

Units of account in daily practice

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

For the inhabitants of the Ticinese districts the practical consequence of this system was a permanent gap between the money in which obligations were expressed and the coins with which they were paid. A lease might be fixed in lire of *terzoli*, a tithe in kind, a toll in imperial *soldi* and a dowry in florins. Every payment required a conversion that depended on the current value of the coins in circulation, which declined as the mints reduced the silver content of the smaller pieces. Notaries and merchants were accustomed to these calculations. The peasants of the valleys relied on them, and on the local officials and priests who could read and count.

The Milanese units of account survived the change of sovereignty in 1500 and 1512/1513. In the Confederate bailiwicks south of the Alps accounts continued to be kept in Milanese lire, *soldi* and *denari* for most of the early modern period, so that the fiscal registers of the Swiss bailiffs in Lugano and Locarno used Lombard units while their colleagues north of the Alps counted in gulden and batzen.¹ The territory was politically Swiss and monetarily Lombard, a combination that lasted until the nineteenth century. It ended only with the adoption of the Swiss franc as the single currency of the Confederation by the federal coinage act of 1850 (see Chapter C.IV).²

Unit Relation Use Lira (*libra*) = 20 *soldi* = 240 *denari* Unit of account Soldo (*solidus*) = 12 *denari* Unit of account; later small coin Denaro imperiale = 2 *denari terzoli* Coin; basis of *lira imperiale* Denaro terzolo = ½ denaro imperiale Coin; basis of *lira di terzoli* Testone (from 1474) = 20 *soldi* Silver coin worth one lira Florin / ducat varying in *soldi* Gold coins for large sums

1 Weights and measures

The measures of the region were equally Lombard, although they varied from place to place in ways that complicated trade. Southern Switzerland used, like Lombardy, two kinds of pound, the *libbra grossa* for heavy and bulk goods and the smaller *libbra* or *libbretta*, of roughly a third of a kilogram, for fine goods. The *rubbo*, which at Milan weighed about 8.17 kilograms, was used for goods such as cheese and iron. Ticino also shared with Lombardy the *braccio lungo* for woollen cloth and the *braccio corto*. Grain was measured by volume, in *staia* and *moggia*, and wine in *brente*. The Milanese system outlived the Confederate bailiwicks, because in 1826 the new canton of Ticino took over part of the old Milanese units into its own legislation.³ The length of the *braccio* differed between Milan, Como and the smaller towns. Lugano, Locarno and Bellinzona each had their own variants of these measures, whose standards were kept by the commune and checked at the market.

The multiplicity of measures was a source of profit and of dispute. A merchant who bought grain by the measure of Como and sold it by the measure of Lugano could gain or lose on the difference. Tolls and taxes assessed in one measure had to be translated into another, and statutes and treaties frequently specified the measure to be used.⁴ The regulation of weights and measures was one of the principal economic functions of the medieval commune. The officers who controlled them were among the most important in the *borgo*. In this sense the medieval market administration was an early form of consumer protection and market supervision, whose modern successors are the federal law on metrology and, in a more distant analogy, the rules of conduct in financial services law.⁵

2 Notes

1. The persistence of Milanese measures is discussed in the section on weights and measures. ↩
2. DSS, art. "Monete", <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/013663/>, on the federal law of 1850 that introduced the franc as the single Swiss currency. See Chapter C.IV. ↩
3. Anne-Marie Dubler, "Poids et mesures", DHS, version of 31 March 2011, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/013751/> ("on trouvait en Suisse méridionale, comme en Lombardie, les libbrette et les libbre grosse "; the braccio lungo and braccio corto; brenta and staio; "Le Tessin reprit à son compte, en 1826, une partie des anciennes unités milanaïses");

Treccani, Vocabolario, "rubbo",
<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/rubbo/> ("a Milano valeva 8,170 kg");
Treccani, Vocabolario, "libbra",
<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/libbra/> (about a third of a kilogram). ↩

4. Dubler, "Poids et mesures" (above). See also Chapter A.IV on the toll tariffs. ↩
5. Federal Act of 17 June 2011 on Metrology (Metrology Act), SR 941.20, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-it/9/94/941.20-index.html>; Federal Act of 15 June 2018 on Financial Services (Financial Services Act, FinSA), SR 950.1, Art. 7 ff. ("Financial service providers must comply with the supervisory duties set out under this title when providing financial services"), <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-en/9/95/950.1-7-10.html>. The analogy is the author's. ↩

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