
Citation:

Wright, OJ (2017) The Religious 'Persecutions' in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and British Sympathy for Italian Nationalism, 1851–1853. *History*, 102 (351). pp. 414-431. ISSN 0018-2648 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12420>

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**The Religious ‘Persecutions’ in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany
and British Sympathy for Italian Nationalism, 1851-3¹**

In 1849 a Protestant Irish officer of the Royal Navy was expelled from the Grand Duchy of Tuscany for printing copies of the Bible in Italian. Captain John Pakenham had been resident in Tuscany for twelve years, during which he had developed interests in banking and the wine trade in Florence, and a school at Bagni di Lucca. Pakenham was evangelical; he claimed to have at heart ‘the real good of an interesting country’ and ‘of a docile population’, and he desired ‘to spread amongst them the sound principles of truth’.² To these ends, Pakenham had become engaged in the distribution of ‘instructive books in the Italian language’, some of which were given to the children at his school. In the liberal climate which briefly prevailed between the election of Pope Pius IX in 1846 and the revolutions of 1848-9, Pakenham’s behaviour had been tolerated by the Tuscan government. Several of his printed texts – including Italian translations of the Bible – had passed through the censors’ offices without issue. Once the abortive revolutions had passed, however, reaction set in, and Pakenham found himself in trouble. Initially he was warned that his activities contravened the laws of Tuscany.³ When he failed to desist, he was ordered to leave the province of Lucca. In Florence, he commissioned a printer named Benelli to produce 6,000 copies of the Bible, and was caught giving printed religious texts to a man dying in hospital. These actions resulted in Pakenham’s house being searched by municipal guards, and in his personal printing equipment and printed material being confiscated. Benelli was prosecuted and fined, while Pakenham – despite not being tried for his offences – was ordered to leave Tuscany.

At first, it appeared that Pakenham’s expulsion was ordered for religious reasons, but it later transpired that Tuscany’s absolutist rulers associated Protestant evangelicalism with political subversion. When the British foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, requested to know why Pakenham had been ejected,⁴ the Foreign Office was informed that his activities had violated two laws – one of 1743 and another of 1848 – prohibiting proselytism against the state religion.⁵ Pakenham was considered to have obstinately endeavoured ‘to make

proselytes to Protestantism' in contravention of those laws, not only by instruction, but by the distribution of 'forbidden books'. The British communities in Florence and Livorno signed addresses in Pakenham's defence, but the diplomatic representative to Tuscany, Sir George Hamilton, suggested that the Protestant activist had brought his difficulties upon himself by aggravating the Catholic sensibilities of the country.⁶ Pakenham sought British intervention, appealing to Palmerston to seek to have his banishment overturned, and requesting the Foreign Office to act in favour of the printer Benelli.⁷ Pakenham claimed that the allegations against him were spurious: the first – 'for giving Bibles in the hospital' – could not be sustained, the second – for not having had 'the necessary respect for Catholicism' – was 'destroyed by its own ambiguity', and the third – that 'he sought to make proselytes for Protestantism' – was 'still more absurd'. Pakenham hoped that Palmerston would not permit 'a British subject to be thus treated on accusations either untenable or unintelligible'.⁸ Even so, neither Palmerston nor Hamilton showed much sympathy for a man whom they appear to have considered something of a troublemaker. Palmerston informed Hamilton that, while the British government had no wish to interfere in the right of its Tuscan counterpart to expel 'a foreigner whose presence may be deemed dangerous to the internal peace and security of the country', that right 'ought not to be exercised capriciously or arbitrarily'. Consequently, the British government was entitled to query Pakenham's banishment. The Foreign Office concluded that because the Irishman was not alleged to have committed acts of 'revolutionary or seditious tendency', the only ground for his expulsion appeared to rest upon 'religious zeal'. While acknowledging fully that British subjects in foreign countries were required to abide by foreign laws, Palmerston did wonder 'how far such regulations may or may not be in accordance with the enlightenment of the present age', and requested evidence that Pakenham had violated Tuscan law.⁹ Beyond that, however, the Foreign Office showed little inclination to support Pakenham's case.

The case involving Captain Pakenham called attention to events involving Protestants in Tuscany, which came to be described widely in mid-Victorian Britain as religious ‘persecutions’. The significance of religion in the Italian national struggle is an area that has been well explored, and there were numerous competing visions of where the Risorgimento might lead. The clerical nationalist Vincenzo Gioberti urged the pope to take the leading role in bringing about the creation of a pan-Italian confederation during the 1840s.¹⁰ For other nationalists, religious reform and toleration were seen as necessary in accordance with the principles of nationalism and liberty, and Protestantism was appealing.¹¹ The Roman Republic of 1849 had even shown that Rome could exist without the pope.¹² The constitutional progressivism of Piedmont during the 1850s provided a secular model to which Italians might aspire. Ultimately, the struggle to make Rome the national capital during the 1860s represented the climax of what became a bitter culture war in Italy.¹³ All of these aspects of the Risorgimento can be seen as part of the wider struggle between Catholicism, religious pluralism, and secularism that raged in mid-nineteenth century Europe.¹⁴

This Italian culture war was a struggle in which recent historiography has shown the mid-Victorian generation of Britain’s Italian sympathizers to have become keenly involved. In recent years it has become customary to consider the formation of British foreign policy from perspectives other than the purely political, economic, or strategic, and the role of religion has become a particularly popular line of investigation.¹⁵ The cultural turn in international history has inspired enquiry into the cultural factors that played a role in Britain’s relations with other states, and this trend has seen the examination of influences on foreign policy spread far beyond the traditional confines of documents written by politicians, diplomats, and consuls.¹⁶ Within this context it is only natural that the role of religion in influencing British policy regarding the unification of Italy should come under scrutiny. Traditional studies on the British interest in Italian unification tended to focus very much on

the political and strategic. For example, in his examination of Britain's Italian policy during the main phase of Italy's national unification, Derek Beales focuses on the high politics of diplomacy, defining British policy as being more anti-French than pro-Italian, as well as generally lagging behind events.¹⁷ However, since the publication of C. T. McIntire's account of how Britain's leaders used their influence initially to encourage reform and ultimately to overthrow the papal temporal power between 1858 and 1861,¹⁸ the understanding of the role of religion as a motive for British support for the Italian national cause has grown considerably. Eugenio Biagini has noted the concern of the British foreign secretary Lord John Russell that Protestant missionary work in Italy caused friction with the Catholic authorities even after unification.¹⁹ Danilo Raponi has investigated the effort of Russell's Foreign Office to include a clause protecting Protestant missionaries in the otherwise strictly commercial Anglo-Italian commercial treaty of 1863.²⁰ Most recently of all, Raponi has identified how certain British Protestants hoped that the newly-united Italy might be converted into a Protestant nation, and that Protestantization would help the Italians overcome the negative characteristics of their national stereotype and find a sense of nationhood, placing Britain, Italy and religion at the centre of the culture war being fought across Europe.²¹ Consequently an understanding of the religious factor in Britain's support for Italian nationalism during the crucial developments of 1859 and 1860, as well as during the subsequent decade, has become well established.

Rather less well understood, however, are the dynamics of British sympathy for the Italian national cause during the years leading up to the creation of a unified state. Studies on British relations with Italy's predecessor states have tended to focus on the Kingdom of Sardinia – based at Turin in the north-western region of Piedmont – because it was that state which led the unification process during 1859 and 1860. While 'the clocks were turned back' in every other Italian state following the revolutionary upheaval of 1848-9,²² Piedmont

thrived under the moderate constitutional rule of King Victor Emmanuel II and his liberal aristocratic prime minister Count Cavour. Cavour visited Britain three times, making the acquaintance of the leading statesmen Palmerston, Gladstone, Clarendon and Disraeli. He travelled on railways, visited factories, banks, prisons and schools, and acquired a life-long enthusiasm for Victorian progress and modernization.²³ Perhaps British leaders most liked the fact that Cavour appeared to consider Britain a model for what his own country ought to become, not to mention the fact that his government allied itself with the British and French against Russia in the Crimean war.²⁴ Moreover, Cavourian Piedmont adopted free trade and led the way with regard to secularization in Italy, tolerating Protestantism and – through the Sissani laws of 1850 – significantly reducing the power of the church in civil matters.²⁵ Cavour's call for 'a free church in a free state' upon the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861 would have been music to the ears of whiggish British leaders who supported the destruction of the papal temporal power in central Italy, and who had greeted Italian unification under the auspices of Piedmont by comparing the event with the Glorious Revolution of 1688.²⁶ Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe has recently observed that many British Italophiles even favoured Giuseppe Mazzini's model of a unified and republican Italy over the constitutional monarchy of Piedmont, and that Mazzini's views on democracy, education, association and citizenship were more inspirational to British social reformers than the prospect of an aggrandized Piedmontese state.²⁷ Nonetheless, the British establishment's perception of the Piedmontese Kingdom of Sardinia as a well-governed Italian kingdom stood in stark contrast against the governments of central and southern Italy.

The history of British relations with Italian states other than the Kingdom of Sardinia has been relatively neglected by historians. This is surprising considering that, after his famous visit to Naples in 1851, William Gladstone publicly condemned the Bourbon regime as 'the negation of God erected into a system of government'.²⁸ His exposé of Neapolitan

tyranny raised the profile of the Italian nationalist cause in Britain, and as relations with the Bourbon government deteriorated during the 1850s, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies came to symbolize everything that was wrong with pre-unification Italy in British eyes. It was his abhorrence of the Bourbon monarchy that inspired Gladstone to join with Palmerston and Russell in government in 1859 in order ‘to do something for Italy’, with important implications for the history of Britain’s domestic politics as much as for Italian unification.²⁹ Similarly, the British view of government in the Papal States, stretching across central Italy and ruled by Pope Pius IX as an absolute monarch, was scarcely any better, and provided Britain’s Italian sympathizers with their most obvious exemplar of the link between Catholicism and what they perceived as oppressive rule overseas. Further research into Victorian Britain’s relations with Italy’s predecessor states – other than the Kingdom of Sardinia – is necessary in order to improve our understanding of how British disdain for Catholic absolutism came to influence British leaders’ approval of the unification of Italy under Piedmontese leadership by 1861.

This article on British relations with the Grand Duchy of Tuscany is a start. Tuscany is widely considered to have been one of the more progressive states in pre-unification Italy. Its government was moderate compared with those at Naples and Rome, it was affluent, and it invested in railway construction and telegraphy. It was traditionally regarded by many British Italophiles as a cradle of Italian culture. While Florence was extremely popular with British tourists and ex-patriots for its art and architecture, the free port of Livorno provided an affluent haven for British merchants; both were considered to be relatively free from the negative effects of absolutism and feudalism that they found distasteful at Naples and Rome.³⁰ As a result, both cities were characterized by a lively cosmopolitanism. However, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the English community had fought a long campaign against the political and religious authorities of Tuscany in order to establish

its right to practise Protestantism.³¹ The first Anglican church and Protestant cemetery in Italy were consecrated at Livorno in the early eighteenth century, but only under the warning that any offence to British Protestants ‘would be regarded as an offence to the British crown’.³² Therefore, it was largely on account of British strength that these privileges were secured, as the Tuscan authorities manifested a pervasive reluctance to tolerate ‘foreign’ religious devotion on account of their fear that ‘any concessions to non-Catholic Christians might popularize the notion that it was socially acceptable to be a Christian without belonging to the Catholic Church, and that Catholic rites were not fundamental to salvation’.³³ The Tuscan authorities were also suspicious of internationalism. Through his organization Young Europe, Mazzini had striven during the 1830s not only for Italian but for pan-European revolution; the overthrow of princes and priests alike.³⁴ Many Italian liberals looked to Britain’s political and religious institutions as examples of how their own country might be reconstructed. Those in exile published their observations on British constitutionalism, and they tended quite frequently also to express opinions favourable on Britain’s Protestant religious settlement.³⁵ From 1852 the controversial Italian proselytizer Alessandro Gavazzi even took his Italian anti-Catholicism to Ireland, where his lecture tours inflamed sectarian tensions.³⁶ Neither political agitation nor religious reform were apt to respect international borders.

Under these circumstances, the Tuscan authorities came to regard foreigners who drew attention to themselves as potential revolutionaries. The recalcitrant Catholic powers had reason to fear the advancement of printing techniques which made ever easier the circulation of revolutionary pamphlets and unauthorized versions of religious tracts.³⁷ During the years following the revolutions of 1848-9, the Tuscan state’s policy of religious retrenchment led it to become regarded as reactionary and repressive. Strict conditions were placed upon its toleration of non-Catholic religious groups.³⁸ Not only was Catholicism professed to be the official state religion, but under a concordat signed with the Vatican in

1851, the grand-ducal government issued new laws restricting the activities of non-Catholics in the country, and awarded the police increased powers to ensure compliance. Richard Sheil, an Irish Catholic who was appointed as the British diplomatic representative to Florence in 1850, noted that religious non-conformity was regarded by the Tuscan government as an ‘aggravated form of sedition’.³⁹ This explains why the Tuscan authorities were so inclined to restrict the activities of Protestants in the country, yet their actions tended to be viewed in Britain as little other than religious repression; nowhere else in mid-nineteenth-century Italy is the potential for the role of religion to affect British foreign policy more clear. This article reveals how the Tuscan government’s treatment of a number of Protestants was perceived in Victorian Britain, boosting British sympathy for Italian nationalism during the 1850s.

In May 1851 Count Guicciardini, a prominent Tuscan nobleman and descendent of the eponymous Renaissance historian, was arrested and charged with having attended a meeting of Italians for ‘purposes adverse’ to Catholicism. Guicciardini was openly Protestant, and when the Tuscan state made it a criminal offence to seek to convert Catholics to other denominations, he determined to leave the country. He got as far as Livorno, traditionally a haven for nineteenth-century Italian Protestants, where he met with a group of like-minded people for a prayer meeting. Guicciardini was imprisoned together with his co-religionists, and his treatment provoked a wave of public sympathy in Britain. The impression it created put the Whig government of Lord Russell under pressure to intervene. The foreign secretary, still Lord Palmerston, was petitioned by the British Evangelical Alliance to intervene in Guicciardini’s favour. Palmerston declined to interfere officially, on account of the fact that the matter was nothing to do with his Foreign Office; Guicciardini was a Tuscan subject arrested in Tuscany for having violated Tuscan law. Palmerston responded by instructing Sheil to act ‘unofficially, privately and confidentially’ to persuade the Tuscan government to commute Guicciardini’s sentence to one of banishment rather than imprisonment. When this

was done, Palmerston attributed the success to Sheil's intervention, and instructed the British chargé d'affaires at Florence, Peter Campbell Scarlett, to act likewise on any similar occasion.⁴⁰ Upon receiving this order, Scarlett clarified that the Grand Duke Leopold had ordered Guicciardini's release prior to Sheil's intervention,⁴¹ but Palmerston's order regarding how British representatives in Tuscany ought to act on similar occasions had nonetheless established a precedent.

In August 1851 a British resident named Walker was arrested on the charge of visiting an Italian house in Pisa with the intention of reading a Protestant Bible to an assembled group of Tuscans. Scarlett succeeded in securing Walker's prompt release, because it was not illegal for a Protestant to preach to other Protestants, which is all he had done. Nonetheless, the diplomat judged the matter 'an example of the arbitrary and intolerant policy of the Tuscan authorities in religious matters'.⁴² The owners of the house in which the gathering had taken place, however, were not so fortunate; Francesco and Rosa Madiari, a married couple of Tuscan Protestants who had long been suspected of actively seeking to convert Tuscan Catholics to Protestantism, were put on trial in July 1851. They were found guilty, and sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour for periods of fifty-six and forty-five months respectively. The news of their treatment outraged British Protestant residents of Tuscany, who petitioned the Russell government to intervene in their favour on the grounds that the British state afforded its own subjects 'the full enjoyment of civil and religious liberty', and that it ought to defend 'the sacred right of every human being to liberty of conscience':

where harmless and peaceful individuals in any professedly Christian community are condemned as criminals for no greater offence than that stated above, it is no less than imperative on every lover of liberty, civilization and security to protest, in the name of justice, of civil freedom, and of common

humanity, against so glaring a violation of the right of every man peaceably to follow the dictates of his own conscience.⁴³

Moreover, the petitioners expressed their abhorrence at the spectacle of a woman, Rosa Madiai, being condemned to imprisonment in ‘the degrading company of the worst of criminals’. Clearly, the signatories expected the British government to interfere in the affairs of a foreign state in support of two people who were not British.

As in the Guicciardini case, the Foreign Office found itself pressed into taking action, the awkward nature of its right to do so notwithstanding. In November 1851 Palmerston instructed Scarlett to speak with the Tuscan government regarding the matter. It emerged that the prayer meeting had comprised only Protestants, and hence there could have been no attempt made by anybody present to convert Catholics. Palmerston observed that the Madiai therefore appeared to have committed no offence other than that of entertaining different religious opinions from their government, and enquired whether such ‘persecution’ was best calculated to promote the religious denomination in whose name it was practised. The remonstrance made no difference to the plight of the Madiai, both of whom continued to languish in prison a year later when, in October 1852, a deputation of British Protestants travelled to Tuscany to protest against their treatment. Like Palmerston, the new Conservative foreign secretary, Lord Malmesbury, instructed the newly-appointed British representative in Florence, Sir Henry Bulwer, that it was his duty ‘to employ every effort tempered by discretion in supporting the efforts of Protestants in an unofficial manner’; Bulwer was warned, however, that any official interference might prove detrimental to their ‘happiness and safety’.⁴⁴ In response Bulwer did, during the winter months of 1852-3, make representations to the Tuscan government urging clemency on the part of Francesco Madiai, whose health was rumoured to be faltering and who was even falsely reported to have died as a result of his harsh sentence.⁴⁵ By February 1853, though, the British legation at Florence

had decided that British pressure merely fortified rather than weakened the resolve of the Grand Duke Leopold,⁴⁶ and it was decided to leave the matter alone.

Nonetheless, any notion that British foreign secretaries might find themselves free of the expectation that they should intervene in favour of the Protestant victims of Tuscany's religious laws were removed when a young Ayrshire woman named Margaret Cunningham was arrested at Bagni di Lucca in September 1853. Cunningham had been distributing leaflets to the local peasantry, 'as well as having attempted to instruct them in religion, contrary to the doctrine and spirit of the Roman Catholic faith, and in violation of the Criminal Code of Tuscany'. She was conveyed by carriage to the city of Lucca for questioning, accompanied by armed police, and also by a friend who had requested to remain with her. Thereafter she was sent to prison pending trial.⁴⁷ She was charged with attempting proselytism through the distribution of religious tracts, including the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*. The new foreign secretary, Lord Clarendon, responded by writing to Scarlett, once more the chargé d'affaires at Florence, that he found it 'shocking that two young ladies should be so punished for an imprudence that nowhere but in Tuscany would be considered a crime', and warned that the occurrence would 'make a deep and general sensation' in Britain. Moreover, he expressed his hope:

that a less intolerant policy would have been pursued in Tuscany, and at all events that the Tuscan authorities would not have selected such a moment as this [the outbreak of the Crimean war] for exciting public opinion against their Government, when wise men are looking for friends instead of creating enemies.⁴⁸

As this incident involved a British subject, Scarlett naturally took a much more energetic line with the Tuscan authorities than he and his predecessors had done over the previous cases. Immediately, he went to see the interior minister, Leonida Landucci, and demanded that all

proceedings against the young woman be dropped and that she be permitted to leave the country. Landucci had been a liberal in 1848, but as the Tuscan interior minister throughout the 1850s he showed himself prepared to restore absolutism,⁴⁹ and unsympathetic to Cunningham. Thereafter Scarlett sought an audience with the grand duke, who was similarly intransigent. The autocrat responded, not inappropriately, that the British, who were 'not in the habit of breaking their own laws at home' should 'learn to respect our [Tuscan] laws'. Moreover, Leopold recommended Scarlett 'to inculcate this on them' in order that they should not find themselves molested.⁵⁰ Scarlett pledged to bring the matter to the swiftest possible conclusion, but lamented that there was a suspicion in Tuscany that the British were 'more prone than the subjects of other nations to interfere in other countries with the doctrines of Rome', leaving him fearful that a quick outcome was not likely.

When Scarlett approached Giovanni Baldasseroni, the Tuscan prime minister sought to explain his government's motive in enforcing the new laws on religion. Baldasseroni explained that in a country where the whole population shared one religion, the maintenance of that religion and the union of all subjects was 'an advantage too precious, in connection with the maintenance of public order, for the Government not to be impressed with the duty of protecting it, and of defending it by the lawful means at their disposal'. With the authority and liberty of an independent state, he argued that the Tuscan government had taken up its right to enact laws intended to protect the state religion. This religion, he claimed, had been threatened 'by the spirit of proselytism' which animated many Protestants, and there was 'reason to believe' that their actions were intended 'to conceal political designs and agitation'. With that, Baldasseroni reminded Scarlett of the case of Captain Pakenham in 1849, whom the Tuscan authorities had suspected to have been a political activist. In response, Clarendon declared it to be 'deplorable that in an age of civilizing progress' such a law as that which Cunningham had violated 'not only exist, but should recently have been

enacted', and that 'men in high position' should consider 'that punishment for conscientious opinions' could be 'acceptable in the sight of Heaven', and that they did not consider it to be 'utterly at variance with the mild doctrines of Christianity'.⁵¹ Nonetheless, at the same time the foreign secretary was careful to point out that no matter how greatly the British government might 'lament the intolerant spirit to which the law in question owes its origin', it did not hesitate to acknowledge 'that British subjects are bound not to disobey the laws of the country in which [...] they may choose to reside'. Clarendon accepted that Cunningham did indeed appear to have violated the law of Tuscany, but added rather haughtily that she had been acting 'in the perfect freedom in such matters' which existed for Catholics and Protestants alike in Britain, and was 'animated by the zeal in the performance of what she believed to be her sacred duty'. She was also ignorant of the law published a few days before her arrest, which had suddenly rendered her proceedings illegal.⁵² In the hope of securing Cunningham's release, Scarlett made a number of deferential appeals to the grand duke, both in person and in writing. When these efforts failed, he wrote to Richard Lyons, the British minister to the Holy See, in the hope that he might persuade the pope to induce the grand duke to take a more clement approach.⁵³ Under British pressure, Leopold pardoned Cunningham for her offence, and the Tuscan authorities released her in October 1853, within a month of her arrest. In an apparent act of indignation, Cunningham refused to accept her pardon, and was compelled to leave her prison by threat of force.⁵⁴ Once released, she was not forced to leave the country, but was instead permitted to remain at Lucca where her mother had been taken seriously ill during her imprisonment.

British responses to the sequence of religious 'persecutions', and to Cunningham's treatment in particular, are illuminating. As Clarendon had predicted, Cunningham's experience scandalized the British newspaper press. For example, *The Times* waged a campaign against the Tuscan policy on religion. It reported that Cunningham's

imprisonment had ‘created much sensation’ among the British community in Tuscany, not only because of its similarity to the Madiai affair but also because of her nationality and the possible severity of her punishment of five-to-ten years in prison. The Tuscan police were reported (inaccurately) as having been so active that Cunningham’s trial had commenced before the British officials at Florence knew anything of it. Scarlett was praised as having been very active in attempting to secure her release. The grand duke was criticized for refusing to interfere, and for allegedly being ‘quite delighted at having the opportunity of venting his grudge against the English Government for their zeal in the Madiai business’. *The Times* also argued that the law against proselytism in Tuscany had been enacted in contradiction of the 1848 constitution, which had granted religious freedom and which Leopold had no right to recall. Most vociferously, *The Times* suggested that:

It cannot be too often repeated in this cause that there is no desire for change of religious dogmas among Italians, but an ardent wish for reform of *church government*.

It was a common saying of a celebrated divine, now no more, that “the Italians were not fit to become Protestants, because they were still Pagans”.⁵⁵

The Times described Leopold as retaining his power over the people of Tuscany ‘by virtue of the strong battalions of Austria’, as having imposed ‘many absurd regulations’ since his restoration, and of withdrawing ‘the bounties and largesses [sic]’ previously bestowed. It described the religious toleration afforded under the 1848 constitution as ‘a boon to the whole world’, and defended the right of foreigners as well Tuscans ‘to say how far they are inclined to be defrauded by the brute force of tyranny’ after its withdrawal. The newspaper added that ‘if a day of reckoning should come for the better adjustment of Italian affairs’ such ‘iniquitous proceedings’ would ‘not be lost sight of’.⁵⁶ *The Times* even suggested that if the British government’s efforts to have Cunningham released did not succeed, it would be necessary ‘to consider the most appropriate method’ of bringing the ‘refractory’ sovereign ‘to

reason'.⁵⁷ *The Manchester Guardian* condemned the Tuscan government's law against proselytism as 'a monstrous one', even when directed against its own 'miserable subjects'. Perhaps misjudging how far Britain stood out of kilter from most of the rest of absolutist Europe, the radical newspaper anticipated that if the Tuscan state should punish a lady 'whose worst fault' was 'an excess of religious zeal', then 'the universal voice of civilised Europe' would surely 'denounce so shameful an abuse of royal power'.⁵⁸ *The Observer* noted Cunningham's defiance in rather celebratory tone, as she 'positively refused to leave the prison as an act of grace' because she had not been found guilty of any crime, and only agreed to leave the prison after demanding and receiving written confirmation that if she did not go voluntarily she would be ejected by force.⁵⁹

Clearly, ideas on what constituted 'persecution' varied. The law in Tuscany did not restrict members of non-Catholic denominations from practising their religion; it merely forbade such individuals from seeking to convert Catholics from Catholicism. Persons who violated this law, like any other law, were liable to punishment. British Protestant opinion did not judge the matter upon this basis. The general expressions of the Protestant organizations which lobbied the Foreign Office to take action on behalf of the 'victims' of Tuscany's religious 'persecutions', the British press which reported and commented on such events, and the foreign secretaries and diplomats who responded to the public pressure to intervene, all viewed the matter through their own eyes and without any attempt to understand the position of the foreign government which they deemed to be abusing its co-religionists and fellow nationals.

With the news of Cunningham's situation achieving such publicity, Clarendon had been pressed into taking actions by religious organizations. He was visited at the Foreign Office by members of the Protestant Alliance, led by Lord Shaftesbury. He was also visited at his home by churchmen from the Evangelical Alliance. Clarendon's visitors expressed

themselves ‘in the strongest manner upon the barbarous nature’ of the Tuscan law, and hoped that his ‘most earnest efforts ... would be used to rescue a British subject from the indignity thus offered to her’. Clarendon agreed entirely regarding the character of the law in question, which he described as being contrary ‘to the spirit of the age’.⁶⁰ Some explanation of the Tuscan government’s position was provided by the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, quoted by *The Times*, which suggested that the British ‘zeal for converting’ suggested a desire ‘to fish in troubled waters’. The German publication noted that this zeal had not been so manifest before 1848, that some 1,500 Italians had abandoned Catholicism since that date, and that at least three quarters of the recent converts to Italy’s *Comitato Evangelico* were opponents of Italy’s political status quo, and of the papal temporal power in particular.⁶¹ It is therefore hardly surprising that Baldasseroni and the Tuscan government should have made an association between Protestant proselytism and political activism, not least when the individuals concerned came from the notorious haven for revolutionaries that was Victorian Britain.

British Protestant sensitivities to what was perceived as religious ‘persecution’ by Catholic governments is also understandable considering the context in which these episodes occurred. If it was through a ‘common investment’ in Protestantism that the English, Scots and Welsh bound themselves together during the eighteenth century, their spirit of unity was surely aided by their common need to defend themselves on numerous occasions against a powerful Catholic rival in the shape of France; it was upon ‘an uncompromising Protestantism’ that the foundation of their state ‘was explicitly and unapologetically based’.⁶² Although British anti-Catholicism dwindled sufficiently to result in Catholic emancipation in 1829, it was resurgent during the 1850s, when the religious ‘persecutions’ in Tuscany took place. At that time, Protestant Britain might have been approaching its zenith as a world power, but many felt that its religious identity was under threat. With regard to the case of Guicciardini, Palmerston had written to his representative in Florence that:

In the present unfortunate state of antagonism in this country between Catholic and Protestant, it is much to be wished that no fresh incident should occur still further to widen the breach which has unhappily been re-opened between these two sections of Christians; and it is plain that any glaring instance of persecution by Catholic authorities, practised towards Protestants, must tend still further to inflame the animosity which recent acts of the Pope have excited in this country towards the Papal system.⁶³

Here the foreign secretary hinted at a resurgence of anti-Catholic sentiment which had arisen because of a number of recent domestic developments. The mid-Victorian era witnessed an influx of Catholic immigration to Britain as millions fled the potato famine in Ireland. This combined with the opportunities created by Britain's rising economic might to make industrialized British cities popular destinations for migrants, with the result that Protestant England began to feel swamped. The Protestants of English and Scottish cities which received the greatest influx of Catholic immigrants were quick to attach many negative stereotypes to their new Irish neighbours, viewing them as racially inferior, uncivilized, lazy, consumed by superstition, and inclined towards drunkenness, violence and criminality.⁶⁴

In this context, the impression that Catholicism represented a resurgent threat to British Protestantism was compounded by Pope Pius IX's re-establishment of the Catholic episcopal hierarchy in England. The move caused outrage, and was considered a threat to Protestantism, free thought, and action. *The Times* denounced it as 'Papal Aggression', prompting the prime minister, Lord Russell, to criticize Pius IX's pretensions of supremacy and his violation of the spiritual independence of Britain. Thousands of petitions were signed, effigies of the pope and his new Catholic archbishops were burnt, demonstrations took place in Scotland, Wales and Ulster (even though the hierarchy had only been re-established in England), and it led societies like the Evangelical Alliance to take a greater interest in the

political and religious affairs of Italy than they might otherwise have done.⁶⁵ These events rendered the period an extremely complex one regarding relations between the British government and the Holy See.⁶⁶ Protestant intellectuals and clergy made their disapproval clear through lectures and sermons, and the proliferation of publications criticizing Catholicism and the papacy.⁶⁷ In 1851 a fifty-page pamphlet sympathizing with Guicciardini's plight was translated into English from the Italian original and published in London.⁶⁸ In 1853 'An Anonymous English Traveller' who was no doubt inspired by William Gladstone's famous *Two Letters to the Earl of Aberdeen* published an open letter to him in which she called for the protection of religious liberty overseas.⁶⁹ A parliamentary select committee was set up to enquire into the nature of the religious laws of foreign states.⁷⁰ The increasingly fractious nature of the relations between Protestant and Catholic, and the potential for events in Italy to have repercussions in Britain, came to a head in 1862, when English supporters of Garibaldi clashed with Irish supporters of the pope in Hyde Park.⁷¹ In Ireland itself, attitudes towards Italian affairs tended to be an extension of domestic debates in which the threat to posed to the temporal power of the papacy by Italian nationalism proved divisive,⁷² and the divisions which emerged were by no means clear-cut.⁷³

Whether the actions of Pakenham, Walker and Cunninghame were indeed motivated by politics as well as their own religious beliefs is unclear, and doubtful. They were, however, not alone in apparently believing that they were entitled to behave as they pleased in Tuscany, irrespective of the laws of that country. Throughout the nineteenth century it was commonplace for British residents and travellers in Italy to be ignorant of foreign laws, to act as though they were at home, and to react with indignation when they found themselves in trouble with the local authorities.⁷⁴ Pakenham was insistent that he had done no wrong, and reacted with insolence. Walker appears to have behaved with equanimity, even though he was arrested without having actually committed any offence. Cunninghame was ignorant of her

crime, and reacted with defiance. In an interview at the Foreign Office between Clarendon and Cunningham's relatives, it emerged that the young woman had acted in honest ignorance of the law. At the same time, however, there was some criticism of the fact that she had been given no warning by those who arrested her that her actions were illegal. She had also been arrested after exiting an office where she had procured possession of a passport to leave the country the following day. Even if Clarendon accepted that British travellers should not expect to act with impunity in foreign countries, he suggested that under all of the circumstances concerning Cunningham's arrest nothing could be gained by detaining her and that she might perhaps be released and allowed to return to Britain.

It is important to note that the British state's reaction to the treatment of its subjects in Tuscany was measured. In 1850 Palmerston had ordered the blockading of Athens in what became notorious as the Don Pacifico affair. Don Pacifico was a Portuguese Jew who claimed British subject status on the grounds of having been born in Gibraltar. When his family was attacked and his house burned down in an anti-Semitic attack, he demanded compensation from the Greek government. When Don Pacifico had failed to secure any indemnity, he had appealed to the British government for assistance. The British government responded by supporting his claim, blockading the Greek capital in order to ensure Greek compliance with its demands, which included a list of other grievances which dated back some years. When criticized in parliament, Palmerston defended his policy in terms which won him tremendous public approbation, notwithstanding the disapproval it attracted from his political opponents, by suggesting 'a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye of England will protect him against injustice and wrong'.⁷⁵ Unlike the Don Pacifico affair, the religious 'persecutions' in Tuscany resulted in no blockade of Tuscan ports, presumably because there was no catalogue of British claims to resolve as much as the fact that the Tuscan capital was not located within reach of British

naval power as Athens was. Nonetheless, the excuse Palmerston used to justify his protest in favour of the Madiai reflected that used in the Don Pacifico affair. The fact that Rosa Madiai, a Tuscan subject, had lived for many years in Britain and worked in the service of British employers, gave Palmerston a tenuous pretext on which to act in her support, which he stridently exaggerated as giving his government cause ‘to take a special interest in what concerns her’.⁷⁶

By way of conclusion, it is reasonable to consider the high profile and negative reception of the religious ‘persecutions’ in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, as publicized in the newspaper press and as perceived by Protestant opinion in Victorian Britain, and the actions of both Whig and Conservative governments in reaction to them, as most likely contributing to the perception of Italy’s predecessor states as being in need of reform. The treatment of Protestants by the Tuscan authorities was perceived as ‘persecution’ by British public opinion, which judged another country and its laws by its own values; there was a clear expectation that Tuscany ought to treat its own subjects – not to mention its British visitors – in accordance with British conventions rather than its own. At the same time, the actions of foreign secretaries in response to these events demonstrate very clearly how religious motives could affect British foreign policy during Britain’s age of global dominance. With regard to British foreign policy on the Italian question, the perceived ‘persecution’ of Protestants in Tuscany surely proved influential. The British notion that Italy was in need of change was not solely inspired by Gladstone’s frequently cited exposition of the abuses of Neapolitan justice following his famous visit to Naples. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, which became viewed increasingly as a pariah state during the decade preceding the unification of Italy, was not the only Italian predecessor state to be regarded as reactionary and repressive, and in need of reform. This article has shown how negative sentiment applied also – but for different reasons – to Tuscany. It has also demonstrated how the British believed that religious reform

was needed as much as political and legal reorganization, in Italy. Certainly, further research on British relations with Bourbon Naples and Papal Rome, and the impact of those relationships upon British sympathy for Italian nationalism and British support for Piedmont's leadership of that cause, would be worthwhile. Finally, the British preoccupation with religious liberty manifest in Victorian reactions to the religious 'persecutions' in Tuscany bears a contemporary resonance. The extent to which the principle of religious toleration continues to be prized and protected in twenty-first-century Britain is nowhere more evident than in the recent decision of the Westminster magistrate's court to permit a radical Islamist cleric to continue to preach in the streets, irrespective of his arrest on suspicion of encouraging terrorism and membership of a banned terrorist group.⁷⁷ If religious toleration is such a cornerstone of the British concept of liberty, it is hardly surprising that the mid-Victorian generation was so strongly motivated by that principle when taking an interest in the events leading up to the unification of Italy.

¹ I would like to thank the British Academy for funding the research project of which this article forms a part. I am grateful to delegates of the 2014 British International History Group Conference for questions which were of use in the preparation of this paper, and to Emma Griffin and *History*'s anonymous reviewer for their comments on this article.

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