

THE LORDS OF ROMAGNA



Tombstone of the Beccadelli, by Bitino da Bologna (1341): Church of SS. Nicolò and Domenico, Imola

THE
LORDS OF ROMAGNA

Romagnol Society and the
Origins of the Signorie

BY
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PHYLLIS CARR
dolce guida e cara

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J. P. L.

Glasgow University, 1964

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A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON MONEY AND MEASURES

THE many different terms of money used in Romagna in the period covered by this book are very confusing. The money systems of Florence and Venice, of Bologna, Ravenna, and sometimes of other towns, all flourished within the province. The value of these currencies continually fluctuated in relation to each other, not only in the course of a year, but even from week to week. To add to the difficulty many of the terms describe 'moneys of account' which were not represented by any real coin in circulation. Though, for instance, the pound of Bologna was constantly referred to in documents, there was no coin which actually was this pound. It was merely an accountant's symbol for 240 (real) Bolognesi pennies. (So today, in Britain, we reckon in guineas representing twenty-one real shillings.)

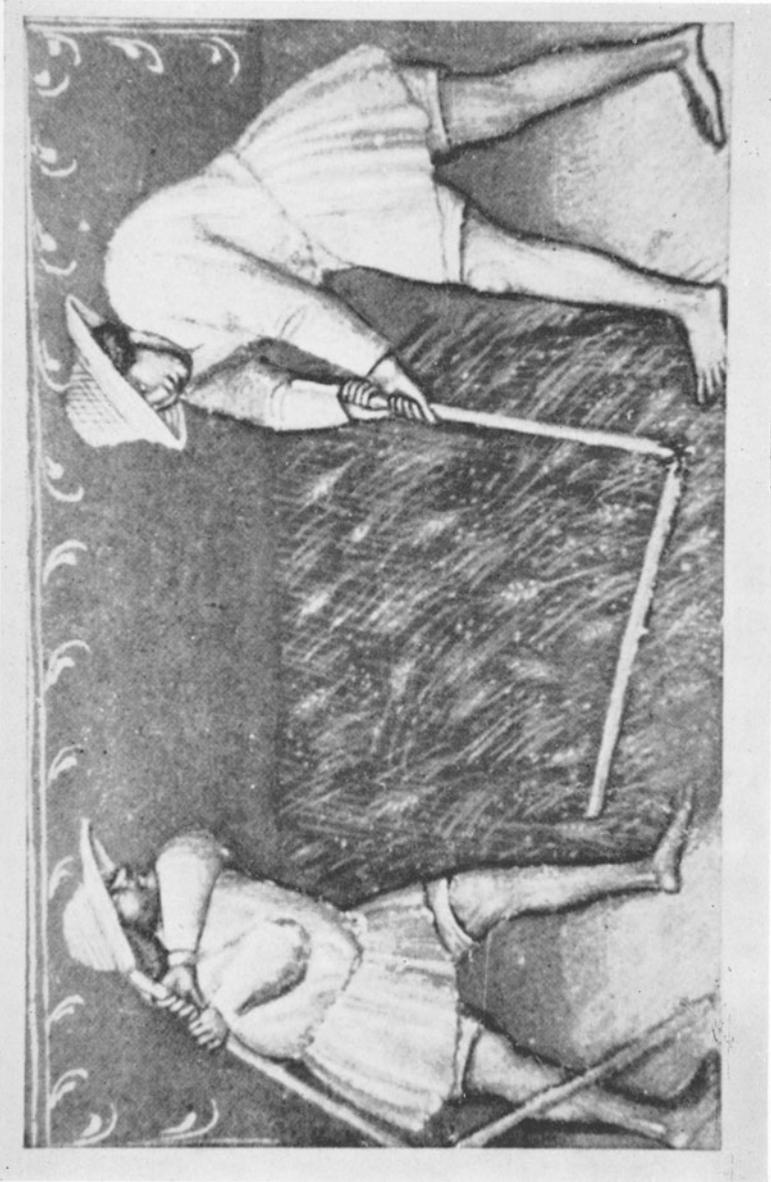
In order to help the reader in this difficult field, the currencies based upon the pound of Bologna (£B.) and of Ravenna (£R.) have been taken as a basis of calculation. In each of these systems the pound (£, *libra, lira*) consisted of twenty shillings (s., *solidi, soldi*), and 240 pence (d., *denarii, denari*). In the text (though not in the footnotes and appendices) an approximate estimate of the value of any sum in the currency of Bologna is placed in brackets after each other term of money. The reader will appreciate, however, that the author of this work lacks the very great technical expertise and knowledge of current market values which were demanded of the medieval money changer, and that therefore these figures are only a very rough guide. The money of Ravenna has not been translated into Bolognesi terms, but here it is easy for the reader to bear in mind that £R.1 was roughly equivalent to 19s. B.

Those already familiar with the medieval English monetary system may be helped by remembering that the pound of Bologna in this period was from ten to thirteen times less valuable than the English pound sterling. At this period the unit of international currency (like the dollar today) was the Florentine gold florin. In 1320 the pound Bolognese, which at that time had a very low exchange rate, was valued at half a florin: that is to say at the equivalent of about 1.765 grammes of fine gold, which in terms

of present-day English money might be worth 14s. 3d. But such a comparison is of very little help in understanding its real value which can only be discovered by considering its general purchasing power.

Yet this is not easy to find. Many rents and services were paid, not in money, but in foodstuffs. The price of foodstuffs varied widely according to the year's harvest, to which every aspect of the town's economic life was closely tied. Some indication can be given, however, by noting that famine conditions were considered to exist in Forlì when the price of corn had risen to 12s. 6d. B. a bushel. An acceptable price for salt was 4d. B. a pound. It is difficult to assess land values which varied with the condition of the land. At the end of the fourteenth century outright sale of land could produce £B.28 for two and a half acres of a vineyard, £B.50 for four acres of ploughland, and yet at the same time, as little as £B.6 for one and a half acres of ploughland. A two-storied house, suitable for an aristocrat, with a balcony and tiled roof, a courtyard with a well, a garden, some land, outbuildings, and a granary, could cost £B.600. Other houses at the end of the century might cost £B.16 or £B.24 or £B.75 in the town, £B.30 or £B.60 in a village.

Mills were very expensive ; they could be valued at £B.1200. Cattle at the middle of the fourteenth century could cost £R.10 before fattening, but the expense of pasturing was high. An ass with two panniers could cost £R.8 ; an inn, £B.400 ; the painting of a lunette with three figures of saints, £B.5 ; a Tartar slave-girl, £R.49 6s. ; a rowing-boat, £B.10 ; a boat with two sails, £B.250 ; a book, £B.44 ; a town clock, £B.100 ; a funeral, £B.10 ; a public lavatory, £B.15 ; the erection of a gallows and execution of a thief, £B.4. A chemist's shop could be leased for £B.50 a year. Clothes could be very expensive. A skirt and long cloak, decorated with pearls, second hand, could fetch £R.22 ; a French purse of silk and gold, £R.4 8s. ; a belt of woven silk and silver, £R.14. But cheaper clothes were available. A short loose cloak, if unlined, could cost £B.1 10s., if lined, £B.2 ; a lady's mantle, lined, £B.1 ; a loose jacket, 15s. B., a man's jacket in velvet, £B.1 15s. ; a surplice, 12s. B. ; a lined hood, 3s. B. ; a pair of strong heavy shoes, 3s. B. Dowries, which were essential for marriage, were expensive ; £B.1500 for the wife of a signore, and £R.400 and £R.50 for the wives of a doctor and cook respectively. Money itself was dear ; the official rate of interest was 30 per cent a year, but many bankers charged a much higher percentage.



The Month of July: Book of Offices of the Blessed Virgin, Forlì

Turning to salaries and wages, it is clear that most services were performed on the basis of an *ad hoc* agreement, or for a commission. Notaries, for instance, charged their clients according to the amount of money recorded in the documents they were asked to draw up. Labourers would only have their wages fixed as the result of laws made by the town's property-holders, and these were often difficult to enforce. None the less some figures can be given. A schoolmaster, appointed by the commune, could be paid £R.25 or £R.50 a year, plus individual payments by parents of the children attending the school. A doctor of medicine could receive £R.300 from the commune, and in addition be allowed to charge any patient who was seriously ill up to £R.3. The clerk of a pawn-bank would be paid £B.30 a year; a mercenary foot-soldier, £B.2 a month. A man who gathered and delivered manure to a field would receive £B.2 for the job.

These fees refer to the period before the mid thirteen-forties. Thenceforth it is certain that all forms of labour costs rose, often steeply. At the end of the century the maximum wages of occasional day-labourers could be fixed at 7s. B. a day from mid-March to mid-April, 5s. B. a day from 1 November to 28 February, and 6s. B. from 1 March to mid-March. Mowers could receive 10s. B. in May, and 7s. B. in August and September. In these three months reapers could receive 7s. B. and threshers 6s. B. a day. Masons and carpenters in the same period could receive 7s. B. a day from mid-March to the end of September, and 6s. B. at other times. Builders' labourers could receive 4s. B. from mid-March to 1 October, and for the rest of the year, 3s. 6d. a day and their food. Smiths could charge 2d. B. for sharpening agricultural instruments. For shoeing war-horses they received 2s. 6d. B. for each shoe; for smaller horses, 2s. B., and for asses, 1s. B. a shoe. A man with his own oxen and cart could receive £B.6 10s. for transporting stones and wood for a month. A priest would probably be grateful for an offertory of 2s. B. for saying a mass.

It will be obvious by now why present-day historians assert that it is impossible to draw up any satisfactory cost of living index for the period. One pointer, however, may be of assistance. In the papal taxation of the clergy of the province in December 1291, those who received annually less than £B.15 were classed with those whose 'revenues are so small or lacking that for the sustenance of their lives they have to beg and seek public alms'. From this it may be concluded that at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, £B.15 was the uncomfortable minimum

upon which a single man with no responsibilities could live.

The weights and measures of this period, when each town had its own different standards, are, if anything, even more difficult to understand than its money. The square measure, the *tornatura*, could vary from $\cdot 4$ to $\cdot 8$ of an acre ; the dry measure, the *staio*, fluctuated from between five and thirty gallons. Some guidance here is given in Appendix IV, though this can be considered as little more than a contribution towards the fuller understanding of the subject. If the reader is confused he may perhaps console himself with the thought that even the merchants' handbooks in the period were not free from obvious errors on these points.