

Diplomacy and International Commerce in the 18th Century Adriatic: The Case of the French Consulate in the Port of Ancona

Paola Nardone

"G. d'Annunzio" University of Chieti-Pescara

This study considers the role of the French consulate in Ancona, Italy, during the 18th century. In particular, it examines the decades after 1732, when the port was made duty free. The French government seized upon this easing of fiscal pressure as an important opening for intensified commercial activity in the Adriatic and, at the same time, an opportunity to damage British maritime trade. The consul was thus charged with creating a solid commercial link between the Mediterranean provinces of southern France and the Papal State's Adriatic provinces, promoting at the same time the establishment of a solid community of French merchants in their central port. This study reconstructs the ways in which the Ancona consulate went about realizing these objectives.

1. Introduction

During the 18th century, ships of many nations – especially European nations – sailed the Mediterranean, competing to secure that “active commerce”¹ which was the pride of sovereigns and the prosperity of States.

Control over shipping, exchange of manufactured goods for commodities, and a positive balance of payments² were, in fact, considered synonyms of State power

¹ A. Genovesi, *Delle lezioni di commercio o sia d'economia civile*, Naples, 1768-1770, p. 233.

² G. Palmieri, “Riflessioni sulla pubblica felicità relativamente al Regno di

and public felicity. To secure this end, complex bureaucratic structures³ were put in place throughout Europe in the 18th century, making it possible to promote mercantilist policies. Even more importantly, aggressive diplomacy and numerous wars were combined with a growing activity in the creation of positive law, new institutions and new “officials” who – in the context of these norms – operated in conjunction with traditional figures, customary practice, the Law of Nations and Natural Law.

The normative log-jam gave rise in turn to structural uncertainty as to the legal context, especially in reference to the territorial validity of regulations, producing a “grey area” in major commercial marketplaces where decisions emerged from tense, and often confused, discussions between public and private figures. Taking correspondence between the local French consul and the relevant officials in Rome, Marseilles, Paris and Versailles as an appropriate point of entry, let us now look into specific diplomatic activity by the French consul in Ancona in this confused normative context. In particular, we wish to see whether, besides defending

Napoli”, in *Scrittori classici di economia politica. Parte moderna*, Table XXXVII, Milan, 1805, p. 162, clarifies the author’s point of view regarding the definition of active commerce, showing that with this term it is possible to present a debit balance: “[the opinion] that [everything] divides into credit or debit seems to be not exact, or at least not properly expressed, and it is a mistake to consider that credit is always useful and debit always harmful; for if the difference that distinguishes them is that in the first case goods are being shipped in local vessels and, in the second, in foreign vessels, in the former it may be that more is put in than is extracted and, in the latter, more is extracted than put in: the difference which distinguishes the profitable from the detrimental”.

³ For the French balance of payments, see G. Daudin, *Commerce et prospérité. La France au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, 2005.

French citizens and merchants, the consulate's activity carried personal profit for the consul himself.

We need, then, to ascertain the existence of three factors which might have affected positively the affairs of all interested parties. The first regards the fact that the consul could facilitate the commercial transactions of those whom he represented for example, by evading local regulations or applying them with laxity; the second consists in establishing the degree to which the consul could "manipulate" the sanctions applied to fraudulent behavior committed by French subjects, or suffered by them. Identifying the third factor requires us to ascertain if – and in what way – the consul was able to limit or contain the competition of economic subjects who were not French. So, we are dealing with observations which place the accent on the problems and difficulties of commercial shipping in the central Adriatic, rather than on the flow of goods entering or leaving the area. This study is, then, part of the lively area of historiographic inquiry regarding consular activities: in our case, French "officials"⁴ who are entrusted with the task of introducing elements of extra-territoriality such as to permit the extension of French power well beyond national frontiers into the localities where they were in service. Still, the study is also attentive to the role of

⁴ A. Mezin, *Les consuls de France au siècle des Lumières (1751-1792)*, Direction des Archives et de la Documentation, Ministère des affaires étrangères, Paris, 1995; C. Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre. Consuls français au Maghreb (1700-1840)*, Geneva, 2002; J. Ulbert, G. Le Bouëdec (eds.), *La fonction consulaire à l'époque moderne. L'affirmation d'une institution économique et politique*, Rennes, 2006. For the Italian peninsula, a recent study on French consuls is: R. Zaugg, *Stranieri di antico regime. Mercanti, giudici e consoli nella Napoli del Settecento*, Rome, 2011.

active commerce and mercantile practice in the European Mediterranean⁵.

Although studies touching on the French consulate in Ancona are almost wholly lacking⁶, the abundant consular correspondence is available in the Ancona Archivio di Stato. Further indications have been drawn from the letters of contemporary Neapolitan consuls in Ancona, deposited in the Naples Archivio di Stato and from other documents present in the Archivio di Stato in Rome (Fondo Camerale).

The study is divided into seven sections. The first reconstructs the whole story of the French consulate in the Papal March and the unusual decision to entrust the role of representative of the French monarch to a local citizen. The second describes the historic context with particular attention to the many obstacles hindering commercial navigation in the Adriatic and the consul's efforts to set up protections for French goods and ships.

⁵ R. Romano, *Le commerce du Royaume de Naples avec la France et les pays de l'Adriatique au XVIII siècle*, Paris, 1952; B. Salvemini (ed.), *Lo spazio tirrenico nella "grande trasformazione"*. *Merci, uomini e istituzioni nel Settecento e nel primo Ottocento*, Proceedings of the International conference held in Bari, Italy (November 17-18, 2006), Bari, 2009; B. Salvemini (ed.), *Istituzioni e traffici nel Mediterraneo tra età antica e crescita moderna*, Naples, 2009; J. Booker, *Maritime Quarantine. The British Experience, c. 1650-1900*, London, 2007; G. Bèaur, H. Bonin, C. Lemerrier (eds.), *Fraude, contrefaçon et contrebande de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Geneva, 2007; D. Panzac, *La caravane maritime. Marins européens et marchands ottomans en Méditerranée*, Paris, 2004; E. Elden, *French Trade in Istanbul in the Eighteenth Century*, Leyden, 1999; P. Boulanger, *Marseille, marché international de l'huile d'olive. Un produit et des hommes, 1725-1825*, Marseille, 1996.

⁶ The only studies are A. Caracciolo, *Le port franc d'Ancône. Croissance et impasse d'un milieu marchand au 18^{me} siècle*, Paris, 1965, which also appeared in an Italian edition as a special issue of the review "Proposte e Ricerche", No. 28/2002, and A. Badaloni, *Quell'amabile dorica società. L'Ancona del '700 in un archivio di famiglia*, Ancona, 2003.

The remaining five sections constitute the center of the study and they reconstruct, first of all, the consul's role in actively fostering French commercial shipping by opposing new taxes and by exercising great vigilance in discovering and foiling fraudulent activities on the part of local authorities. They then look into consular activity aimed at spurring commercial navigation by periodically sending fiscal, legal and commercial information to French authorities, as well as the precious, active, support offered to all those merchants residing in France who had economic interests in Ancona.

The study closes with a final series of considerations on the results and implications of the study as a whole.

2. The Origins of the Ancona Consulate

With the spread of the ideas of the Enlightenment, the 18th century European political climate showed clear signs of a reduction in the political and economic power of the clergy. In the Papal State the signs of this decline joined with the long 17th century economic crisis and were clearly visible from the early decades of the new century when, ever more frequently, situations regarding the policies of foreign states exhibited a failure of papal influence as growing secular sentiment rose in defense of royal absolutism and regalism⁷. This tendency added further difficulties to relations between the Roman Court and representatives from abroad; relations were often compromised by lack of trust and suspicion but,

⁷ M. Carnavale, A. Caracciolo, *Lo Stato Pontificio da Martino V a Pio IX*, in the series *Storia d'Italia*, vol. XIV, Turin, 1986, p. 465 et seq.

as well, by arrogance and a tendency to impose solutions deriving, on the one hand, from the need to limit diplomatic space (not simply juridical space, but, as well, the very territorial space in which they operated) and, on the other, to evade such control. In particular, in the Papal State in the period we are considering, the right to nominate consuls autonomously was reserved to Catholic princes, through consular Brevets or Letters Patent, which were subsequently ratified by the papal government. In other cases, “His Holiness names [ed] whoever He wishes [wished]”⁸ and, often, the criteria of choice varied according to the state of relations with the foreign State in question. Candidates for diplomatic posts belonging to friendly nations were brought to the pope’s attention by letters of presentation, usually written by important figures of the nation in question. In this sense, the case of the succession of the representative at the British consulate in Ancona is interesting. It unleashed a veritable battle fought between various candidates through numerous letters of recommendation in which the fulsome praise of the author’s candidate was followed by the denigration of rival

⁸ Archivio di Stato, Ancona (hereafter ASA), private Benincasa family archive (hereafter Benincasa), corda 102, cc. 169-170. The entry cites the case of the Greek, S. Protopsalti, proprietor of a café in Ancona. Passing through town, Count Orlov, a Russian, had appointed this Greek consul, with an official certificate of nomination signed by the Empress and an honorarium of 100 *scudi* a month. However the document was not recognized as valid by the Court of Rome which, instead, had charged the British consul – also known as the “consul for the North” – with receiving and following the bureaucratic iter of Russian vessels. Refusing to accept this, Protopsalti had displayed the Russian insignia on his house, proclaiming himself consul without notifying the Governor of Ancona. Archivio di Stato, Rome (hereafter ASRo), Camerale II, b.4, Ancona, 12 June, 1780.

candidates⁹. As for diplomatic representatives in States less closely linked religiously – or on politico-economic grounds – to the papacy, the choice usually fell upon local notables as was the case with the Russian consul, the “Levantine” and the consul for the Republic of Ragusa¹⁰. In any case, within the papal state, anyone charged with the affairs of a foreign monarch was barred *de facto* from any activity that regarded the administration of public affairs¹¹.

⁹ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4. Shortly before his death, Carlo Tommasi, consul for Britain and Holland in Ancona, had been obliged by illness to relinquish his office to Luigi Candelari “one of the foremost citizens and merchants of this Marketplace”, who possessed all the qualities necessary to occupy the post “save for nobility”. Candelari spoke excellent English and had worked for years with the British consulate to “resolve satisfactorily” a number of disputes. Among other difficulties to the appointment, was the highly prestigious recommendation of Cardinal Duke of York, who wished the post to be conferred upon his protégé, Lt. Col. Francesco Storani. In fact, the situation was resolved with the appointment of Storani.

¹⁰ ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4. “The Republic of Ragusa, having named Giovanni Storani as the successor to its Consul in Ancona, his son Domenico has presented, through [the good offices of] Mons. Stay, Certification to the Cardinal Camerlengo, so that this [fact] may be registered. Since Storani is a subject of Your Holiness and thus [this request] is counter to the principle of not allowing such Certification in favor of subjects, [we] remit the request to the Cardinal Camerlengo, your highest spokesman”. The Russian consul was Francesco Storani, while the Levantine consul was also the French consul.

¹¹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, cc. 146, 256. These dispositions were set up to avoid ambiguous behavior and subterfuge to the damage of the interests of the papal State. In January of 1756: “The Governor of the city convened all the consuls of foreign nations and advised them [...] that any papal Subject charged with the affairs of any sovereign whosoever and who is a member of this Magistracy or of other Congregations in which public affairs of the city are treated, must not, from henceforward, intervene in the consultations, but must remain wholly without Active or Passive Voice during these foreign affairs”. All this meant an economic loss for the consuls, but the consequences in a diminished social prestige were much more serious; the impossibility of assu-

Over the entire century, the papers of the French consulate in Ancona¹² reveal smooth relations between the papal Court in Rome and the representative of the French king's subjects. Occasional conflicts and a sort of underlying tension appear, instead, in relations between the French consul and local authorities, often treated with some arrogance by the consul, in virtue of the fact that he had been appointed by the king himself and due to the strong, direct, ties he enjoyed with the papal Court. At the same time, the fact that the consul was a subject of the pope as well, made his relations with his superiors in France necessarily somewhat ambiguous. These royal officials were quite conscious of the fact that their station in Ancona served not only as consulate for the Levantines¹³, but as a source of precious information for the papacy. Thus, royal authorities were often obliged to reprimand their consul general for the Adriatic provinces of the Papal State, enjoining him to respect the various National Ordinances¹⁴.

ming public appointments limited the exercise of one's influence over the territory.

¹² Particular attention has been given to corde 95-103 – these are 9 registers entitled “Copies of Various letters, chiefly to the Court”, and cover the period 1739-1796 – and corde 49-53, entitled “Letters from the Court to Sig. Benincasa consul in Ancona”, which go from 1730 to 1793. All these documents are deposited at ASA.

¹³ ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4. Promemoria from the Levantine consul to the Illustrious Mons. Governor, no date. From 1665, the Benincasa family held the post of consul “of the Easterners”, which passed from father to son with a single interruption of about twenty years due to the death of Luigi Filippo, who “left a son in tender age and a consort pregnant with another, today Consul”. For the French consuls, the possibility of holding more than one post was conceded only for the Italian peninsula. See, Mezin, A., *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ ASA, Benincasa, corda 52, Versailles, August 5, 1776.

The persistence over time of the excellent relations between the Ancona consulate and the papal government, arose from the fact that these consuls – though as “bridging-organs” they exercised their authority through mediation between two different institutional contexts¹⁵ – acted without fail with maximum respect for the Roman laws¹⁶. Basically, more than attempting to oblige French subjects present in papal territory to observe their homeland’s laws – allowing the French king to exercise his sovereignty far from his own dominions – consuls preferred to intervene in conflicts of interest to their people finding ways of applying papal laws to their advantage. They made use of extra-territorial jurisdiction (French laws) – or extra-judiciary solutions – only in special cases, when this choice was expressly consented by the pope or when no papal citizens were involved.

In this case, the kind of “double jurisdictional track” described by Roberto Zaugg, which, in the Kingdom of Naples, allowed the foreign citizen to recur to an extra-territorial justice as an alternative to the judiciary process available to local citizens, did not exist. In the papal March, the figure of the French consul in Ancona was, from its creation, very different from that of his colleague in Naples. The former was a subject of the pope, the latter a French subject. Stefano Be-

¹⁵ Zaugg, R., *op. cit.*, p.18.

¹⁶ The task was often made easier by the fact that, for some questions linked to trade, the papacy referred to norms from the French *Ordonnance* of 1681. For example, in the case of the interpreters and agents whose functions were, in fact, regulated by Art. XIII of the above mentioned *Ordonnance*, where it was stated that such subjects: “cannot engage in any negotiation, or purchase anything from the owners of the ships which they serve, under penalty of confiscation and fine”. ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4, August 30, 1794.

nincasa (the first French consul in Ancona) had, in fact, economic and social interests which were strongly rooted in the territory and his desire to rise in the social order was bound tightly to the pope's benevolence¹⁷. François Devant (the French consul in Naples) was, instead, bound to France and deeply convinced of his consular mission¹⁸.

It would certainly have been possible to obtain a stronger diplomatic representation in the Adriatic provinces by choosing a French citizen as consul for Ancona. The heart of the question, though apparently simple, was in practice difficult to resolve, for it was made up of a series of juridical and economic threads entangled one with the other.

A first difficulty arose from French legislation regarding consular representation. The Ordinance of 1681 forbade consuls to engage in commerce and, in establishing the requisites for eligibility¹⁹, excluded *a priori* some professional

¹⁷ The Benincasa family aspired to rise in Court circles and to enlarge their fortunes within the Papal State to this end Giuseppe, French consul in Ancona, ceded his post to his brother, Luciano, to take on "the habit of St. Phillip". Diverse were the ambitions, for example, of Girolamo Malacari, Neapolitan consul in Ancona, who, though a papal subject, after 37 years in service asked the government of Naples to declare him "natural [citizen] of the realm with his family". The Royal Chamber refused the request, sustaining that "naturalization should be reserved solely to the individual who, transferring himself physically [...] acquires the condition of becoming a subject", instead, [Malacari] being subject of another prince, "the quality of double citizenship disrupts public law and may produce horrid obligations". Archivio di Stato, Naples (hereafter ASNa), Minister of Foreign Affairs, f. 1321, May-June, 1786.

¹⁸ To the extent that he entered into conflict with the Neapolitan Government. On the figure of François Devan, see R. Zaugg, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁹ *Ordonnance de la Marine du mois d'Aoust 1681*, Titre XI: "Du Consul De La Nation Française dans les Pays Etrangers, Art. I, declared that consuls must be "Lawyers experienced in the law" and informed as to the usages of maritime navigation and trade, and "[persons] who hold posts as important and hono-

figures who might more readily be inclined to live abroad²⁰. The possibility of sending out a diplomat from France was made even less attractive by the derelict state of the Ancona marketplace. At the end of the 17th century, the papal economy was in deep crisis, both for structural reasons²¹ and due to the overall negative international economic situation: the Doric city of Ancona had, unfortunately, declined into a veritable emblem of this decadence. The loss of Ancona's cosmopolitan traits had come about through a constant decline in the flow of trade, especially to and from the West and from the Balkans, on which its former prosperity had been based. In the vain attempt to stem the decline, Church authorities had adopted extraordinary fiscal measures as early as 1695. Specifically, all fees on goods in transit had been abolished and duties had been eased on goods loaded in the East and in France²². These changes had, however, shown

able as those [to be conferred]". On this head, see, C. Windler, *op. cit.*, p. 38, where he writes: "With the prohibition to engage in commerce, the *Ordonnance* singles out the French consuls as officials of the king and members of a specialized corps, distinguishing them from the merchant consuls of the other European powers".

²⁰ Unlike most of the other consuls "of the same port of Ancona where, if we exclude three consuls who are noble, all the others – that is, the consuls of Genoa, Venice, Spain, Russia, the Emperor, Prussia, Malta, and Sardinia – are not noble, but simple Men of Business and few citizens", ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4, Ancona, August 3, 1790.

²¹ In the early 18th century, the most serious economic problems derived from a heavily passive balance of payments, from the flight of wealth abroad, from the paralysis of commercial, manufacturing and banking initiatives, from the debt weighing on the Treasury and fiscal and administrative inefficiency. The over-all situation was further aggravated by a series of years of poor harvests and famine. See, M. Carnavale, A. Caracciolo, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

²² Notification of the transit of goods, procedure for the port and Customs in Ancona, 1698, cited in A. Badaloni, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

themselves to be of very modest effect; so much so that, in 1708, the city was described as “a place with no commerce”²³, having a scarce presence of foreign merchants and citizens, especially French²⁴. The French were, in fact, penalized by the weighty clauses concerning commercial shipping imposed on the French king by the peace treaty which had closed a long period of war. In the first decades of the century, Ancona counted only one French citizen; there was no French firm or merchant in the town, nor had any French vessel appeared in the port for many years²⁵.

All this made the consulate in Ancona a position of very little prestige for a diplomatic career²⁶ and of small attraction from an economic point of view, both due to the minimal consular fees involved and to the impossibility of making a profit from possible other activities linked to those in which “customers” of the consulate might be engaged. For the French court, opening a consulate in Ancona and selecting a papal subject as its chief was a choice imposed by the pres-

²³ The quotation from A. Marcucci is in A. Caracciolo, *Il porto franco di Ancona nel XVIII secolo. Crescita e crisi di un ambiente mercantile*, “Proposte e Ricerche”, Quaderni Monografici, n. 28/2002, p. 25.

²⁴ In Ancona, too, the concept of “belonging” to the French nation was rather vague; just as in Naples, where “one could be french without being either Catholic or French”, R. Zaugg, *op. cit.*, p. 143. As, for example, in the case of Jean Baptiste Charles, a captain who claimed he was French and was so regarded by others until the consul discovered that he did not know the language and, instead, came from Sanremo. ASA, Benincasa, corda 97, November 14, 1754.

²⁵ A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, *cit.*, p. 158.

²⁶ C. Windler, *op. cit.*, p. 37, notes that the consular career was often chosen not for economic motives, but for the social prestige which representation of the king afforded. In Ancona this motivation was weakened by the economic decadence of the city and the lack of a prestigious Court circle with its attendant social assemblies.

sing need to redress the situation there not only for valid commercial motives, but, as well, as a means of curbing the economic thrust of its British rival, who was well established in the town²⁷. Finally, France needed a privileged point of observation so that information on what was going on in the central Adriatic might be acquired without delay: in fact, the consulate very rapidly became an important center in the French information network²⁸.

The impossibility of entrusting such a task to a resident subject of the French king made it necessary to confer the office on one of the local notables. Marquis Stefano Benincasa was officially appointed first French consul in Ancona on January 17, 1671. Subsequently, the enlarged maritime traffic which had followed the institution of the free port in 1732 led French authorities to open a General Consulate in Ancona in 1751 to “[serve] all the ecclesiastic states situated on the Adriatic sea”²⁹, conferring its direction on Giuseppe Be-

²⁷ “This port is frequented at the moment by far different nations than our own, and, chiefly, by the English and the Dutch” A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, cit., p. 158. “France”, he concludes, “does not make herself felt in the March any longer”.

²⁸ Letters from France usually reached Ancona thanks to the papal couriers in service both with the French and Roman postal organizations; mail was occasionally delivered directly by courier or by French ships. The mail from French consuls and vice-consuls in other Mediterranean ports traveled by sea, entrusted to vessels of various nationalities (Spanish, Genoese) to Benincasa on whom they relied to have them forwarded to the French government. It was from Ancona, in fact, that a postal service left, overland, directed into France. Responding to a request from the Commercial Officer in Paris to move correspondence more rapidly, Benincasa observed that postal service would be faster if French couriers took “the Loreto road as [...] the papal couriers do [...] the trip of Paris letters would then be shorter, for they go from here and come from Rome”. ASA, Benincasa, corda 99, June, 1771.

²⁹ The post of French consul was the prerogative of the first-born Benincasa

nincasa who, in 1754, resigned in favor of his brother, Luciano.

The enhanced role of the Ancona consulate, increased, in turn, the social prestige and the network of the Benincasa family's clients within the papal State since it could now automatically choose the individuals who would be appointed vice-consuls³⁰ in the maritime papal provinces as, in fact, it did for the ports of Fermo, Fano, Fabriano, Pesaro³¹ and, with some difficulties, Ravenna³². This prerogative did not,

son for 121 years. The tie with France was an important one: indeed, some members of the family were educated in France and married members of the Court nobility. A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, cit., p. 147.

³⁰ These others were "[the consuls'] legal agents, charged with attending to the interests of owners, captains and merchants"; usually the post was not accompanied by any fixed stipend, but represented "symbolic capital which increased social prestige" and, often, served "as a way of engaging in contraband under the cover of a foreign office", R. Zaugg, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

³¹ In May, 1783, Angelo Maria Billy, vice consul in Pesaro, notified Luciano Benincasa that he had been named consul for Malta in Pesaro and had been officially confirmed by the Court in Rome. Billy continued, as well, as French vice consul until the end of July, 1793, when Benincasa lost the Ancona consulate and requested him to turn in his documents in turn. ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 92, corda 103, cc. 211, 225.

³² The office of vice consul in Ravenna was created in 1783 by Luciano Benincasa as a favor for his Roman friend, Count Braschi Onesti, who wanted to "settle" a certain Vincenzo Zanelli. The Ancona consul requested – and obtained – the post of vice consul for Zanelli through Cardinal de Bernis, Protector of the French Nation and Plenipotentiary Minister of the King of France to the Holy See. When the consul actually arrived to take up his post, however, cardinal Valenti, papal Legate for Romagna, opposed the institution of the post, objecting that "a French vice consul has never been seen in so small a port where French ships rarely enter" and declaring that, without a direct order from the Secretary of State, he would recognize no other consul save Venice's. Benincasa, in referring the episode to de Bernis, noted that the legate's reaction had not "taken [him] unaware" and that he had already advised Zanelli "to not become disquieted by the episode", for the documents he had been given were in any event valid. ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, cc. 88, 91, 92, 100, 105, 108.

however, extend to the port of Senigallia where, in 1712, having noted the importance of commercial traffic³³, the sovereign had set up a consulate which was independent of Ancona. This decision gave rise to numerous complaints on the part of Benincasa, who felt that his authority as consul general was damaged by it, but, more importantly, saw the consular charges for goods in transit through that port slipping through his hands³⁴.

So an antagonism sprang up between the two consulates, with a lack of cooperation on the part of Benincasa with his colleague, Count de Beliardy. The former tried a number of times to affirm his supremacy over the latter as a representative of the King of France; the last attempt was made in 1792 when, at the death of the count, Luciano Benincasa addressed an appeal to the Naval Minister to authorize him to act in that consulate³⁵. The Benincasas served France until June 8, 1793, when the political changes there, symbolized by the execution of Louis XVI, interrupted diplomatic relations between the two States³⁶.

³³ “[...] there are more French merchants living in Senigallia; an important fair is held there; ships of our Nation dock there often; and the port is free and independent not only of Ancona, but of all the [other ports] of the Ecclesiastic State [...]”. ASA, Benincasa, corda 47, Marseilles, June 25, 1712,

³⁴ Ivi, Marseilles’ reply: “You ought not to be displeased by the appointment conferred by the king upon Beliardy, for his Majesty is far from displeased with you”.

³⁵ ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, c. 202.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, cc. 222-223, Consul Luciano Benincasa writes: “As my situation did not allow me to be confirmed in accordance with the Laws of April 15 – of last year, 1792 -, as a consequence, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, with a communication of June 8 past, informs me that the French Republic no longer recognizes me as its consul in this city [...]”.

3. The Consulate and the Obstacles to Commercial Navigation in the Adriatic

A number of conflicts engaged the European powers during the 18th century; the wars and the treaties among the various nations influenced the over-all political and economic context in which the French consulate in Ancona operated. During the first fifteen years of the century, the competing mercantilist systems dominating the flow of trade in the Mediterranean did not seem interested in the Ancona market³⁷ which, invested by the effects of the wars of the Spanish Succession, found Venetian, French and Neapolitan ships facing off in the approaches to its harbor³⁸.

At first, given the impasse in transalpine maritime trade, the consulate's chief role was to keep French authorities up to date as to any new elements in the Adriatic; in particular, rivalry with Austria made the acquisition of commercial data on the major Imperial ports extremely difficult to obtain. Benincasa found himself under pressure to compile reports on Trieste and Fiume as well as reporting the situation in other, less important, Adriatic ports of call³⁹. At the same time, the consul worked to establish the many conditions necessary for the return of French shipping to the port of Ancona, furnishing economic data – for example on the

³⁷ The city was excluded from the principle commercial Western-Eastern route: the former went from Marseilles to Genoa, Leghorn, Civitavecchia, Naples and Messina; the latter from Lombardy to the Tyrol to Venice. See A. Badaloni, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

³⁸ The negativity of the city's situation emerges, as well, from the decline in population; in fact, inhabitants went from 8,644 in 1701 to 7,000 in 1725. See R. Pavia, E. Sori (eds.), *Le città nella storia d'Italia*, Bari, 1990, p. 35.

³⁹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 47, Versailles, December 9, 1711.

relations between prices and grain cargos⁴⁰, on the state of the Senigallia fair and on the kinds of merchandize which interested the Ancona market⁴¹ – as well as taking steps to protect ships from “the privateer war”⁴² and from Venetian interference.

During the Seventeen Hundreds, the incursions of Barbary pirates under false flags, became more intense in the Adriatic, preying upon ships in the gulf. The French especially feared the *Angligracs*: that is, Greeks who, paid by the British, used the Venetian flag to attack ships. Conversely, given the excellent relations between France and Malta – and some of the countries in the Ottoman Empire – many Italian vessels (especially Genovese) sailed flying French insignia abusively to avoid privateer attacks.

After 1740, piracy in the Adriatic increased and British vessels began to fly false papal flags with growing frequency; the constant attacks were so devastating that the Neapolitan consul in Ancona at last wrote to his government begging for the intervention of the Spanish fleet⁴³. The

⁴⁰ ASA, Benincasa, corda 99, note, June, 1771.

⁴¹ A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, cit., p. 159.

⁴² Piracy was a way of life for the Mediterranean countries, though if, for Christians, it was merely a part of their activities, for the Barbary regencies it was the prime activity; the latter “could not be contemporaneously at peace with all the Christian nations, because the mainstay of their resources [that is their prey] would then have been missing and so their entire economic life would have been paralyzed and the finances of every single regency wholly dried up”. T. Filesi, *The Public Archives of Campania with Special Reference to the Archive of State of Naples from the Beginning until 1922*, Institute for the History and Civilization of Africa and Asia in the University of Pavia, Leiden, E. J. Brill, (ed.), 1973, vol. 3, p. 2.

⁴³ ASNa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, f. 2417, letters from Ancona: October 4, November 5, November 26, 1739.

French flag, too, was used by the pirates to prey upon their enemies; there were a number of episodes in which pirates from Dulcigno in Montenegro attacked Ragusan ships to capture and enslave their crews⁴⁴. Between 1755 and 1763 the situation became even more dangerous for French vessels, for the war with Great Britain brought with it an increase in the *Angligracs*, who now infested the Southern Mediterranean, actively hunting French ships.

In this situation, Benincasa aimed at defending, in so far as possible, the crews and the owners of French vessels who incurred damages in the waters within the jurisdiction of his consulate, assuming “policing” functions towards the “sailors” in accord with French authorities⁴⁵. One of the ways attempted to evade attack was to embark quality merchandize, or letters for France, in foreign bottoms (preferably Genoese). In such cases, the French consul – though

⁴⁴ Ibid., Ancona, March 22, 1740.

⁴⁵ In this regard, see the case of the *Assunzione*, a ship under the flag of Jerusalem which, in October, 1754, entered the port of Ancona. Benincasa immediately recognized the ship as a French vessel which had arrived some time earlier from Marseilles with a cargo of porcelain ware and had then set sail, its hold filled with grain, for Nice. With the intent of protecting the interests of the Marseilles owners, he caused the vessel to be impounded, set in motion a police inquest and had the false captain – who had declared himself a French citizen, though in fact, he did not “understand the language”- arrested. It was subsequently discovered that the ship’s captain, the French citizen Combe de Martigues, had been assassinated in the port of Brindisi. ASA, Benincasa, corda 97, October 13, 1754. Another episode concerns a French ship seized by an Anconetan near the Tremiti islands and brought into the port of Ancona under a false papal flag. Benincasa defended the interests of the French captain in the city court and had the pirate from Ancona – who was unaware that the papal state recognized France as one of its most faithful allies – arrested. ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, cc. 215-217.

well aware – pretended not to know what was going on, neither going aboard to inspect the cargo nor compiling the usual accompanying papers required for the movement of goods, so as not to provoke suspicion and to avoid the ship being stopped on the high seas by enemies *de la Nation*⁴⁶.

In attempting to protect navigation, the consul was also active in regard to the Venetians. Conscious of the excellent relations between the papacy and the French King, Venice tried in every way to hamper the already feeble maritime traffic. The Venetians, claiming the existence of a Concession from Pope Alexander III, “attempted to exercise a sort of sovereignty over the Gulf”⁴⁷, warning French ships leaving the Laguna not to call in at Ancona. The consul collected and reported to the French Naval Minister, the complaints of captains who on occasion were stopped off the papal coasts by Venetian ships and found their cargoes of tobacco and other goods whose sale in the port of Ancona was forbidden by Venetian edicts⁴⁸ summarily confiscated. The Serenissima’s interference took many forms, establishing a sort of maritime blockade with notable damage to the flow of papal trade⁴⁹. The attempt to interrupt trade between Ancona and

⁴⁶ This procedure was applied to goods directly requested by the King. “[...] we are of the opinion that only [goods] to be shipped overland should be inspected, since, if we inspect them in the same way as those that travel by sea, they will risk being sacked by the enemies of the Nation [...]”, ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 24.

⁴⁷ The quotation refers to a letter from Benincasa to the Naval Ministry and is cited in A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, cit., p. 54, n. 99.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ An example that regards the consuls is that of the lawsuit successfully brought by the consul of Venice against the Levantine consul (that is, Benincasa) regarding the custom that Greeks and Armenians paid a fee of 6 *Bolognini*

Ragusa was accompanied by a series of prohibitions aimed at preventing Venetian ships from calling in any papal port⁵⁰; the most serious damage was effected with the laws regulating quarantine. The Venetian Health Office (Magistrato di Salute) issued quarantine ordinances without taking into account the existence of isolation facilities in the port of Ancona, blocking the possibility for ships to satisfy quarantine requirements there⁵¹.

Besides enhancing the economy of the papal state's Adriatic provinces, the creation of the Ancona free port in 1732 appeared to deal Venetian trade a harsh blow⁵² and consul Benincasa repeatedly wrote of "the Serenissima's jealousy" in his reports to authorities in Marseilles⁵³. But – as the papers of the Neapolitan consul in Senigallia informing his government in 1737 of a secret plan devised by the Roman and the Imperial courts "in virtue of which all Ger-

– or *quattrini* – for each item of goods brought into port. This sum was divided into equal parts, shared, one by the Levantine consul and one by two churches: the Greek Saint Anna and the Armenian Saint Anastasia. The Venetian consul wanted – and succeeded in obtaining – the 6 *quattrini* in the case of "items of Levantine Subjects of this Republic", ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4.

⁵⁰ In July of 1791, Neapolitan vice-consul Giovanni Pezzotti wrote: "For about twelve years now the Venetian galleys have not put in here for the up-coming Senigallia Fair", ASNa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, f. 1321.

⁵¹ A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, cit., pp. 50-57.

⁵² ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 137. In 1735 the Roman Court, with an edict of May 31, set a 12% charge on goods or foodstuffs introduced into the port of Ancona on ships "of Nations which themselves only hold such items at second hand". This edict was simply a sort of retaliation on the Venetians, who had imposed a like duty upon articles exported from Ancona to Venice. The imposition was 12%, but "usage has pushed it up to 19%: [it is] not rigorously imposed, except on items which are not products of the Venetian state -like sugar and coffee – [...] and are exported here on ships belonging to the Republic".

⁵³ ASA, Benincasa, corda 104, cc. 54, 70.

man goods will come down to Ancona directly, rather than going immediately to the kingdom of Naples or Venice”⁵⁴ show – other accords were set up to damage Venice.

Benincasa, too, was active in relaying information on Venetian trade to Marseilles so as to gain advantages for French commercial activity. In March, 1784, the Adriatic was rife with rumors of the break in relations between the Republic and the Tunis Regency: “though no one gives a precise reason, the Tunis Regency has shattered the harmony that reigned between itself and the Republic of Venice and the Coat of Arms which the Republic’s Resident had on his door. As this item may interest Trade in the measure in which it creates trouble for Venetian shipping – especially during the Senigallia Fair – I esteemed it my duty to inform the Chamber of Commerce in Marseilles to facilitate the planning of the ventures in which Its Merchants might engage”⁵⁵. The consul brought the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce up to date on the tactics adopted by the Serenissima to avoid the consequences of the breakdown. In particular, he informed them that Venice was arming to block its enemies’ trade and to defend its own; Ancona was asked to keep watch over the Venetian ships at anchor in its harbor, which were not to be allowed to leave the port until further order⁵⁶.

The occasion was propitious: it was an obstacle to Venetian shipping precisely at the moment of the Senigallia fair

⁵⁴ ASNa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, f. 1319, Senigallia, January 4, 1737.

⁵⁵ ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 131. The information was of interest to authorities in Marseilles given the commercial relations with the Tunisian regency on this head. Cfr. C. Windler, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁶ ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 139.

a serious blow for the Venetians, who usually brought most of the goods from the East there. Unfortunately, that occasion was soon overshadowed by the outbreak of the plague along the Dalmatian coast in the Spring of the same year. The gravity of the situation made necessary very severe cautionary measures and the strictest of quarantines for all vessels in arrival from the Eastern coasts of the Gulf and, more especially, for all goods loaded in the East. The situation became so critical that in May, 1784, the Sacra Consulta ordered the fair in Senigallia suspended (and with it, all fairs in Adriatic cities), with an absolute prohibition of entry into the port even for ships with legitimate health certificates⁵⁷.

That same year, false rumors spread through the Mediterranean aimed at disturbing French trade; they regarded a presumed breakdown of relations between Morocco and France and the voices went so far as to prospect a war between the two countries. In these circumstances, Benincasa was charged with denying the rumor in the areas of his competence. On order of the Naval Minister, he sent out a circular to his vice consuls, instructing them to make known that similar voices "spread by many public sheets, are absolutely false and without foundation": to the contrary, the king of France had received "substantive proof of the positive intentions of the King of Morocco to maintain harmony between the two States"⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, cc. 161, 168.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, cc. 147-8.

4. The Role of the Consulate in the Protection of French Maritime Trade in the Ancona Market

In 1791, consul Luciano Benincasa sent French authorities a brief resumé of his forty years of service in the Ancona post. This document allows us, at least in part, to make some considerations on the work of the French consulate in Ancona during the second half of the 18th century.

The Premises of the report already furnish important information as to the relations between the port of Ancona and French ports; in particular, Benincasa declares: “The port of Ancona is above all interesting for the Marseilles trade”⁵⁹, both as receiver of French goods and as embarkation point for cereals and sulphur; however, it did not, unfortunately, offer any other attractions for seamen and, still less, for transalpine travelers⁶⁰.

This, obviously, did not exclude the city’s having commercial relations with other localities of *la Nation*, but certainly such relations had a marginal role in Ancona’s foreign trade. Indications in this sense may be drawn from the data in the Books of the Arch of Trajan, from which we learn that in the period between 1734 and 1796, French ships indicated as in transit in the port declared (where such information was present) their port of origin exclusively as Marseilles. There were other ships registered coming from other localities – especially from the southern coast of France (in particular Nice) but, in these cases they were not flying the French flag. The paucity of commercial relations between

⁵⁹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, c. 172.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 173.

Ancona and other French cities is revealed, as well, by small episodes related in the consulate correspondence. For example, the case of the Parisian banker, M. de Beauregard, who, in 1783, wrote to Benincasa for an opinion as to the opportunity of dispatching a commercial agent to Ancona to handle the Parisian affairs of local merchants. The consul's negative reply gives us a clear view of the situation, declaring that, at the moment, "the exiguous trade" between the two cities made the presence of an agent quite useless⁶¹.

While maritime commerce chiefly gravitated on Marseilles, the origins of the single individuals with whom the consulate dealt is not always known. They are, in any event, citizens whose socio-economic provenance is heterogeneous, as Luciano Benincasa himself indicates when he defines the consulate as "the home of all the French"⁶², where not only

⁶¹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 115.

⁶² ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, cc. 141-142. In the memoir, Benincasa complains of the lack of an appropriate seat, property of the Nation, where citizens might find "the natural succor of their consul", but he boasted of having made his own home available. A fact, this latter, of which he was well content, since it gave him the opportunity to place the French "Arms" or crest on the building. This guaranteed him a sort of immunity or autonomy in regard to public constabulary and local authorities, towards whom he exhibited a sort of superiority, behaving like an ambassador. This is evident in an episode linked to the arrest of a Jew who was in the street in front of the consulate, leaning against the wall of one of the shops on the palace's ground floor. The consul judged this event injurious to his position, since no arrests were allowed on his property unless his permission were previously sought. A dispute with the Governor of Ancona ensued which was resolved only with some difficulty. The Jew was brought back to the place in which the arrest had been executed by the "cops", who simultaneously handed Benincasa a note from the Governor which "most formally gave satisfaction" and re-arrested the hapless man. On his part, the consul sent the Governor a letter "[in which he] noted the remittal to prison of the Jew, acknowledged himself satisfied, and thanked him".

seafarers, merchants and travelers were welcomed and offered aid for their affairs and “ advantages [both for] their trade and [for] their security and, I may say, their personal well-being” by French consular representatives, but the numerous poor – drawn to the city by its closeness to the Shrine in Loreto – and the Officials passing through the city (who were received ceremoniously) as well.

Even though the presence of French traders and merchants, over whom the consulate exercised jurisdiction, remained rather thin over the entire 18th century⁶³, the consulate made a number of efforts in protection of the interests of trade in general, as well as in favor of individuals.

Though Ancona had been declared a free port, there were frequent attempts to levy sums on ships in transit, as there were frauds organized to the detriment of seafarers by the customs authorities as well as by the consulate’s interpreters. In some cases, the latter usurped the consul’s functions and, occasionally, presenting themselves as brokers or middlemen, they substituted approved local ship agents, stealing their commissions and directing the captains of foreign vessels to merchants who connived with them to their own advantage⁶⁴.

⁶³ ASA, Benincasa, corda 95, Ancona, January 1744. In that year Benincasa advised the transalpine authorities that there were only nine new French citizens stably residing in the territory; among these a merchant, “a man of honor” with a patrimony of about 50,000 *scudi*, who had moved to Ancona from Venice two years earlier, and a craftsman who, however, was absent at the moment. A surgeon had been reported in the locality of Sirolo, while the remaining individuals were for the most part papal soldiers and servants.

⁶⁴ Outstanding, in this sense, is the British case, for which the interpreter Camelati was sued several times by consul Storani. Camelati contacted British ships in port and, in exchange for his services, sent them to merchants who

Since the records of the city's Consolato del Mare have not survived, a detail examination is not possible, but the climate of suspicion and vigilance in which the Ancona consulate operated, does emerge from the documents that can still be consulted in the Fondo Camerale of the Archivio di Stato in Rome. There we find that Luciano Benincasa vigorously opposed the requests of certain ecclesiastic bodies to finance themselves by taxing foreign ships. We can, as an example, cite the case of the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception, which requested papal authorities to impose a fee of 6 *quattrini* "for every item on foreign vessels which come into this port in pursuit of trade, to be paid once in entering[port] and again on quitting it"⁶⁵; or that of the Venerable Company Stella Maris and Porta Coeli, which hoped for "the meager

were friends of his, exacting a commission. Often payment consisted in a small portion of the cargo. Further, taking to himself the consul's prerogative, he informed the British captains as to the latest news regarding the Anglo-French war. The interpreter for Danish and Swedish vessels behaved in the same manner. ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4. Consul Luciano Benincasa had three Clerks during his term of office; the first served him until he was elderly, the second was accused of treason by the papal authorities, but was not, as was usual in such cases, imprisoned: he was, instead, accompanied to the State borders and banished – so he received special, lenient, treatment – as was the case for the dependents of diplomats. The third Clerk, Luigi Deschamps, "son of a well-to-do Lyon merchant", arrived from Rome, where he had resided for some time. ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, cc. 66, 93; corda 103, c. 187. Deschamps also took on translations for the needs of the other consulates; he was never accused of illicit behavior by Benincasa, as had been the case for the interpreter of the Levantine consulate, whose appointment Benincasa had requested be revoked for the "pernicious" behavior which disturbed local market dealings. ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4, Ancona, May 2, 1794.

⁶⁵ The French consulate was the only one to join with the municipal agents "Deputati ai Negozi" to avoid the "conspicuous burden such a tax – contrary to the Free Port laws – would place upon trade", *Ibid.*, Ancona, November 26, 1783.

charity of a *Paolo* from every Seaworthy Vessel, whether foreign or belonging to the Papal State, which docks in the Port of said City [as] needful for the activity of the School of Saint Nicholas”⁶⁶. In particular, in this instance the payment of the charitable contribution was to have been made at the public health office which would not otherwise issue the certificate authorizing the activities of the Company. Opposing the request, Benincasa noted that his position did not allow him “to agree to even the smallest tribute [it may be desired] to apply to vessels of that nation, since this is the responsibility of the Naval Minister”⁶⁷. In reality, the adverse reaction was general; not only the foreign consuls, but the very school ‘beneficiaries’, opposed it: the papal proprietors, obliged to pay similar fees in almost all the ports they sailed to⁶⁸.

Once the consul had foiled the laying of taxes in favor of religious communities, he had to be watchful lest French ships and seamen should be victims of dishonest customs officials. French authorities quite often, in fact, asked Benincasa to be on the alert for frauds aimed at French ships and, above all, to enforce respect for reciprocity, ascertaining that all nations received the same treatment⁶⁹. Dishonesty showed itself in customs officials in various ways: a striking case was that of the Cancelleria criminale of the city government, which demanded bribes to issue permits to load “goods of

⁶⁶ Ibid., c. 170. The school’s purpose was “the education of that numerous group of seafarers in the rudiments of our holy religion, as well as in reading, writing and arithmetic, and nautical procedures”.

⁶⁷ Ivi. The Levantine consul would, instead, defer to the Camerlengo’s decisions.

⁶⁸ Ivi.

⁶⁹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 52, c.n.n., corda 53, Versailles, May 31, 1784.

secondary necessity which, legitimately acquired in other territories, are carried to Ancona to be transported overseas”, refusing, as well, to issue the captains of the ships permits so that they could take on supplies of food for their crews – all with notable damage to free trade⁷⁰.

In consular papers we can also see a series of complaints by Benincasa to the Santa Consulta, the governor of Civitavecchia, the governor of Ancona and various other local and Roman authorities. In these statements he accused the sanitation officers of the port of Ancona of violating the norms set out in the Papal Edicts of 1749 and 1755, by requesting the captains of French ships to pay sums not required of them (and which, in any case, were never imposed upon Ancona merchants). In particular, he denounced the imposition of a 6 *Paoli* bribe, 3 were collected by the inspector who physically boarded the ship at its arrival in port; a further 3 were required at the dropping of the anchor, before any inspection was made. To cast a semblance of legality upon this practice, the sanitary officials issued a “declaration” which had no status of any kind. The consul’s denunciation was extremely harsh; in upholding the French position, he cited papal statutes which, in fixing the duties and the salaries assigned to deputies, made no mention of similar costs which, instead, seafarers were forced to pay to “win over” public officers and avoid bureaucratic problems in obtaining the papers required to navigate freely⁷¹.

⁷⁰ ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4, Ancona, July 30, 1792.

⁷¹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 99, 1770. According to the consul, the only legal extra compensation was that owed to “the pork-butcher soldier” when suspect goods – that is goods from places close to those where pandemics were in course – were unloaded.

Even in the illegal practices created by papal customs authorities, there was a difference in the treatment of French ships. With the end of favoring contraband – especially in grain – the officials did not report shipping from the Kingdom of Naples⁷². Or, if they did do so, in registering the ships, they routinely reduced the tonnage of the cargo – something they also did habitually for papal ships whose cargos were “declassed” by about a quarter to make their commercial activities easier. No such aid was afforded French shipping, where strict registering of cargo was applied – and thus full anchorage charges. The worst treatment, however, was reserved for British ships, where the attempt was to indicate an augmented tonnage with consequently heavier charges, provoking constant requests for consular intervention⁷³.

However, captains and crews also often tried to evade correct payment of fees to both port and consular authorities⁷⁴. The latter case was quite frequent in Ancona and re-

⁷² ASNa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n. 2417. The Neapolitan consul, Gerolamo Malacari, informed his government that “to encourage fully the introduction of grains – even by contraband – into this State, the highest authorities have forbidden any official of this port to take any sort of note of their arrival here”.

⁷³ ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4, Ancona 26, 1790.

⁷⁴ The most frequent crime committed by the captains was the falsification of their ship’s tonnage and the manifest listing the type and quality of the goods carried; in addition, in the case of damaged vessels, they attempted to avoid the dispositions which imposed a price scale fixed by the Maritime Board, Consolato del mare. The most dangerous fraud was that of “knick-knacks” items belonging to the captain or members of the crew which were bought and sold in the various ports of call. This custom led to a lack of respect for regulations regarding quarantine, raising risks sharply. See A. Badaloni, *op. cit.*, p. 75; ASA, Benincasa, corda 111, c. 4.

garded all foreign vessels. The situation made for numerous conflicts between the consuls and the shippers and ship owners. The problem even engaged the papal Secretariat of State, put under pressure to order sanitary officials not to give ships the certificate required for departure from the port without written proof that consular fees had been paid⁷⁵.

The exaction of consular fees also led to a dispute between Benincasa and the French consul in Civitavecchia, who complained that the Ancona consulate applied higher fees than those indicated in French ordinances. The Ancona consul responded immediately and sharply and his reply, complete with the copy of a typical transaction, left his colleague no room for doubt⁷⁶.

5. The Consulate and French Commercial Navigation

At first, declaring Ancona a free port in 1732 had a positive effect on maritime traffic: in only a few years, movement in the port had more than tripled and, inside the papal state, the center of economic activity moved towards the Adriatic

⁷⁵ ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4. The consuls addressed the request to the Camerlengo's court and this body transmitted it to the Secretary of State, Ancona, September 17, 1789.

⁷⁶ ASA, Benincasa, b. 102, c. 114. In responding to the French consul in Civitavecchia on the case of captain Long, commander of the tartan S. Jean Baptiste, Benincasa declared that he had applied the 1767 ordinance. This declared that vessels of 60 to 80 tons should pay 5 *paoli* to the consulate, as the previous ordinance had established on December 8, 1720 declaring "for the cargo list or manifest of a vessel, including two copies, registrars shall be paid 10 *livres*. The registrar is further owed a sum for the permission to put to sea: for small ships, 4 *paoli*, for medium size ships, 6, and for large vessels, 8. This prerequisite is applied even when neither parties engage in any trade [...]".

provinces, which had notably increased relations of all kinds with the outside world, especially to the West⁷⁷. In this context, the consulate – under pressure from French authorities who pressed Benincasa for reports, resumés of prices, exchange rates, tables of weights and measures and the laws regarding commerce applied in Ancona – moved in a number of sectors to favor French maritime trade⁷⁸. If the immediate goal was to promote trade and draw French shipping to Ancona⁷⁹, the long term target was to seek to control “the extension of trade”⁸⁰, and the contraband movement of goods from the East.

In reality, the first objective was never secured: the number of French vessels remained rather small during the entire

⁷⁷ The negative effects of the free port became evident only over time, consisting chiefly in an excessive drain of coin, a rise in prices and a worse balance of payments. The process of integration of the papacy into the world economy brought the weak productive structures of the papacy into contact with more advanced structures, causing finally more damage than advantages. See, M. Caravalle, A. Caracciolo, *op. cit.*, pp. 471-474.

⁷⁸ ASA, Benincasa, corda 52, Versailles, August 5, 1776, May 21, 1784.

⁷⁹ ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, cc. 132-138. The consul dispatched a number of memoranda regarding taxes imposed on foreign merchandise introduced into the city of Ancona, taxes on goods produced in the Marches and Free Port taxes.

⁸⁰ In conformity with the ordinances of December, 1710 and May 1767, the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce had ordered consuls to issue two “State cargo” manifests to French captains when they left port, while they retained the original in the registrar’s office. These documents were to be presented at the consulates of the ports of call, up-dated with the evaluation of the listed goods in French; thus, a copy remained *in loco* and another, newly compiled, was given to the captain. This practice, which served as a control on maritime commerce, meant a fee for the registering official and was often evaded by the captains, who blamed the consul in the first port of departure for not having furnished them with the documents. *Ibid.*, cc. 106, 144, 145.

second half of the century; so much so that the consulate complained many times that “income from fees is slight, because there is so little French traffic”⁸¹. In reality the port offered little for maritime trade; the consul himself reminded the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce that: “the city of Ancona, like the entire province, produces no manufactured goods consumed beyond the borders of the State, nor does it export any sort of goods, with the exception of cords and ropes for maritime use, subject to no fees. The chief products of the country are silk, hemp, wheat and all sorts of cereal grains and legumes”. Benincasa did, however, underline the fact that the Roman Court, wishing to promote agriculture, almost every year gave permission to sell a specified quantity of wheat, grain or legumes (based on the size of the year’s harvest), issuing to this end bills of exchange to landowners free of charge⁸².

⁸¹ Income fell especially after the 1767 ordinance, whose provisions resulted in a reduction of consular honoraria to the degree that, in 1791, these funds amounted to 150 *lire*, “a ‘nothing’ barely sufficient to keep a clerk”; on the other hand, king Louis XVI had doubled the annual consular grant to 2,400 *lire*. Often, however, Benincasa preferred to take payment in goods to resell in Ancona, rather than in coin. This was especially true towards the end of the century, when the exchange rates between the French *lire* and the Roman *scudo* was especially unfavorable. ASA, Benincasa, corda 99, June 1771, corda 103, June, 1773, cc. 187, 193.

⁸² ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, cc. 134, 137. “The bills of exchange, as one can observe, are issued free of charge by the Camera Apostolica, but they still cost something; under the head of the presence of Agents, living in Rome, from whom they must be obtained. Further, the merchants – who engage in speculations on the grains – without holding [as yet] the drafts, cannot get them in hand except for a part which they propose to ship abroad. They are obliged to buy the drafts from the Agents and pay them more or less according to the circumstances. There have been years in which the price of the drafts has touched 10 or 12 French *lire* per *ruble*”.

The exportation of wheat was the business which drew the major part of French shipping into the port; Benincasa therefore worked to give authorities in France all the information they required as to the number of bills of exchange issued each year, the names of the agents, the state of the harvest and the harbors and ports of call in the papal provinces where loading the grain was less expensive or difficult. Consular records do not show the consul engaging in any role other than that of furnishing information.

The same behavior marks the observation of the movement of goods in arrival from the East, which Benincasa had been requested to institute in the intent of avoiding triangular trading, damaging to French taxes. In this case, the French consul was really precious. The fact that Ancona was a free port meant, among other things, that ships in arrival were not obliged to present a manifest detailing the goods they carried. Further, the majority of ships carrying Eastern goods were not under Ottoman flags, but flew the Venetian flag, making it still more difficult to obtain information as to their cargoes.

Nevertheless, between 1775 and 1781, Benincasa sent the French authority an annual prospectus showing the state of trade and navigation with Morocco, the Algerian Regency, Tunis and Tripoli. He was able to accomplish this feat because, as Levantine Consul, he managed to acquire "from some Greeks who have settled here and who are the sole carriers of these goods", information not only concerning Levantine goods unloaded in Ancona but, as well, regarding the goods purchased there and sent to the East. In 1784, Benincasa was even able to estimate the balance of trade between imports and exports, underlining the fact that the

value of the former was much higher than that of the latter and that the deficit of more than a third was paid for in coin⁸³.

If we analyze the relations with individual captains, we see that, apart from carrying out bureaucratic formalities, most contacts were limited to offering aid in repairing damages to the ship, in cases of shipwreck or of mutiny, or of the death of members of the crew or of a captain⁸⁴. We find no “active” role of the consul in consular records in so far as regards the commercial activities of French captains. He does not, for example, act in any way as mediator between the French shippers and local merchants, as other consulates instead did⁸⁵. The documents do not deal with conflict with

⁸³ *Ibid.*, c. 127, corda 52, September 1, 1782. Fundamentally, Benincasa was describing the crisis of the free port in relations with the states of the Grand Turk where the exports are reduced to “a trifling quantity of Christian goods, thus this port is but a warehouse, for most of what issues from it bound for the East is treated in cash”.

⁸⁴ There were numerous uncertainties as to the laws applicable to vessels in port in the case of their captain’s death. For example: “[...] among the positive laws accepted into the Laws of Nations in Foreign Ports regarding mercantile vessels, and the Procedure accepted as usual here in Ancona, there is some notable difference[...]. In any Port – and in any Foreign Harbor – it is accepted Practice that, when a mercantile vessel has tied up to the pier, it is to be under the Shore [laws], and thus is governed by the local Sovereign. [...] In this case, the usage has been wholly to the contrary. Every freighter, whether or not it has tied up is considered to be outside Papal Jurisdiction. This generalized error has prevailed whether through the complicity of the Superior Courts with Foreign Flags, or through ignorance of the Law of Nations in the Official on Site. Once this anomaly becomes set, the reasons for which the influence of the various Consuls over their own Ships is broader here than what it is, or might be, in foreign Ports and harbors [is clear]”. ASRo, Camerale II, b. 4, Ancona, May 14, 1792.

⁸⁵ This regards most specifically the British consul, *ivi*, c.n.n.

brokers or middlemen, broken freight contracts, contraband or disputes before maritime courts all activities of which we find frequent mention, instead, in the papers of the Neapolitan consul⁸⁶.

It was probably the infrequent presence of French vessels⁸⁷ that made for too few cases from which we might evaluate the consul's activities on the institutional margins. Or did the lack of particular interest in commercial transactions derive from the very nature of this figure for "the prohibition to engage in trade was intended to make it difficult for a consul to incur the stringencies of local justice for trading with local people and, rather, strengthen his personal immunity?"⁸⁸. Since we have no documentary clues, it is difficult to gauge Benincasa's activity in "the shadowy area" where the application of Papal law and that of French law came into contact.

Even when, in writing to French authorities, the consul described specific cases, he seemed interested only in furnishing information. For example, the episode of a Captain Daudifret, accused of adding sand to a cargo to increase transportation costs by increasing weight to the damage of his Ancona clients; or the case of Commander Pancer who, after taking on grain in Ancona for French merchants, sold it as contraband in Genoa⁸⁹. Even where Benincasa could

⁸⁶ See in particular the correspondence in ASNa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, fasci 2417-2419.

⁸⁷ ASA, Arch of Trajan, b. XXX, fasc. 2358-2360. The Books of the Arch of Trajan show that, in the period between 1734 and 1796, vessels of the following nations were reported in transit: British 1,449; French 751; Venetian 732; Neapolitan 1,581, Papal 95; Ottoman 536.

⁸⁸ C. Windler, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁸⁹ In this I concur with Badaloni, *op. cit.*, who, in citing this episode, does not discern any special interest on the part of Benincasa.

take action and apply French norms extraterritorially, he preferred, instead, to cite Papal laws. This was the case on the occasion of the attempted sale of a French ship belonging to French share-holders, without their consent. The ship's master, a certain Savournin, from Marseilles, meaning to take advantage of the Free Port to sell the ship, came to an agreement with a Flemish merchant – a long-time Ancona resident – to sell him the ship at less than its value. The operation could, however, be completed only with the approval of the French consul. Benincasa, noting the absence of documents attesting the agreement of the Marseilles share-holders who owned it, and noting, too, that the operation was in contrast with French law, ordered the immediate seizure of the ship and remanded the case to the Consolato del Mare, without attempting any mediation between owners, captain and would-be purchaser. In any case, the episode was resolved positively since, in 1753, a year after the ship was impounded, Benincasa offered it to the "Maison Combe et Fort" of Ancona, operating in the area of import/export of colonial goods, declaring the sale necessary to increase maritime trade. Receiving a positive reply, he requested authorities in Marseilles to send a new captain with all the documents required to put to sea⁹⁰.

6. The Consulate and French Merchants

Relations between the consulate and French firms and merchants were rather modest during the whole eighteenth

⁹⁰ ASA, Benincasa, corda 96, September 20, 1753.

century, occupying very little space in consular records. It should be remembered that the city of Ancona had great difficulty in attracting foreign mercantile firms, whatever their nationality might be⁹¹. In a 1788 letter Benincasa informed the *Contrôleur general des finances* in Paris that “[...] since then [1785] we have had no French merchant residing in Ancona”⁹² and his 1791 report essentially confirmed that the situation had not changed⁹³.

The list of “negotiations” in which the consul declared to have most often occasion to participate was, indeed, quite brief, comprising as it did only three firms: Cesar and Pierre Teissier; Straforello and Peragallo d. Hercules; Poubert cadet et Compagnie. Even this did not necessarily mean that the firms were physically present in Ancona⁹⁴, or that there were no others; undoubtedly, not all French Merchants and trade-

⁹¹ A. Caracciolo, *Il porto*, cit., pp. 40-41. Estimates that, in 1694, the city had only “5 houses which [...] sell and negotiate”. At the beginning of the 18th century, only a few local businesses, or businesses founded by individuals from Ragusa and a community of ‘Levantine’ represented by Benincasa were present [in town]. There was, however, a fairly large Jewish community numbering some 1,000 individuals and about 50 houses, and in contact with other similar communities in Adriatic and Mediterranean ports. Benincasa himself informed Paris that the port of Ancona had a number of inconveniencies which made things difficult for foreign merchants and sailors, “for it lacks warehouses or shops in which they can deposit their goods, so that they must sell up at any price or carry them away again”. ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, c. 170, Paris, June 25, 1784.

⁹² ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, c. 66.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, c. 196. In 1792, the presence of French merchant firms must have been very scarce indeed, for the Consul informed the Naval Minister that “at this point French merchants and [French] ships are very rare”.

⁹⁴ When Benincasa wrote to Straforello et Peragallo, or Poubert & C., he always addressed the letters to Marseilles.

smen went to Benincasa when negotiating. We can cite, as an example, the case of Madame Fargé, traveling for the Lyon firms of Fargé Père et fils Ainé and Ravii, who was advised to contact the Jewish merchant, Abram Coen at her arrival in Ancona, “for all possible assistance”, rather than the French consul⁹⁵.

A number of merchants and firms from Lyon and Marseilles did, however, turn to Benincasa to resolve difficulties arising in transactions with French citizens – or captains – passing through, or resident, in Ancona, or with merchants and suppliers, especially those who were Jewish. In these cases, the consul received and sent out bills of exchange and drafts, collected and traded bills⁹⁶, protested bills, changed money at rates fixed periodically in Rome. Benincasa made himself spokesman of the commercial interests of French merchants residing in France⁹⁷, aiming at resolving disputes regarding specific operations so as to avoid the long delays attendant on cases which came before the Consolato del Mare court⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ ASNa, Commercial Papers, b. 282, cc. 39-40, Verona, December 15, 1791.

⁹⁶ There were many drafts of exchange treated for other consuls. Benincasa enjoins the case of a bill for 121.1 *paoli* payable in 45 days, emitted in Marseilles, by the firm of Cesar Pierre Tessier and sent to a certain Berté in Leghorn. The sum, once in hand, was for the French consul in Ragusa: Benincasa negotiated the bill in Ancona for him. ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, c. 34.

⁹⁷ Ibid., c. 194. These contacts must have been rather frequent since, in a letter to the deputies of the Marseilles Chamber of Commerce, the consul wrote: “The chief cost of paper work regards letters to merchants and other French gentlemen which comes to me because of consular duties”.

⁹⁸ Though the papal government had expressed the desire that these conflicts find resolution within a month, with little and moderate expense (ASNa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, f. 1318, February 3, 1739), Benincasa, in carrying out his effort at negotiation, congratulated himself with the interested parties for

The most serious problems arose in relations involving the local Jewish community, with which French affairs often did not end well. A typical example is the controversy between the Marseilles firm Peragallo Belleville and the Jewish firm Pacifico and Aziz regarding the shipment of a cargo of goods. The latter, on receipt of the merchandise, declared itself unsatisfied with the quality of the goods and demanded a conspicuous reduction of the agreed price, threatening not to pay (and making no mention of possible return of the contested goods). Benincasa intervened in defence of the French merchants and, after lengthy negotiations, adopting "an almost commanding tone", concluded an agreement which, none the less, in the end was not entirely respected by the Ancona merchants. In describing the episode to Belleville, Benincasa wrote resignedly: "this should not have happened according to proper and honest behavior, but it is best to stand it and attribute the system to that Nation"⁹⁹.

The consul rarely took on the role of middleman or agent in search of business, and even in such cases we cannot really be sure whether he was an "active" or economically interested party and, indeed, whether he did or did not gain any sort of personal advantage. On balance, we tend to think that he did not have private interests in the affairs chronicled in the consular records and that, consequently, he kept within his official functions¹⁰⁰.

having saved them from "the obstacles which would have been encountered, the risk of a long and nasty lawsuit costing a great deal in various expenses and with uncertain results", ASA, Benincasa, corda 103, c. 206.

⁹⁹ Ibid., cc.199-200, 206, 210.

¹⁰⁰ Among the few cases included in the consular records, we may note that of the Beaune wine merchants, Masson Pere et Fils, who turned to the consul to

7. Conclusions

Study of the records of the activities of the French consulate in Ancona during the second half of the 18th century, then, shows that consular activities aimed at promoting French interests, especially in offering an impressive representation of the King to local authorities. Basically, when Benincasa was acting as consul, he found himself in the best position to emphasize and exalt his own social status within the city's élite. On other levels, in relations with individual, French, businessmen, the consul seemed to have a secondary role, directed more to resolving disputes and executing bureaucratic procedures than to "expediting" or protecting more or less legal commercial procedures.

These circumstances were undoubtedly the result of the Benincasa family's fidelity to the Pope, on whose benevolence the family's fortunes depended, but the lack of personal interest in French commercial activity probably also derived from the impossibility of drawing economic profit from it.

sell their product, receiving the following reply: "If you Gentleman, at your own expense and under your own responsibility, wish to risk sending me a few shipments of these goods, I can promise to attempt to sell [the wine] directly [to consumers] as much to your advantage as possible", *ibid.*, c. 202. Or we can cite the case of the Lyon firm Maupetit, Chouchaud et Martau, to whom the consul wrote that he was "sorry" he had not received information from them in time, [which] impedes me from [promising] anything for this winter, as the season is advanced and the commission would not arrive in time". *Ibid.*, c. 206. Another case regarded the firm of Bratis Fils & C., of Constantinople which shipped gunpowder to Ancona for Ragusa; the firm asked the consul to add some flints to the cargo and to take payment for them, tasks which were carried out punctually. In Benincasa's note of expenses, the various calculations do not include any item which would make us suppose that he received any commission. *Ibid.*, c. 195.

The thin presence of French businessmen and French ships in Ancona had not permitted consolidation of a stable commercial circuit between the local port and French ports. This had, in practice, inhibited any type of “specialization” of the consulate in mercantile practices as had been the case elsewhere, for example in the Tyrrhenian sea, where some consuls openly aided merchants of their own nation in perpetrating crimes, some of which carried very severe penalties¹⁰¹.

Even in the final years of the century, when war seemed to have eased incursions on navigation in the Adriatic allowing us to suppose there might have been a discrete revival of French traffic in Ancona¹⁰², various adverse, external, circumstances arose blocking trade between the two States. The plague broke out, disrupting the life of the maritime community of the whole Southern Mediterranean with devastating effect (and saw the consulate engage decisively in the gathering and communication of information in favor of French authorities¹⁰³) until the French Revolution which, making relations between the two countries hostile, had the consequence of also stripping Benincasa of his position as consul.

¹⁰¹ B. Salvemini, *Lo spazio*, cit., pp. XXVI-XXVII.

¹⁰² ASA, Benincasa, corda 102, cc. 97-98, letters from the consul to the Naval Minister: “I am honored to inform Your Excellency of the arrival in this port of the first French vessel after the peace settlement. I hope that it will soon be followed by many others, which we await constantly. This vessel bears the name Tartane de S. Antoine, Captain Ant. Benet, left Marseilles on April 26 and arrived here on the second of this month. Her cargo is sugar, coffee and common wool cloth”.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, c. 202 The pandemic broke out in 1783 in the Ottoman countries and was especially virulent in Dalmatia, obliging sanitary officials to impose a very strict quarantine.

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