

CUSTOMS SERVICES OF THE PAPAL STATES IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Abstract. This article presents the activities of the Papal Customs Service in the 19th century. This service consisted of civil officials and a military corps known as *Truppa di Finanza* (Finance Troop), was established in 1786 by Card. Ruffo, the Papal States' Treasurer General, to combat rampant smuggling. The main customs posts of the Papal States were located in the free ports of Ancona and Civitavecchia, in the city of Ferrara and in Rome. It should be noted that customs regulations were not uniform throughout the country. The practice of smuggling inflicted significant harm upon the Papal States, which had adopted a protectionist stance, entailing the imposition of taxes on foreign goods to promote domestic production. A special procedure was adopted to facilitate the discovery of cases of smuggling or corruption.

Keywords: Papal States; XIX century; customs offices; smuggling; customs laws; *Truppa di Finanza*; documents of the Papal States.

1. STATUS QUAESTIONIS

Each state reserves the right to protect its internal market by establishing customs services and guardhouses, imposing import and export duties, conducting border controls, and preventing smuggling. Throughout its history, the Papal States was no exception in this regard.

It should be noted that the Papal States' foreign trade focused on the following main commodity categories: 1) imported: coal, wood, metals, salted fish, colonial products, yarn, wool, paper, sugar, cloth, oil, luxury goods, glassware, porcelain, metals and their products; 2) exported: hemp, silk and wool yarn, cheese, cured meats, antiques, terracotta, flour, raw hides, and ropes.

This article presents the activities of the papal customs service in the 19th century. The presentation will also cover the origins of the papal customs service and the relevant legislation concerning customs policy. All translations from Latin and Old Italian into English were made by the author of these words.

2. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CUSTOMS SERVICES OF THE PAPAL STATES

The Papal Customs consisted of civil officials and a military corps known as *Truppa di Finanza* (Finance Troop), established in 1786 by Monsignor Ruffo, the Papal States' Treasurer General, in imitation of the Light Troops Legion (*Legione Truppe Leggere*), which had been active for some years in the Kingdom of Sardinia to combat rampant smuggling [Pallotta 1833, 125-43]. This corps was disbanded by Austrian General Enzo Caprara in 1797, during the reorganization of the Papal Army. The French customs system, which succeeded the Papal Customs system during the Napoleonic era, traditionally organised into civil service and active military service, reinstated the military organisation of the Papal Customs Guards (*Guardie Doganali Pontificie*) [Fosi 2011], which was maintained even with the papal restoration [Nicali 1997, 23; Fuselli 2014, 35; Corcione 1993, 21].

The Treasurer General, Cardinal Guerrieri, reinstated the Finance Troops corp, which was increased to 100 men and, in 1817, made completely independent from the customs authorities and organised with a distinctly military focus. Alongside the land forces, Cardinal Guerrieri established Coast Guard Squadrons (*Squadriglie Guardiacoste*) in the free ports of Ancona and Civitavecchia to monitor the territorial sea [Nicali 1997, 23].

The 1833 report on the Papal Customs highlighted the following points: "With regard to the Finance Troop, it would be prudent to postpone any consideration of reform until such time as the unit has shed its character as a line troop and abandoned military discipline and training in favour of assuming solely the role of an armed customs force, exclusively dedicated to the suppression of smuggling" [ibid., 23].

The main customs posts of the Papal States were located in the free ports of Ancona and Civitavecchia, and in the city of Ferrara. Rome itself had many customs offices: 1) the Land Customs (*Dogana di Terra*), near Piazza Colonna, responsible for checking people and goods arriving by land; 2) the Ripa Grande Customs (*Dogana di Ripa Grande*), near Porta Portese, responsible for foreign traffic, carried out via the Tiber River between the city and the sea; 3) the Fiumicino Customs (*Dogana di Fiumicino*), at the mouth of the Tiber, which handled the navigation and movement of boats; 4) the Ripetta Customs (*Dogana di Ripetta*), located in the port of Ripetta between the bridge and the Ara Pacis, controlled internal traffic; 5) the People's Customs (*Dogana del Popolo*), located at Porta del Popolo, which was primarily used for passenger traffic because the main roads of the Papal States, the Cassia and Flaminia, converged there [Nicali 1997, 23-24].

The most significant customs house in Rome was undoubtedly that of Ripa Grande, where the majority of goods arriving from abroad

converged; and it was also the location where the most significant smuggling attempts took place. In 1849, Director General Carleschi established the Customs Port Guard Service (*Servizio Doganale di Guardia-Porto*), which proved especially important in combating smuggling during nighttime hours. The port guard vessels were crewed by a boatswain and three financial guards from the maritime branch and reported to the Port Captain and the Regulator of the Ripa Customs [ibid., 24].

The most significant customs offices included the following professional figures: governor, auditor, accountant, cashier, appraiser, goods custodian, dispatcher, weigher, stamp collector, stamp keeper, declarant, bill collector, pupils, and porters. In the “bollettone” customs offices (e.g., Fighille, Pistrino), there was often an absence of the full range of professional figures required by customs legislation. In most cases, the staff consisted of the most senior minister, who acted as regulator, assisted by two clerks (the most senior of whom acted as auditor) [Fuselli 2014, 48].

3. CUSTOMS POLICY

It should be noted that customs regulations were not uniform throughout the country. In addition to being valid in individual provinces, these regulations governed customs matters, as well as internal consumption duties, in different ways.

The city of Rome had its own customs regime, governed by a 1738 decree of Clement XII. Although the tax was to be paid by “everyone”, various exemptions were in place for cardinals, the Tribunal of the Holy Office, and various ecclesiastical orders [Gurmacci 1752, 591-92]. With regard to the Land Customs, couriers and carriers were required to bring all goods to Customs for the usual inspections. The city of Rome was surrounded by walls, and the porters in charge of the gates could not open them without an order from the Customs. Carriers who failed to present their carriages, loaded with goods and passengers, to the Minister Custodian of Customs were punished with three lengths of rope, confiscation of the goods and the means of transport, and a fine. In the event of false declarations, a fine of one hundred scudi would be issued. Furthermore, should false declarations be made by customs officials, they would be subject to three public fines. Customs legislation established the principle of *merci da passo*, meaning transit, permitted only with a guarantee and accompanied by a security deposit. For arrivals by sea, the goods had to be handed over to the Port Customs Commissioner and the Customs Commissioner of Ripa della Nota [Nicali 1997, 24-25; Fuselli 2014, 36; Corcione 1993, 21].

A special procedure was adopted to facilitate the discovery of cases of smuggling or corruption. This procedure had to be carried out within 24 hours of the incident. The individual who came forward with the allegations was entitled to a reward of 100 *scudi*. In 1824, the General Treasurer issued a decree that reorganised customs regulations. This regulation abolished corporal punishment, while still providing for heavy fines of up to two-thirds of the value of the cargo, in addition to confiscation. Concurrently, more precise provisions were issued regarding cargo manifests, incoming ship inspections, and consumables available to the crew [Nicali 1997, 25].

The Customs Tariff issued in 1738, concurrent with the legislative provisions enacted by Clement XII, was very simple: 14% of the value for incoming goods, 3% for outgoing goods. This tariff was superseded by the French one during the period in which the Papal States were incorporated into the French Empire. However, it was reinstated in 1814 with the return of Pius VII [ibid.].

A new tariff was issued in 1830, which was more detailed than the previous one. In 1847, the Papal States joined the Customs Union with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Kingdom of Sardinia. However, this union remained only on paper due to the revolutionary uprisings that occurred the following year. The following shows the revenues of the main customs offices of the Papal States in 1858: Terra di Roma Customs – 420000 *scudi*; Ripa Grande Customs, located in Rome – 396000 *scudi*; Ancona Customs – 396000 *scudi*; Ancona Customs – 229000 *scudi*; Bologna Customs – 228000 *scudi*; Pontelagoscuro Customs – 180000 *scudi*; Civitavecchia Customs – 92000 *scudi* [Nicali 1997, 25].

For example, the customs office in Pistrino (Umbria) was a *dogana di bollettone* - a second-line customs post. Here, goods were checked and a *bollettone* (escort bill) was issued. This document certified the payment of taxes and the legal transit of goods. The Pistrino customs house was administratively dependent on the Superintendency of Citta di Castello, as were ten other offices: Citta di Castello, Lerchi, Cospaia, Uppiano, San Secondo, Petroja, Petrelle, Belfore, Borgo Pace and Carpegna [Fuselli 2014, 36-40].

As of mid-1836, the border customs officials of the Papal States were granted the authority to collect the “barrier tax”, a levy imposed on individuals entering the state’s jurisdiction with carts or livestock. The introduction of the tax was decided following the example of neighbouring states, where it had long been levied, and because the papal authorities believed it was inappropriate for the state alone to be responsible for maintaining the roads, which also carried foreign subjects. The customs house of Pistrino (and subsequently that of Fighille) was also granted authorisation to collect the barrier tax [Lambruschini 1836, 354-56].¹

¹ *Elenco delle dogane ai confini dello Stato Pontificio, nelle quali si esige la tassa di barriera*, in: *Raccolta delle leggi e disposizioni di pubblica amministrazione nello Stato Pontificio emanate nell'anno 1836*, vol. II, Stamperia della Reverenda Camera Apostolica, Roman 1836, p. 46.

It is interesting to note that leeches were smuggled through Pistrino. It was the responsibility of the border guards to ensure that leeches were not collected from reservoirs and subsequently exported abroad. This export ban, issued on three occasions in 1835, 1844 and 1845, was necessitated by the requirement to ensure sufficient quantities for therapeutic purposes within the Papal States [Tosti 1835, 318-19; Morichini 1845, 27; Idem 1849, 27-28].

G. Monti noted in his *Manuale di legge organica ossia istruzione elementare ad uso degl'impegnati delle dogane dello Stato Ecclesiastico*: "PESTRINO. In the village of this name, there is a customs house, located in a mediocre area, 7 miles from the Superintendency, 158 from Rome, and 2 miles from the border. This is of the utmost importance because it is close to the Tuscan towns of Monterchi and Anghiari, and the city of S[an] Sepolcro, which are places of commerce that deal with the Ecclesiastical State in various goods and products" [Monti 1832, 99-100].

A. Tosti, the General Treasurer, issued a notification on 15th December 1837 (*Notificazione del 15 dicembre 1837*) that, with effect from 1st January 1838, all land borders (including Pistrino) would be subject to the following regulation: "Article 1. Conveyors of goods arriving from abroad are obliged to present themselves at the first customs post corresponding to the border point through which they enter the Papal State. At this post, goods may be cleared, a transit bill may be issued, or goods may be accompanied to another customs office. Conveyors of goods are not permitted to bring their goods to the aforementioned customs post by the route they are most comfortable with. Instead, goods must be introduced at the designated points and then travel the legal routes leading to the individual customs posts near the border. These legal routes are indicated in the attached list, which also lists the customs offices authorised to establish or discharge transit points. These provisions also apply to livestock introduced for customs clearance or for grazing.

Article 2. Goods found at locations or on routes not specified above will be seized [*in commissum*], along with the means used to transport them, regardless of their owner. This will be done without prejudice to any penalties that may be applied, depending on the type of smuggling, under the provisions of the laws in force. The same protocol will be applied to livestock. Both smuggling and penalties imposed by the laws in force will be dealt with in accordance with the regulations in force. [...].

Article 4. Goods or livestock that cross the border customs post without a regular bill, even if they have taken the legal route, and are caught in the stretch that forms a continuation of the same road from the customs post towards the interior, or towards another customs post, will fall *in commissum* in the manner indicated in the previous articles" [Tosti 1838, 264-66].

The presentation of goods to customs was a mandatory requirement for all individuals entering the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from the border,

and it was also applicable to goods intended for export: “Article 8. Any goods or merchandise subject to the extraction tax that reaches the border area is subject to seizure if it is not on a road leading directly to the border customs post. This is even more likely if it has crossed the customs post without being accompanied by a regular customs bill or if it is being transported outside the designated highways for introduction, as per Article 2. Such goods will be confiscated in accordance with the current laws and regulations on smuggling, as outlined in Article 5. This provision also applies to livestock, as outlined in Article 1” [Tosti 1838, 268].

The Pistrino customs house was relocated to Fighille in 1842. The reasons for this are as yet unclear. The notification ordering the move does not explain: “The Pestrino customs house, which is under the jurisdiction of Città di Castello, is to be relocated to Fichille along the same route, in proximity to the border” [Cristaldi 1843, 248-49]. It is reasonable to assume that the decision to relocate the customs office closer to the border with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was driven by the need to enhance the effectiveness of measures to combat smuggling. According to traditional local folklore, which remains in circulation to this day, smugglers would congregate in the building near the border, being alerted by the local population about the customs officers [Fuselli 2014, 39-40].

In 1843, the papal authorities issued regulations regarding the entry of carriages into the Papal States. As carriages used by travellers were exempt from duty, many individuals took advantage of this by bringing in new carriages manufactured abroad and passing them off as their own means of transportation. The citizens of the Papal States had a well-established practice of leaving the country in old carriages, which they would discard immediately after crossing the border. They would then re-enter the country in new carriages, thus evading payment of duties to the treasury. From this point onward, the papal customs offices would be responsible for issuing transit bills for foreigners passing through the State. In contrast, citizens of the Papal States would be required to obtain a *manifesto a rimettere*, detailing the characteristics of their vehicle [Cristaldi 1844, 7-10].

Tariffa generale dei dazi [General tariff of duties] of 1830 addressed the importation of books, prints, engravings, and immoral and licentious objects, stipulating that they could be “dutiablely collected” only at the customs posts of Rome, Civitavecchia, Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna, Pesaro, Ancona, Perugia, Acquapendente, and Terracina. Regulations permitted travellers to bring their books with them. In accordance with the law, objects of any kind depicting scandalous or obscene facts and figures, due to their nudity or the immortal or indecent nature of the facts, are prohibited from entering the territory of the State. The items in question were to be seized and sent to the General Treasurer by the first courier [Fuselli 2014, 44].

Individuals entering or exiting the Papal States were also subject to customs inspections. In order to undertake such a journey in accordance with the law, it was necessary to be in possession of a passport. Upon entry, nationals or foreigners were required to present the document issued by their own authorities and stamped by the papal representative [ibid., 43]. The inspection and validation of passports, whether foreign or national, was the responsibility of customs ministers and members of the *Truppa di Finanza*. Individuals presenting themselves at customs who refused to present the document, or did not have one, or whose documents were not in order, were to be turned away from the country or detained pending instructions from the General Directorate of Police [Consalvi 1835, 679-80].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can refer to the opinion of F. Valsecchi, according to whom the different customs policies pursued by the states bordering the Papal States constituted a strong incentive for smuggling. The practice of smuggling inflicted significant harm upon the Papal States, which had adopted a protectionist stance, entailing the imposition of taxes on foreign goods to promote domestic production [Valsecchi 1975, 390]. However, this choice was characterised by a certain prudence, motivated by the Roman authorities' desire to avoid provoking harsh reactions from the states with which they maintained close, and not exclusively commercial, relations.

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