Military Mail of the Post-Napoleonic Papal States: 1815–1870

Purpose and Scope: This military postal history study examines military mail of the Papal States after the establishment of national boundaries by the 1815 Congress of Vienna, with the goal of setting forth the rates, routes, and markings that separate it from civilian mail of the era. With a delineated territorial responsibility and the removal of foreign troops, the Papal States established a coherent military force that lasted until the unification with Italy in 1870.

For this era, the term "military" includes three branches of service: army, navy, and military police (initially *carabinieri,* later *gendarmerie*) who reported to the Minister of Arms.

This is only the second Papal States study to make extensive use of the prephilatelic frankings and the first known study of Papal States military mail.

Treatment/Importance: No amount of searching has uncovered any published research or exhibits on Papal States military mail. All prior military mail exhibits related to the Papal States were presenting foreign (French, Italian, and Austrian) military mail within the Papal States. This study adds a previously unrecognized topic within European, Papal States, and military mail studies.

The six covers listed below are red-boxed in the study for their philatelic importance.

- Military police mail: The 1819 graphical franking is the earliest known graphical franking. The 1851 cover mixed *gendarmerie* manuscript franking with the *carabinieri* franking.
- Garrison units: The 1815 garrison unit is the earliest block franking.
- Headquarters units: Although three 3rd Division covers exists, the one shown is the only division cover that uses a stamp.
- The maritime sanitation cover is the only known military mail piece that went from the Papal States to an overseas location and lacked stamps despite their mandatory use on overseas mail. It is also one of two known covers from a naval unit/ship.
- The 1867 cover is military mail that used only a stamp and had no military/official markings.

Condition/Rarity: The inks used in the 19th century cause severe deterioration of the paper and are prone to fading. Fully half of all franked mail (which itself is less than 10% of Papal States philatelic material) has illegible frankings because of ink fading. All items used in this study are the clearest examples of their type, even when compared to museum collections.

During Italian unification, the military mail was routinely seized for intelligence or destroyed in combat by Italian forces. Destruction was sometimes as mundane as soldiers using the papers to wrap food.

Assembling this study required buying **nearly every** piece of Papal States military mail offered for sale over many years. Even so, about 10% of purchased covers were found to be unsuitable (wrong country, no identifiable military marking, etc.) after direct examination. (See **Condition/Rarity** and **Research**.)

This study uses approximately 90+% of the market over the last 17 years. In the very few cases where two or more similar covers existed, the one of greater philatelic importance **or** better quality was selected. **More than 75% of the material in this study cannot be duplicated or replaced**. For the last 5 years, only one to two previously unlisted covers have come on the market each year.

Very little comes from U.S. dealers. Most of the material was found in European auctions. **Note:** The small pencil markings on 8 of the covers (left untouched to maintain provenance) are old-style expertizing marks (by Dr. Migliavacca – well known to European/Italian collectors). General dealer marks have been removed.

Presentation and Organization: This study's structure follows that of the papal military. Command started with a Minister of Arms (in Rome). The army had three operational areas called divisions – indicating separate geographic areas, **not** the modern usage meaning a specific size and structure military unit – that were three of the major provinces in the Papal States: Romagna, Marches, and Lazio (a.k.a. Latium). **Umbria was administratively split between Lazio and the Marches by the military**. Within each province were garrisons, traditional combat (mobile) units, and *carabinieri/gendarmerie* located in major towns, cities, and ports.

Completeness: Why a one-frame study? This study contains a cover from every known type of Papal States military land unit of the period. Despite the limited availability, one to three covers are present for every 5 year period from

1820 onward. Six covers are available from the period 1815-1819 when the military was getting organized after the Congress of Vienna.

Exclusions: This study excludes mail **from** the following sources:

- Foreign armies and their posts within the Papal States.
- The Swiss Guard, Noble Guard, Palatine Guard, and the *Guardia Civica,* which were never part of the military since they reported to the Master of the Apostolic Palace. **One** cover is from a military unit **to** the *Guardia Civica*.
- Irregular/militia units, formed outside of the military and reporting to local authorities.
- The Papal States naval ships (only one such cover is known to exist, and it is in private hands).
- Nonmilitary police units (local police).

==Research:== The Papal States collections at the SI-NPM (Washington, DC) and the Spellman Museum (Weston, MA), totaling more than 5,000 pieces, were personally examined. Another 15,000+ pieces of Papal States material have been examined in online auctions. Any letters included with the covers were translated to verify the information presented in this study. Neither SI-NPM nor the Spellman have any military covers as part of their collections.

Research in this area is an ongoing effort. Any apparent contradictions between this study and the references cited below is attributable to new material/information discovered since the articles were written. Recent research shows:

- Literature implied four military divisions, but it is now known that there were only three.
- Umbria, traditionally associated with the Marches, was split between Lazio (with the north and west of Umbria) and the Marches (getting the south and east of Umbria) for military responsibilities.

==Challenges:==

Challenge 1 – Finding military mail: Less than 10% of the now 20,000+ examined pieces are covers and identifiable Papal States military covers make up less than 0.045% of that. Approximately 15% of franked covers presented by dealers as Papal States military are actually from the Italian, French, or Austrian military in the peninsula, or various duchies, that were using their own national/military postal systems.

Challenge 2 – Lack of census information: I maintain a personal census since there is no published one.

Challenge 3 – Identifying military mail: It is relatively easy when marked by frankings (1815 to 1863). After stamp usage became mandatory for Papal States mail in 1864, military mail can only be identified by the written content. The practice of separating letters and covers for sale adds to the problem. Also, recipients are usually addressed on the cover by their (civilian) honorific and not their military position or rank. Lastly, there is the mutilation of covers to remove or obscure the addressee's name (an increasing trend spurred by recent E.U. privacy regulations).

Challenge 4 – Military did not rely primarily on civilian mail system: The period presented here overlapped major hostilities on the Italian peninsula. Since the Papal States military was not an expeditionary force, units were usually static. Even units assigned to a general area of operations (a.k.a. *mobile*) were always close to a populated area. The primary means of military communication were military couriers and the telegraph, not the civilian mail system.

Challenge 5 – Learning to read and translate 19th century handwritten Italian.

==References:== No published material on the Papal States military mail and its markings exists in English, or any other language, other than the two articles listed below. Military histories helped develop the understanding of how military communications worked during this era but did not discuss mail or frankings.

- *Identifying Military Mail Markings of the Papal States*. (2017) *The American Philatelist*, *131*(1399), 776-780.
- *Papal States Military Mail and the Collector*. (2017) *Vatican Notes*, *65*(372), 32-35.

Exhibit Changes: *After first show (2017)* – Changed exhibit organization from unit types to military command structure and added three covers.

After second show (2018) – Added one cover and a major rewrite of synopsis and title page.