

The vicinanze and degagne of the Leventina as transport cooperatives

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South of the pass the same functions were performed by the rural communes of the Leventina. The valley formed a single valley community divided into eight *vicinanze* (German *Nachbarschaften*, neighbourhood communes), each of which comprised three to five smaller units called *degagne*, some thirty in all.¹ The *vicinanze* were at once political communities, owners of common land (pastures, forests, alps) and associations of the users of that land. Chapter A.I describes their origins as rural communes under the lordship of the cathedral chapter of Milan. In the transit economy, the *vicinanze* along the road acted as transport cooperatives, since the right to carry goods was reserved to the members of the commons, as it was in Uri and Urseren. After agriculture, carrying was the most important trade of the valley and an important secondary income for its peasants. The communal rules of the valley, from the ordinances of single villages to the valley statutes of 1656 and 1713, regulated the use of the forests and pastures, transhumance and the keeping of livestock, including the pack animals, and the same communities organized the order of the carriers on their section of the road.²

A village ordinance of Osco in the upper Leventina, dated 1237, and one of Chiggiogna, dated 1398, are among the oldest surviving statutes of the valley.³ The principle that governed the carrying trade is clear from the later sources: the right to carry goods was attached to membership of the community, and outsiders were excluded from it. The communities depended on their lords for the protection of that right, first on the canons of Milan and later on the government of Uri, which in 1498 issued rules for transport over the whole Gotthard route. Uri appointed the bailiff of the Leventina for a term of three years, and from 1660 for four, and local officials of the valley assisted him.⁴

1 The Susten and the Sustmeister

The physical centre of the system was the *Sust* (Italian *sosta*), a public warehouse at the end of each stage in which goods were unloaded, weighed, recorded and stored until the carriers of the next stage took them on.⁵ The Susten of the Gotthard route stood at Lucerne, at Flüelen on the Lake of Lucerne, at Altdorf, Silenen or Amsteg, at Göschenen or in Urseren, at Airolo, at the stages of the Leventina, at Biasca, at Bellinzona and at Magadino. They were owned by the towns or valley communities, sometimes by the canton, and run by a *Sustmeister* (Italian *sostaro* or *custode della sosta*), who was a public official or a lessee. The *Sustmeister* kept the register of goods received and delivered, collected the warehouse fee (*Sustgeld*, Italian *diritto di sosta*), assigned loads to carriers according to the *Rod* and was responsible for the safekeeping of the goods while they lay in the warehouse.⁶

The *Sust* anticipated several functions of the modern bonded warehouse and of the warehouse keeper under the law of obligations. It was a public facility with a duty to receive goods from any merchant, it issued records that proved the deposit and it combined storage with the collection of public charges. The register of the *Sust* was the evidence on which a merchant relied if goods were lost. Where the warehouse also served as the point of toll collection, as at the Dazio Grande in the Leventina, the functions of the storekeeper and the customs officer were joined in one building.⁷

2 Notes

1. HLS, art. "Leventina" (as above): "Die Leventina bildete eine einzige Talgemeinde, die in acht Nachbarschaften gegliedert war. Diese umfassten ihrerseits drei bis fünf Degagne (insgesamt rund 30)." ↩
2. HLS, art. "Säumerei" (as above), on the reservation of the carrying right to the members of the commons in Uri, Urseren and the Leventina and on the rotation; HLS, art. "Leventina" (as above), for carrying as the most important trade after agriculture ("Nach der Landwirtschaft war die Säumerei das wichtigste Gewerbe im Tal"), for the "Satzungen von 1656 und 1713" and for the communal rules on forests and pastures. The bibliography of that article lists Karl Meyer, Blenio und Leventina von Barbarossa bis Heinrich VII. (Lucerne 1911). ↩

3. HLS, art. "Leventina" (as above), which lists the ordinances of individual villages (Osco 1237, Chiggiogna 1398) among the oldest statutes of the valley. ↩
4. HLS, art. "Säumerei" (as above), on the reservation of the carrying right to the members of the commons and on Uri's regulation of transport on the whole Gotthard route in 1498; HLS, art. "Leventina" (as above): "Dem Vogt, den Uri jeweils für eine dreijährige Amtsdauer ernannte (ab 1660 für vier Jahre), standen lokale Beamte zur Seite." On the Leventina under Uri see also Raffaello Ceschi (ed.), *Storia della Svizzera italiana dal Cinquecento al Settecento* (Bellinzona 2000). ↩
5. HLS, art. "Susten" (Fritz Glauser, version of 18.04.2011), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/007968/2011-04-18/>: Susten served for the short-term storage of transit goods from the later thirteenth century, the Italian term is *sosta*, and the first Sust on the Gotthard route is attested at Flüelen in 1309. ↩
6. HLS, art. "Susten" (as above), on the Sustmeister who collected the Sust fee and on the scale and toll collection at the Sust; HLS, art. "Säumerei" (as above), on the allocation of loads by the Sustmeister. ↩
7. HLS, art. "Prato (Leventina)" (Mario Fransioli, version of 17.02.2026), <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/002082/>: the Dazio Grande (1561) at Rodi was a stopping place and until 1834 a customs post. HLS, art. "Susten" (as above), on toll collection at the Susten. ↩

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