

## Foreword

**L**he lack of documentation relating to the early years of the presence of the Taxis family in Tyrol and Flanders makes it difficult to draw a detailed picture of the events surrounding the birth and early development of the postal service at the imperial court and its gradual spread to the main European cities.

Therefore, to carry out this research, reference was firstly made to the existing literature and then various archives were consulted, beginning with that of the Thurn und Taxis Princes of Regensburg. The most authoritative texts were those of the German-speaking authors who already addressed the Taxis issue between the end of the Nineteenth century and the beginning of the following century, clearing the field from news sometimes fanciful or scarcely credible that had been proposed by the authors of previous centuries but without providing comprehensive and definitive indications.

The important text information of authors such Rüksam and Ohmann, often repeated in subsequent publications, were compared with the most recent studies, conducted by researchers who had access to the aforementioned Taxis archive, or with monographs published on the occasion of exhibitions and conferences organized to celebrate certain anniversaries of the postal history or of the Taxis family.

Therefore the information acquired as a result of archival research, was included in this bibliographic database which, in addition to the aforementioned Regensburg resources, has for object in particular the Innsbruck resources and those of Lille and Brussels, in addition to the documents found in various Italian archives.

A non-marginal part of these documents was already known and published, but to these it was possible to add more information of non-negligible interest that contributed to outline a fairly clear and rather comprehensive picture of the Taxis postal service in the period corresponding to the years of service of Francesco Taxis, commonly referred to as the main representative of the family.

This study therefore is intended to give an organization, the most comprehensive and documented as possible, to all the news already known and distributed in a fragmented way in various publications,

integrating them with the presentation and analysis of documents (service assignments, letters, mandates, receipts, certificates) on which the Taxis family built its fortune and founded the European postal service.

After the initial historical background of the Taxis family, with the justification of its origins from Cornello and reference to the first postal services in Venice and at the papal court, the work focuses on the beginnings of the Taxis postal service in Tyrol, reviewing the various hypotheses advanced over the centuries about the identity of the first members who worked at the Habsburg court and their time frame, to then illustrate the first available documents, consisting of a series of receipts for fees received for unspecified mail services provided by the brothers Janetto and Francesco Taxis and their nephew Giovanni Battista.

In subsequent years, these couriers were working in Flanders, the western possessions of the Habsburgs, and two postal licenses of Philip the Handsome of the early years of the sixteenth century we found, with which Francesco Taxis was appointed *chief et maistre de noz postes*, a qualification that makes him the single organizer of the postal and courier services in the territories of the empire.

The text of these licenses is transcribed on the basis of contemporary copies of original diplomas preserved in the archive of Lille and also the version in the current language is given, the same goes for the license issued by Charles I of Spain on 12 November 1516, which can be considered as the official birth of the modern European postal service. The last part of the book is dedicated to this crucial document and to the work of the Taxis family in the years following the transfer of their residence from Mechelen to Brussels. It also describes the most personal aspects of Francesco's life, such as religious devotion to the church of Notre-Dame du Sablon, for which he commissioned important tapestries, as well as the family's votive chapel.

This book also touches the subject of the postal service spreading in the major European cities after the death of Francesco, which took place in 1517, and the work of his nephews who took on the legacy to expand it up to make it a multinational company lasting for centuries.