

The dazio of the Leventina and the Dazio Grande

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South of the pass Uri inherited the tolls that the cathedral chapter of Milan and the dukes had levied in the Leventina. The principal toll station lay at Rodi in the upper Leventina, at the upper end of the gorge of the Piottino, where the road descended through a narrow passage that could not be bypassed. The building known as the Dazio Grande, dated 1561, served there as toll station and stopping place and remained a customs post until 1834.¹ The toll levied there financed the maintenance of the difficult road through the Piottino. For Uri the tolls of the Gotthard route were the backbone of its public finances in the eighteenth century: toll and road money made up about 55 per cent of the canton's revenue in 1756 and as much as 72 per cent in 1794. The building still stands at the entrance of the gorge and has been a cultural centre since 1999.² Further tolls were levied at Giornico and Biasca, while the Riviera and Bellinzona had their own. When the merchants complained, Uri generally answered that the tolls paid for the roads, and that the roads were better than those of the competing passes. This argument was not always convincing. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the merchants of Lucerne, Basel and Zurich repeatedly petitioned the Diet of the Confederation about the level of the Leventina tolls. The diplomats of Milan raised the same complaints in the negotiations on the renewal of the capitulations.³

1 The dazio in the bailiwicks

After 1500 and 1512/1513 the Confederates also held the tolls of Bellinzona, Lugano, Locarno, Mendrisio and the Vallemaggia. The three cantons of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden governed Bellinzona, the Riviera and the Val di Blenio jointly, while the twelve cantons governed the other four bailiwicks (Chapter A.II).⁴ In each bailiwick the *dazio* was a public revenue of the ruling cantons, collected under the authority of the *landfogto*. It was normally farmed out (*appaltato*) for a period of years to a local contractor, the *daziere* or *appaltatore del dazio*, who paid a fixed annual rent and

collected the duties for his own account. The rents were shared among the ruling cantons according to their shares in the bailiwick. The syndicators who inspected the bailiwicks each year audited the accounts.⁵

The farming of the *dazio* had consequences that went beyond public finance. The *daziere* was a local notable with capital, since he had to advance the rent and to provide sureties. The office also gave him information on the flows of goods, the solvency of merchants and the prices in the markets. Several of the families that dominated the commerce and the credit of Lugano and Mendrisio in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries held toll leases at some point.⁶ Tax farming was one of the ways in which a local elite accumulated the capital and the knowledge that later went into banking. The pattern is familiar from other European centres, where tax farmers were among the first financiers of the state.

2 Notes

1. HLS, art. "Prato (Leventina)" (as above). ↩
2. HLS, art. "Prato (Leventina)" (as above), for the cultural centre run by the foundation since 1999 ("dal 1999 è un centro culturale per iniziativa della fondazione omonima"); HLS, art. "Zölle" (as above): "Im 18. Jahrhundert bildeten die Zolleinnahmen das Rückgrat der Finanzen des Standes Uri: Die Zoll- und Weggelder machten 1756 rund 55%, 1794 gar rund 72% der Einnahmen aus." ↩
3. Amtliche Sammlung der älteren Eidgenössischen Abschiede, vols 4–7 (Lucerne, Berne, Basel 1858– 1886), passim, on complaints about the Leventina tolls. ↩
4. See Chapter A.II. HLS, art. "Ennetbirgische Vogteien" (Lucienne Hubler, version of 04.10.2017), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/046979/2017-10-04/>. ↩
5. HLS, art. "Gemeine Herrschaften" (André Hostenstein, version of 21.09.2021), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/009817/2021-09-21/>: "Die Vögte legten jährlich Rechenschaft ab", those of the Italian bailiwicks before "Gesandten der regierenden Orte (Syndikat)". HLS, art. "Bellinzona (Gemeinde)" (as above), on the falling price of the toll lease (Zollpacht) at Bellinzona as a sign of its decline as a toll centre. ↩

6. Marco Schnyder, Famiglie e potere. Il ceto dirigente di Lugano e Mendrisio tra Sei e Settecento (Bellinzona 2011). ↩

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