

Gardens & Medallions 75th Anniversary Retrospective—Part III

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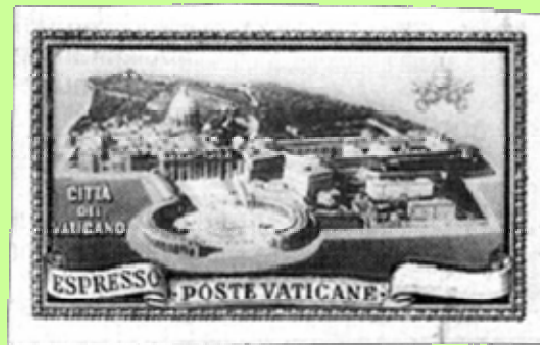
Editor's note: The first installment of this article, covering the low values of the 1933 definitive series, began on page two of the May-June 2008 issue. The second part, which examined the £1-£2.75 mid-range values, began on page eleven of the Fourth Quarter 2008 issue. Both can be accessed at <http://notes.vaticanphilately.org/veritas.htm>.

This article will review the production and postal history of the three high values and the express stamps of the Gardens and Medallions definitive series issued by Vatican City on May 31, 1933. The stamps feature two bicolor pictorial designs—a view of St. Peter's Square and the façade of the basilica on the £5-20 values and an aerial view of the entire territory of the newly defined Vatican City State on the two express values.

As with the other large format values in the series, these values were printed by the *Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato* (Italian State Printing Works) in panes of 50 on water-marked paper and perforated 14. The vignettes were engraved by Austrian master engraver Ferdinand Schirnböck and the frames by Enrico Federici.



David Feldman sale, November 18, 1997 Lot #32041



David Feldman sale, November 18, 1997 Lot #32048

▲ Fig. 1: Top, an essay for the £5 value, taken from a black-and-white auction catalogue. According to the lot description the essay is composed of two photographs: a blue frame with a brown sepia vignette pasted in place. Bottom, a similar essay for the express values, from the same auction. This one is a composite; the frame is a die proof without the value while the vignette is a photograph.

◀ Fig. 2: Block of four of the £20 value with red SAGGIO (specimen) overprint.

▼ Fig. 3: A cropped 500% enlargement of the £5 special delivery value reveals the names of the stamp's two engravers, Federici (at left, under the word ESPRESSO) and Schirnböck (at bottom right of the vignette).



£5: Most frequently encountered Gardens & Medallions high value

While all of the high values and both express stamps in the series are generally hard to find on cover, the £5 value is the most commonly encountered. First flight and zeppelin covers command a premium; properly franked commercial usages are much scarcer, however, and significantly undervalued in comparison.



▲ Fig. 4: 17 November 1934 registered cover weighing 60-80 grams and franked with a single £5 value addressed to Cechovice, Czechoslovakia. *Rate calculation:* £1.25 external letter rate for the first 20g. + £1.50 external registration fee + (£0.75 per 20g. × 3 = £2.25) = £5.

► Fig. 6: 20 December 1939 registered first flight card to Seville, Spain carried on the Italian LATI airline's first flight from Rome to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. There is a 21 December first flight cancel as well as a receiving mark and military censorship cachet applied in Seville.



▲ Fig. 7: 25 February 1946 cover from the Vatican Secretary of State to the Bishop of Nice, France. A £5 single pays the foreign letter rate in effect from 20 April 1945 to 30 April 1946.

► Fig. 8: Scarce 31 May 1933 first day of issue cover carried by air from Berlin to Friedrichshafen, Germany and then placed aboard the second South American flight of *Graf Zeppelin* to Recife, the capital of Pernambuco state in Brazil.



▲ Fig. 5: Exceptional *ninth* step in weight 9 September 1939 registered express cover weighing 160-180 grams and franked with £7.05 to Taormina, Italy. *Rate calculation:* £0.80 letter rate to Italy for the first 20g. + £1.25 registration fee + £2 express fee + (£0.50c per 20g. × 8 = £4) = £7.05.



£10: Better late than never



▲► Fig. 9: Exceptional 11 December 1945 registered cover from the Vatican Motor Vehicles Registry to Troy, NY franked at the £5 letter rate to foreign destinations in effect from 1 May 1946 to 14 October 1947. *Rate calculation:* £5 foreign letter rate + £10 external registration fee = £15).

The addressee, Keith L. Marvin (1924-2009), was an automotive historian and the author of more than 3000 articles on the history of cars and license plates, which helps to explain his correspondence with the Vatican's register of motor vehicles.

▼ Fig. 10: 21 June 1945 registered cover from the Vatican Post Office to New York paying the same £15 rate as in Fig. 9. There is a blue civil censor marking of the Allied Military Commission. Most external mail from Italy, and to a lesser extent from the Vatican, was subject to censorship for several years following the end of World War II.



When the Gardens and Medallions series was issued in 1933, postage rates were calculated in cents rather than lire, and there was little use for the £10 value. Then, during the war years, mail service with many countries was suspended. It was not until the resumption of normal mail service and the inflationary period following World War II that the £10 and £20 values came into widespread use.



▼ Fig. 11: 17 December 1944 picture postcard to Haifa, Palestine censored on arrival. Although it is vastly overfranked and probably philatelic, it is nonetheless an early usage of external mail following the liberation of Rome in June 1944.



£20: The scarcest stamp of the series on cover

From the 1920s until the mid 1940s, £20 was approximately equal to one U.S. dollar. When it can be found on cover it is usually paying high foreign airmail rates, often in combination with registry fees. The usages illustrated below (a pair and a corner plate number copy) are particularly unusual and rare. Moreover, they help to solve a difficult airmail rate conundrum.



◀▲ Fig. 12: 30 January 1942 registered airmail cover from the Argentine Embassy to Buenos Aires. It weighed 33g. and is franked with £52.50, including a horizontal pair of the £20. The reverse bears the transit datestamp of Lisbon, Portugal (where mail from the Italian LATI airline connected with the transatlantic Pan American clipper service) and registry backstamps from New York and Buenos Aires. The red 43937 numeral handstamp indicates that this cover transited Bermuda (see Peter A. Flynn, *Intercepted in Bermuda*) but was not censored because it was diplomatic. *Rate calculation*: £1.25 external letter rate for the first 20g. + £0.75 for the second 20g. + £1.50 foreign registry fee + (£7 airmail fee per 5g. × 7 steps = £49) = £52.50.



◀Fig. 13: 5 March 1942 cover from the same correspondence. The letter weighed 22g. and is franked with £38.50, including a plate number copy of the £20. A 13 March 1942 Lisbon transit backstamp and an Argentine arrival marking are on the reverse. *Rate calculation*: £1.25 external letter for the first 20g. + £0.75 for the second 20g. + £1.50 foreign registry fee + (£7 airmail fee per 5g. × 5 steps = £35) = £38.50.

The airmail rate from the Vatican to Argentina during this time period is not known with certainty. However, analysis of these two covers, and another that I am aware of from this same correspondence, indicate a likely rate of £7 per 5 g. for letters via New York. It is not clear whether this rate covered the transatlantic airmail fee to New York only, in which case the final transit to Argentina would have been via surface mail.

£2 and £2.50: Speedy delivery

The £2 express value paid for express delivery to all destinations in Italy and the extended Italian Empire during most of its long period of validity. The £2.50 value paid the express fee to foreign destinations. Commercial usages of both stamps are scarce and undervalued by catalogues, especially if used after 1940. Philatelic frankings are more common and usually found in combination with other values of the series or with other stamps that were valid at the time.

Express service (called special delivery in the U.S.) meant that mail was dispatched to the addressee by messenger immediately upon arrival at the delivering post office instead of waiting for regular carrier delivery. An international postal agreement that took effect on January 1, 1923 required signatory nations to honor each other's special delivery stamps.



▲ Fig. 14: 5 February 1937 express picture postcard to Acireale, Italy franked at the £2.50 postal card rate to Italy (£0.50 Italian postcard rate + £2 Italian express fee). With a Rome railway transit marking and 8 February 1937 arrival date stamp.



▲ Fig. 15: 20 December 1934 express cover to Rome franked at the proper £2.80 rate (£0.80 Italian letter rate + £2 express fee). A local express letter posted and delivered within Rome via the Italian postal system would have cost the sender only £1.50 (£0.25 local letter rate + £1.25 express fee).



▲ Fig. 16: 6 March 1940 registered express picture postcard to Milan. *Rate calculation:* £0.25 picture postcard rate to Italy (five words or fewer) + £1.25 Italian registration fee + £2 Italian express fee = £3.50.



▲ Fig. 17: Remarkable 19 February 1940 express cover to Tirana, Albania franked at the proper £2.80 express single letter rate to Italy. Albania was part of the Italian Empire from the time of its conquest by Mussolini in April 1939 until Italy surrendered to the Allies in September 1943. As result, postal rates from the Vatican to Albania were the same as those to destinations in Italy during this period.



▲ Fig. 18: 3 July 1937 express cover from Vatican Radio to Luxembourg. There is a "Stazione Radio" imprint and 5 July receiving backstamp on the reverse. *Rate calculation:* £1.25 foreign letter rate + £2.50 foreign express fee = £3.75.