



Papal States



Status: Minor nation.

Description: Large central Italian state owned by the Pope.

Monarch: His Holiness Pope Pius VII (left).

Delegate: Cardinal Ercole Consalvi (right).

Background

The French revolution which began in 1789 was explicitly and openly hostile to the Catholic Church, forcing bishops to swear oaths to the republic, confiscating church property, and rebranding local churches into quasi-atheistic “Temples of Reason”. The **Comtat Venaissin** – an exclave of the Papal States within France – was annexed by revolutionary forces in 1791, and when Pope Pius VI supported Austria in suppressing the revolution, Napoleon personally invaded the Papal States, imprisoning the pope (who subsequently died), and proclaiming the ‘Roman Republic’.

The next pope – Pius VII – was elected in 1800, and managed to strike a deal with Napoleon to restore the Papal States and the Catholic Church in France (albeit in a diminished capacity). This truce lasted just long enough for the pope to attend Napoleon’s coronation, after which relations deteriorated¹, France annexed the Papal States, and the pope excommunicated Napoleon. The Vatican’s art treasures and archives were seized, and the pope was imprisoned in France, where he remained until he was freed by Austrian forces in 1814.

Objectives

The principal objective of the Holy See was the restoration of its Italian territories from before the revolution, and the Comtat Venaissin in France² (which included the historic city of Avignon). Additional matters included the return of the Vatican archives (which were still in Paris), restoring the Pope’s authority to appoint French bishops, and restoring the Prince-Bishoprics of Germany which had been lost with the Holy Roman Empire.



The Papal States in 1792

¹ In 1805, Napoleon insulted the Pope by gifting him a Papal Tiara deliberately manufactured to be too small and heavy to wear.

² Now the west half of the Department of Vaucluse.