

Population and economy in Lombardy in the age of Charles V (1535-1560)

Stefano D'Amico
Texas Tech University

Historiography has not yet devoted a great deal of attention to the State of Milan in the age of Charles V. Economic history in particular has not been the subject of any specific study. The few studies available, such as the classic works by Federico Chabod and the more recent analysis of the *estimo* by Giovanni Vigo, focus on the political and fiscal turbulence affecting the State around the middle of the century, but they allow us only a few glimpses into the economic conditions of the time¹. The age of Charles V has often been described as a period of economic decline or, at best, an era of «stagnation» for the State of Milan. After the disastrous years between 1521-1529 when wars, famine and plague ravaged the population, the state of constant military activity and fiscal pressure would not allow the Lombard economy to recover². Only after the peace of Cateau Cambresis in 1559, under the rule of Philip II, would the State of Milan again reach the same level of prosperity as the beginning of the century. Through the reconstruction of the demographic trends and the industrial and commercial activities between 1535 and 1560, this essay will illustrate the way in which the population and the economic system were already on their way to recovery under Charles V and will demonstrate that Philip II in fact inherited the State during a period of rapid growth.

In 1535, the year of the death of Francis II Sforza, Lombardy was in a state of devastation, with a population drastically inferior to that of thirty years earlier and an economy almost annihilated. The Venetian ambassador Giovanni Basadonna wrote in 1533:

¹ CHABOD, F., «L'epoca di Carlo V», in *Storia di Milano*, Milano, 1958, IX, pp. 3-506; VIGO, G., *Fisco e società nella Lombardia del Cinquecento*, Bologna, 1979.

² For a chronicle of those dramatic years see «Cronica milanese di Gianmarco Burigozzo merzaro dal 1500 al 1544», *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 3 (1842), pp. 421-552.

Lo Stato di Milano... è pieno di miseria e di ruina rispetto alle condizioni dei tempi passati ; le quali miseria e ruina non si potranno ristorare in poco spazio essendo ruinate le fabbriche ed estinte le persone, per il ché mancano le industrie³.

The only data we have concerning the population of the city of Milan during those years is the figure of 11,415 hearths provided by Beloch for 1542. That figure, using a multiplier of five people per hearth, would give us a population of approximately 57,000 inhabitants⁴. This data seems to be confirmed by the number of deaths in the city: applying a mortality rate of 32 per thousand to the average of 1737 people deceased annually in the years 1540-1544, we would have a population of approximately 54,000 people⁵. If we consider that forty years earlier the population of the city had probably surpassed 100,000 souls, we have an idea of the catastrophic events of the previous decades⁶. Also to be taken into consideration is the fact that in 1542, the population was already recovering: after the plague of 1528-1529, Milan did not number more than 40,000 inhabitants. The recovery continued to prove itself stronger and stronger in the following years, and by 1555, using mortality as an indicator once again, the population had probably reached approximately 80,000 people.

This trend is confirmed in the cases of other Lombard cities. The population of Pavia decreased from 16,000 people at the end of the 15th century to 5,000 after the pillaging of the city in 1529⁷. In the following years, the city recovered extremely quickly, and in 1546, numbers had already reached 14,000 inhabitants, a figure that would not change until the end of the century. In the countryside, the demographic boom seems to have been even more marked, and in the *contado* of Milan, the population tripled in the period between 1542 and 1574⁸.

³ «The State of Milan... is full of misery and ruin compared to the conditions of past times; this misery and ruin cannot be canceled in a short period as the economy has collapsed and the people exterminated and therefore, any activity is lacking», cited in ALEATI, G., and CIPOLLA, C. M., «Aspetti e problemi dell'economia milanese e lombarda nei secoli XVI e XVII», in *Storia di Milano*, op. cit., XI, pp. 375-399.

⁴ BESTA, B., «La popolazione di Milano nel periodo della dominazione spagnola», in Atti del congresso per lo studio dei problemi della popolazione (Roma 1931), vol. I, Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Roma, 1933, pp. 593-610; SELLA, D., «Premesse demografiche ai censimenti austriaci», in *Storia di Milano*, op. cit., XII, pp. 459-478. Beloch used a multiplier of 7 people per hearth, definitely too elevated considering that in 1576 the average household in Milan counted 4.5 people (D'AMICO, S., *Le contrade e la città. Sistema produttivo e spazio urbano a Milano fra Cinque e Seicento*, Milano, 1994).

⁵ For the number of deaths see Archivio di Stato di Milano (henceforth ASM), *Popolazione*, parte antica, 64. The average mortality rate in urban early modern Europe was usually around 40 per thousand. However, the number of deaths is probably underestimated and for the years in which we have reliable figures of the population of the city (1576, 1610) the deceased represent a percentage of about 32 per thousand.

⁶ For the population of Milan under the Sforza see CIPOLLA, C. M., «L'economia milanese dalla metà del secolo XIV: i movimenti economici generali (1350-1500)», in *Storia di Milano*, op. cit., VIII, pp. 337-385.

⁷ ALEATI, G., *La popolazione di Pavia durante il dominio spagnolo*, Milano, 1957, pp. 13-14.

⁸ BEONIO BROCCHERI, V., «Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo». *Famiglie e mestieri nel Ducato di Milano in età spagnola*, Milano, 2000, p. 43.

Therefore, despite the warfare that directly or indirectly involved the Lombard territory until 1559, both the urban and rural population managed to develop at an astonishing rate⁹, helped most certainly by the migratory flows from neighboring states. From the end of the 1530s, thousands of peasants from the Piacenza, Brescia and Ferrara regions arrived in Lombardy to take advantage of the favorable conditions¹⁰.

The countryside and agricultural activities were quickly revitalized and many immigrants, often very qualified, chose to settle down in the towns¹¹.

Nevertheless most official documents of the time portray the economic conditions of the State as extremely delicate and oftentimes desperate. In 1542, the town of Pavia claimed that

per che per li tumultuosi tempi li mercanti hanno cessato di far lavorari et molti poveri arteri ne viveano dritto stentando et hora cum gran difficultà si poteno rescatare il vivere (...) molti ne sono fugiti et più ne fugiranno di presente per le nove esattioni...¹².

In August 1544, Milanese merchants denied a loan of 17,000 scudi to Governor Del Vasto claiming the city to be completely exhausted of money because of all the taxes paid and loans offered¹³. Without any doubt, Milan and the other Lombard cities had to contribute heavily to military expenses. However, as evident in the previous reports, most of the documents we have concerning the industrial activities of these years are responses to or complaints about the heavy tributes imposed by the Spanish government, and for this reason must be taken with a grain of salt.

Several sources belong to the mass of documentation produced after the decree by Charles V that ordered a census (*estimo*) for the levy of a tax (*mensuale*) on all movable and unmovable assets in 1543¹⁴. Both the central and local authorities, in an attempt to determine the amount and distribution of wealth within the state, and individual communities and guilds willing to defend their particular interests, produced an astounding number of papers. These documents are extremely interesting but frequently unreliable, particularly when we use them to reconstruct the economy of the

⁹ In 1540, the birth rate was 44 per thousand in a small town like Monza and 68 per thousand in the countryside (CIPOLLA, C. M., «Per la storia della popolazione lombarda nel secolo XVI», in *Studi in onore di Gino Luzzatto*, Milano, 1950, II, pp. 144-155).

¹⁰ ALEATI, G., and CIPOLLA, C. M., «Aspetti e problemi...», *op. cit.*, p. 383.

¹¹ For some cases of this new immigration like the one of Matteo Orsi, a merchant from Casale Monferrato, or the brothers Serafino and Andrea Adami, armor makers from Brescia, see ASM, *Albinoggio*, 21, october 10, 1572; 6, june 26, 1567.

¹² «Because of the tumultuous times, merchants ceased their orders and many poor craftsmen who already lived with difficulty now are having problems surviving (...) many have left and more will leave now because of the new taxes», quoted in ALEATI, G., and CIPOLLA, C. M., «Il trend economico nello Stato di Milano durante i secoli XVI e XVII. Il caso di Pavia», in *Bullettino della Società Pavese di Storia Patria*, 1-2 (1950), pp. 21-33.

¹³ CHABOD, F., «L'epoca di Carlo V», *op. cit.*, p. 347.

¹⁴ On the *estimo* see VIGO, G., *Fisco e società...*, *op. cit.*

middle of the century. One of the reasons why the central decades of the sixteenth century have always been characterized as a period of overall decline that came to an end only after 1560 is because, until the actual introduction of the tax in 1595, the merchants hoped that the assets to be considered for taxation would be the ones of 1548 and not the ones of 1580, much more accurately verifiable¹⁵. The increase of trade between 1548 and 1580 was therefore exaggerated by merchants who helped to depict Milan in 1548 as an underdeveloped city with a weak textile industry. In particular, the silk sector, according to them, counted only three or four merchants and no more than seven silk shops¹⁶.

In reality, the condition of Milanese manufactures in those years was not so gloomy as described. A document issued by the *Tribunale di Provvisione* in that period stressed that the major income of the city came from gold, silver, and silk cloths, as well as wool, cotton, arms, iron, and leather goods¹⁷. The silk industry, introduced in Milan in the middle of the 15th century, had probably suffered the most because of the calamities of the previous decades and the loss of skilled labor¹⁸. However, in the years of 1548 and 1549 alone, 30 gold and silk merchants were approved by the guild, and the silk sector was at the beginning of a strong expansion, due also to the increase in the consumption of luxury goods in the following years. By 1560, the industry that in the 1540s employed 6,000 people, had reached and surpassed the levels of the beginning of the century, numbering 18-20,000 workers¹⁹. New working processes and types of cloths were introduced: in 1553, Giovanni Pietro Limonta and Francesco Raynoni were authorized to make cloths of gold, silver and silk, or silk and cotton at the fashion of Morea²⁰; the following year the Senate gave permission to Milanese merchants to make cloths of silk, velvet, damask and ormesino in the measure and shape of Genoa (shorter than that of the Milanese)²¹. In 1558, the creation of the new guild of the weavers of *bindelli e lavorini* confirmed the success of this new production²².

One clear sign of the prosperity of the silk industry in Milan in these years is the activity of the merchant Giovanni Antonio Orombelli, who, at his death in 1553, left in his warehouse 18,001 *braccia* of silk and gold cloths, equal to 150 *pezze* or 4,800

¹⁵ SABA, F., *Il valimento del mercimonio del 1580*, Milano, 1990, p. 69.

¹⁶ ALEATI, G., and CIPOLLA, C. M., «Aspetti e problemi...», *op. cit.*, p. 384.

¹⁷ Archivio Storico Civico di Milano (henceforth ASCM), *Materie*, 259.

¹⁸ On the introduction and the first stages of the silk industry in Milan see BARBIERI, G., *Economia e politica nel ducato di Milano, 1386-1535*, Milano, 1938, pp. 87-91.

¹⁹ For the figures in 1500 see BARBIERI, G., *Economia e politica...*, *op. cit.*, p. 90; for 1540 see ASCM, *Materie*, 259; for 1560 see DE MADDALENA, A., *Dalla città al borgo. Avvio di una metamorfosi economica e sociale nella Lombardia spagnola*, Milano, 1982, p. 54.

²⁰ ASM, *Registri della Cancelleria*, serie XXI, 1, august 29, 1553.

²¹ ASM, *Commercio*, 228, october 18, 1554.

²² VERGA, E., «Le corporazioni delle industrie tessili in Milano: loro rapporti e conflitti nei secoli XVI e XVII», in *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, 30 (1903), pp. 64-125.

libre piccole of raw silk. The same amount of silk was worked yearly in that period in a small but still important center of the industry like Mantua²³.

The production of silk cloths was not limited to Milan any longer and spread to other Lombard centers during these years. The silk industry had been introduced to Como in 1510, and after a period of decline, was re-established in 1551, and developed quickly in the following years²⁴. Silk workshops appeared in Pavia in 1547, and in Cremona in 1549²⁵. In Pavia, the manufacture expanded rapidly, and in 1554, it counted more than twenty masters and fifty looms²⁶. In addition, local merchants and craftsmen also oversaw the spinning of silk and the refining of cloths, making Pavia manufactures completely autonomous.

Probably in the 1550s, the silk manufacture surpassed the wool industry, traditionally the leading sector of Milanese textile industry, both in value and production. In 1554, the value of silk production and trade was likely equal to that of the wool industry, as both the silk and the wool merchants were asked to pay a tax of 2,000 *scudi* to the royal treasure²⁷. This is even more interesting considering the fact that the wool industry, although it was losing ground to that of the silk, still enjoyed a high degree of prosperity. In 1554, more than 15,000 people worked in the sector, and between 1531 and 1560, 214 new wool merchants registered in the guild²⁸. The figures for the two decades from 1541-1550 (77) and 1551-1560 (81) are the highest in the century with the exception of the decade from 1511-1520 (122). At the beginning of the rule of Charles V, the wool sector was still able to attract heavy investment from merchants and bankers, as is documented in 1536 when Giovanni e Tommaso Marino replied to state officials requesting a loan that they did not have any cash «per aver exposso grossa somma in impresa di lana et altre imprese»²⁹. In the 1550s, the wool sector showed the first signs of decline in Milan and other large Lombard towns. In Como, in 1553, 221 of 986 heads of household for whom we have occupational information, worked in the wool sector. However, 111 of them lived in a state of poverty³⁰. On the other hand, in the small towns and rural villages, wool production was skyrocketing. In 1553, among the 5,000 inhabitants of the town of Vigevano, 27.4 per 100 of the

²³ DE MADDALENA, A., *Dalla città al borgo...*, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

²⁴ VIGO, G., *Fisco e società...*, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 12; idem, «Tra sviluppo e declino: l'economia pavese nella seconda metà del Cinquecento», in *Rivista Milanese di Economia*, 1994, núm. 49, pp. 108-132.

²⁶ ALEATI, G., and CIPOLLA, C. M., «Il trend economico...», op. cit., p. 28.

²⁷ ASCM, *Materie*, 259.

²⁸ For the number of workers see ASCM, *Materie*, 570; on the registration of the wool merchants see SANTORO, C., *Le matricole dei mercanti di lana sottile di Milano*, Milano, 1940, p. XXVIII. In 1570, 110 wool merchants, 91 *drapari* (drapers), 26 *berretari* (beret makers) were active in the city (ASCM, *Materie*, 570).

²⁹ «... had employed a substantial amount of money in a wool company and other trades» cited in CHABOD, F., «L'epoca di Carlo V...», op. cit., p. 406.

³⁰ MIRA, G., *Aspetti dell'economia comasca*, Como, 1936, pp. 148-149.

heads of household worked in the textile industry, primarily in the wool sector, and already in 1548, there were 41 wool cloth makers, with an annual production of about 1300 pezze³¹. In 1537, Monza counted 228 workers in the wool sector, and the workforce along with production would increase progressively in the following years³². Even villages of a few hundred people such as Lissone, Sesto and Seregno had their share of wool workers, mainly weavers³³.

The third sector of the Milanese textile industry which, although far from the levels of the previous century, still employed thousands of workers was the manufacture of cotton and fustians. In 1548, the guild of the fustian merchants counted 48 masters and about 10,000 people who worked in the sector³⁴. In 1554, they had to pay a tax of only 600 *scudi* versus the 2,000 *scudi* each paid by their colleagues in the wool and silk sectors. In 1560, their number was reduced to 18³⁵. The crisis affected also Cremona, which from the 14th century had been one of the major European centers in the production of fustian cloth³⁶. Even more than in the case of wool, it is clear that in these years the sector was transferred from the urban to the rural manufactures. In 1548, the fustian makers of Abbiategrasso felt strong enough to oppose the Milanese guild, refusing to open their workshops to an inspection³⁷. In 1559, the transfer of urban labor to the countryside, also to neighboring states, had probably reached serious proportions, and the authorities issued a decree that forbade merchants and craftsmen to leave the city³⁸. Despite these efforts, by the 1570s, the major centers of fustian and cotton production would be lesser towns such as Busto Arsizio and Gallarate.

Also the second leading sector of Milanese economy, the production of arms and armor, showed clear signs of prosperity around the middle of the 16th century. Already under the rule of Francis II Sforza, Milan had regained its predominance: in 1531-1533 there were 32 masters *armaioli* (arms-makers) in the city³⁹. The production of armor, particularly in the manufacture of luxury items for tournaments and parades was flourishing once more⁴⁰. The brothers Filippo Jacopo and Francesco Negrolo, active between 1532 and 1545, exported their products all over Europe. Military activities also provided

³¹ OLIVERO COLOMBO, D., «Mercanti e popolari nella Vigevano del primo Cinquecento», in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 85 (1973), pp. 114-161.

³² BEONIO BROCCIERI, V., *Piazza universale...*, op. cit., p. 222.

³³ In 1541 in Lissone there were 11 hearths out of 63 employed in the wool sector, in Sesto 13 out of 70 and in Seregno 23 out of 189 (CIPOLLA, C. M., «Per la storia della popolazione lombarda...», op. cit., p. 153).

³⁴ ASCM, *Materie*, 428; for the number of workers employed, *Materie*, 259.

³⁵ ASCM, *Materie* 259; 428, list of masters of July, 5, 1560.

³⁶ MAZZAOUI, M. F., *The Italian Cotton Industry in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1981.

³⁷ ASCM, *Materie*, 428, document of July 28, 1548.

³⁸ ASM, *Commercio*, 1. Many Milanese workers had moved beyond the Po river in the areas of Monticello and Busseto where they made fustian and wool cloths.

³⁹ GAMBER, O., «L'arte milanese dell'armatura», in *Storia di Milano*, op. cit., XI, pp. 735-736.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

favorable opportunities for the metal workers. Supplies of arms were constantly requested by the Spanish army, and the Milanese craftsmen were ready to satisfy this need. The foundries in Valsassina were very active between 1537 and 1554, and the foundry of Milan alone worked 14,200 kilograms of metal every year between 1549 and 1565⁴¹. New businesses developed like that of Vincenzo Figino who, in 1555, asked for the privilege of starting up an arquebus factory⁴². Metal working was not an exclusively urban activity: in Monza and Concorezzo, several families worked as needle makers, and in Busto the production of iron thread increased throughout the century⁴³.

The last important sector of the economy, leather working, had recovered as well: there were 17 masters *pellizzari* (fur workers) in 1548 (in 1570, their number would decrease to 13), and in 1560, 36 masters *centurari* (belt makers) and *borsinari* (purse makers) worked in Milan⁴⁴. Another guild which prospered was that of the *guantari* (glove makers): in 1554, Orlando Colli of Vigevano who resided and worked in Milan obtained permission from Milanese authorities to move to Antwerp with two journeymen as there were too many masters in his guild in the Lombard capital⁴⁵.

Although the prosperity of Milan was based on flourishing textile and arms industries, a sizable part of its commercial fortune had always been placed in its role as the great clearing house between the Italian states and the rest of the continent⁴⁶. The new role of the State within the Spanish empire offered new opportunities to Lombard merchants. The routes to Genoa to the south, and through the Gotthard Pass and the Grisons to the north, so essential to the political and military strategy of the empire, progressively developed their commercial functions as well⁴⁷. Overland trade still played a predominant role in commercial activities. A high percentage of the transport of goods between the peninsula and central and northern Europe passed through northern Lombardy.

The transport organization had progressively been perfected since the end of the Middle Ages. From the beginning of the sixteenth century, it had acquired precise features with the establishment of the figure of the long distance carrier, who took responsibility for the transportation of goods on specific routes on behalf of the merchants⁴⁸.

⁴¹ FRUMENTO, A., *Imprese lombarde nella storia della siderurgia italiana*, Società Acciaierie Falck, Milano, 1963, II, pp. 58-59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴³ CIPOLLA, C. M., «Per la storia della popolazione...», op. cit., p. 153; SELLA, D., *Crisis and Continuity. The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century*, Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁴ ASCM, *Materie*, 754 and 256.

⁴⁵ ASM, *Registri della Cancelleria*, serie XXI, 1, march 9, 1554.

⁴⁶ FRANGIONI, L., *Milano e le sue strade. Costi di trasporto e vie di commercio dei prodotti milanesi alla fine del Trecento*, Bologna, 1983.

⁴⁷ KELLENBENZ, H., «Commercio tra la Lombardia e l'Europa centrale e orientale dal xv alla metà del xvii secolo», in *Commercio in Lombardia*, Milano, 1986, pp. 95-100.

⁴⁸ BERGIER, J. F., «Le trafic à travers les alpes et les liaisons transalpines du haut moyen age au xviiie siècle», in *Le Alpi e l'Europa*, Bari, 1982, III, pp. 1-72.

The *condotta* companies were enterprises with clear capitalistic traits that represented one of the first exclusively service oriented industries. At the middle of the sixteenth century nearly all transportation from the Low Countries to Italy was provided by only six companies and until the end of the century the main route went through Antwerp, Basel and Milan⁴⁹. After the immigration of many Italian merchants for religious reasons at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Basel became the base of the Milanese carriers, such as the Rovellasca and later the Annoni, who controlled transit through the Gotthard pass and the Grisons, and had branch offices in Lucerne and Altdorf⁵⁰. The use of the Swiss passes became even more frequent after the treaty with the Swiss Cantons in 1552 that allowed free transit and exemption from duties to all goods coming from the State of Milan⁵¹. Lombard merchants were active all over Germany as well, and in 1554, the city council of Cologne ordered the construction of a warehouse specifically for Lombard goods⁵².

Another extremely important market for Lombard goods was Lyon, evidenced in 1569, when one third of all Italian imports were silk cloths, gold thread, ribbons, embroidered purses and gloves from Milan⁵³. The export of Milanese goods to Lyon had increased remarkably after 1540, and the two cities were intertwined by assiduous commercial relations⁵⁴. It is, therefore, understandable that the prohibition of any commercial and financial exchange with the French city proclaimed by the Spanish authorities in 1553 seriously alarmed Lombard businessmen. The governor of Milan, Ferrante Gonzaga, was forced to suspend the decree for 45 days in order to allow the representatives of the Milanese merchants Gerolamo Pecchio and Bartolomeo Porro to organize a diplomatic expedition to the emperor⁵⁵.

International exchange was not the only aspect of Lombard trade. Along with the growth of a strong rural industry, a network of local fairs and markets developed in the central years of the century. In fact, the age of Charles V could be seen as the moment of major expansion of the system of rural markets in Lombardy: around 1543, there were sixty-one markets spread in the different areas in the State, with an higher

⁴⁹ BRULEZ, W., «Les routes commerciales d'Angleterre en Italie au XVIe siècle», in *Studi in onore di Amintore Fanfani*, Milano, 1962, pp. 124-183; idem, «Les transports routiers entre les Pays-Bas et l'Italie aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles», in *Trasporti e sviluppo economico. Secoli XIII-XVIII*, Proceedings of the «quinta settimana di studio» of the Istituto Francesco Datini, Prato, may 4-10, 1973, Firenze, 1986, pp. 257-264.

⁵⁰ KELLENBENZ, H., «Commercio...», op. cit., p. 99.

⁵¹ FORMENTINI, M., *La dominazione spagnola in Lombardia*, Milano, 1881, pp. 100-101.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁵³ SELLA, D., *Crisis and Continuity...*, op. cit., p. 47.

⁵⁴ GASCON, R., «Le couple Lyon-Milan dans l'Europe des affaires au XVIe siècle. La primauté milanaise», in *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel. Histoire économique du monde méditerranéen (1450-1650)*, Toulouse, 1973, pp. 177-186; CIRIACONO, S., «Per una storia dell'industria di lusso in Francia. La concorrenza italiana nei secoli XVI e XVII», in *Ricerche di Storia Sociale e Religiosa*, 1979, pp. 181-202.

⁵⁵ ASCM, *Materie*, 258, 259.

concentration in the contado of Milan⁵⁶. In fairs like the one held periodically in Vigevano, a variety of goods were exchanged, in particular wool and cotton cloths and leather items⁵⁷. These goods were frequently exported beyond the borders of the State as far as Piedmont, Genoa, Naples, Palermo and France⁵⁸.

There are enough clues concerning both the different kind of production and the division of labor between cities and countryside to allow the speculation that the central years of the 16th century were fundamental in redefining Lombard economy.

If on the one hand, warfare and the fiscal exaction connected to it were a burden to the economy of the State, on the other hand, the need for military supply contributed to the recovery of specific manufactures. The flow of Spanish gold and silver through Milan also revitalized the financial and industrial sectors. In fact, the large profits coming from the continuous operations related to the needs of the crown were fundamental to the development of a new group of local bankers and businessmen who often invested their capital in manufactures and trades. In addition, merchants and entrepreneurs were able to profit from the decreasing cost of labor. Indeed, the dramatic increase in prices during this period was not paralleled by salaries that remained stable or also decreased⁵⁹.

A new division of the production between urban and rural industries was introduced in this period. During these years, silk became the primary product of the State of Milan. Raw silk and silk cloths were indubitably the main goods to be exported from Lombardy. The growing role of silk within the urban textile industry during the second half of the century is clearly evidenced by the data obtained from an analysis of Milanese censuses. In 1560, 44 per 100 of the heads of household worked in the silk sector, 42.5 per 100 in the wool industry and 13.5 per 100 in other textile manufactures. In 1576, the proportions changed to 65.9 per 100, 23.8 per 100, and 10.3 per 100 respectively. In 1610, the percentages were 71.7, 22.3, and 6 respectively⁶⁰.

Rural industries already existed in the 15th century, but only after the severe crisis of 1521-1529 would they develop to such an extent as to play an integral part in the regional economic system. Charles V maintained the policy of the previous Milanese dukes, weakening the control of the cities over the hinterland. The introduction of the *mensuale* would lead to the creation of the Congregazione del Ducato, consisting of representatives of the rural district. The new body, initially in charge of the allocation

⁵⁶ There were 22 markets in the district of Milan, 3 in the district of Lodi, 10 in the district of Cremona, 6 in the district of Pavia, 8 in the district of Tortona and 12 in the area of Novara and Lake Maggiore (SABA, F., «Le forme dello scambio. I mercati rurali», in *Commercio in Lombardia*, op. cit., pp. 176-185).

⁵⁷ MIRA, G., «L'organizzazione fieristica della bassa lombarda alla fine del medioevo e nell'età moderna», in *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, 1958, pp. 289-300. On the subject see also idem, *Le fiere lombarde nei secoli XIV-XVI. Prime indagini*, Como, 1955.

⁵⁸ OLIVERO COLOMBO, D., «Mercanti e popolari...», op. cit., p. 135.

⁵⁹ VIGO, G., «Real Wages of the Working Class in Italy: Building Workers' Wages (14th to 18th Century)», *Journal of European Economic History*, 3 (1974), pp. 378-399.

⁶⁰ D'AMICO, S., *Le contrade e la città ...*, op. cit., p. 79.

of the tax, progressively increased its power, and the contado finally gained a voice in public affairs⁶¹. On the economic level, while the leading role of Milan increased, the city never became a monopolistic regional capital like Florence⁶². By the middle of the 16th century, the Lombard urban network had recovered and in addition, a strong system of rural industries, perfectly integrated in the regional economy, had developed in different areas. Until the plague of 1630, this configuration would not change and the economy of Spanish Lombardy would be characterized by a network of competing urban centers and by an active proto-industrial district in the countryside.

⁶¹ SELLA, D., *Crisis and Continuity...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

⁶² EPSTEIN, S. R., «Town and country: economy and institutions in late medieval Italy», in *Economic History Review*, 46/3 (1993), pp. 453-477.