bailiwicks were acquired in three waves: the Leventina by Uri between 1403 and 1480; Bellinzona, the Riviera and Blenio by Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden between 1495 and 1503 (Treaty of Arona, 1503); Lugano, Locarno, Mendrisio and the Vallemaggia by twelve cantons in 1512–1513, recognized by France in the Perpetual Peace of 29 November 1516. The Ossola, occupied in 1512, was lost after Marignano in 1515. All eight bailiwicks remained subject lands until the spring of 1798.

2 Notes

1. Giuseppe Chiesi and Pablo Crivelli, "Bellinzona (pieve, baliaggio, distretto)", in Dizionario storico della Svizzera (DSS), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008540/> ("di fatto B. si trovava già sotto il controllo dei Conf. fin dall'aprile del 1500"). ↩
2. Giuseppe Chiesi, "Riviera (baliaggio, distretto)", in DSS, version of 5 April 2017, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008547/> (occupation of Blenio and the Riviera by Uri, Schwyz and Lucerne in 1495); Stadler, "Ennetbirgische Feldzüge" (above), according to which the Peace of Arona of 1503 granted Blenio, the Riviera and Bellinzona to Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden; Rodolfo Huber, "Arona", in HLS, version of 20

September 2001, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/007024/2001-09-20/>. ↩

3. Adriano Augusto Michieli, Fritz Gysin and Eligio Pometta, "Bellinzona", in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1930), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bellinzona_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bellinzona_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/) ("i castelli [...] furono chiamati d'Uri [...], di Svitto e d'Unterwalden"); Martin Peter Schindler, Giuseppe Chiesi, Pablo Crivelli and Chiara Orelli, "Bellinzona (comune)", in DSS, version of 16 December 2022, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/002031/> ("Castel Grande (o castello di S. Michele, secondo la nuova denominazione del 1818)"); Chiesi and Crivelli, "Bellinzona (pieve, baliaggio, distretto)" (above). ↩
4. Wikipedia, "Castles of Bellinzona", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castles_of_Bellinzona (consulted as a last resort): inscribed in 2000 at the 24th session of the World Heritage Committee as "Three Castles, Defensive Wall and Ramparts of the Market-Town of Bellinzona" (World Heritage List no. 884). The same article dates the names of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden Castle to 1506. ↩
5. Stadler, "Ennetbirgische Feldzüge" (above), on the Pavia campaign of 1512 under the direction of Julius II and the extension of Confederate rule to Locarno, the Vallemaggia, the Val Verzasca, Lugano and the Mendrisiotto; Paolo Ostinelli, "Italia, guerre d'", in DSS, version of 5 February 2024, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008893/> (the Confederates did not formally join the Holy League of 1511 but supported it with troops; expulsion of the French from Lombardy in 1512 and installation of Massimiliano Sforza as Duke of Milan). ↩
6. Enrico Rizzi, "Ossola, Val d'", in HLS, version of 3 December 2009, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007095/2009-12-03/>, on the Confederate occupation of 1512–1515 and its end after Marignano. On the Grisons' Valtellina see HLS/DSS, "Valtellina". ↩
7. Rodolfo Huber, "Locarno (pieve, bailliage, district)", in *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse* (DHS), version of 18 November 2014, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/008544/>; Giuseppe Negro, "Lugano (pieve, baliaggio, distretto)", in DSS, version of 14 March 2017, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008545/2017-03-14/>, according to which the lands of Lugano passed under Swiss rule in 1512. ↩
8. André Holenstein, "Pace perpetua", in DSS, version of 23 April 2026, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008898/2026-04-23/> (conclusion at

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Fribourg on 29 November 1516, the offer of 300,000 crowns for the territories south of the Alps except Bellinzona, its refusal, and the duration of the treaty until the French Revolution). ↩

9. Stefania Bianchi, "Mendrisio (baliaggio, distretto)", in DSS, version of 18 January 2017, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/008546/> ("dopo il 1517 fu definitivamente conquistato dagli Svizzeri"; a landfogto resident at Mendrisio from 1522, in office for two years). ↩

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