

of Italy; to the creation of territorial departments becoming integral part of France; and a most useful chronology of the French Forces in Italy. From there on, a 70-page chapter deals with the field post of the French Forces in Italy.

Well-equipped with such information the serious collector can then capitalise on the contents of the 380-page Volume Two which opens with a chapter on the use of postmarks and unusual combinations of the same (field post and civil post, for example), as well as variables of their use and other complexities. The catalogue itself lists the postmarks, hand-stamps, administrative and accessory marks of the various Armées: Midi; Savoie; Alpes; Reserve; Var; Italie; Rome; Naples; Italie Meridionale; Calabre; Observation; Grande Armée; Grisons; Illyrie; Allemagne; Corps d'Observation de la Gironde; Rhin; and Pyrénées Orientales.



For each postmark we are given clear illustrations, and the various places where the field post was stationed and related dates. Other important technical aspects such as the colour of the postmarks and their rarity are also examined. Each section is replete with illustrations of mouth-watering items and stunning gems. In this respect the reader is advised to have suitable medication available to curb over-excitement or fibrillation.

The sections on field posts with longer-lasting and wide-ranging operations benefit from detailed information, including maps showing the changing deployments of the troops.

The table of contents is well devised and compiled, the bibliography is exhaustive, and a section on internet sources is a practical and pleasant surprise.

Younger readers and older readers, new collectors and veterans will find a huge amount of information and the language barrier is quite contained since the hundreds of illustrations are worth a million words. Furthermore the translation facilities found on the internet will provide a useful aid.

It is certainly cause for great celebration that such an ambitious project, both from the research and production perspectives, has successfully come to fruition. I am told that these two volumes are a genuine limited edition; therefore anyone with even a distant interest is strongly advised to secure a copy now. The price may appear somewhat high; nevertheless when you have these two volumes on your desk, even a cursory examination will tell you that it was a wise investment that will produce handsome dividends.

*Reviewed by Giorgio Migliavacca*

Nicola Luciano Cipriani, Claudio Ernesto Manzati, Giovanbattista Spampinato - **Il Servizio Prioritario: storia, francobolli, tariffe ed aspetti collezionistici** - A 4, Hardbound, 352 pages, full colour, illustrated throughout, in Italian, CIFO Publishers, 2015. €50.00. Available from Dr. Stefano Proserpio, Via S. Balestra 6, 22100 Como Italy. (email [segreteria@cifo.eu](mailto:segreteria@cifo.eu) for payment & postage)

While much emphasis is consistently placed on the classical issues, during the last decades there has been a definite trend towards modern philately. One of the strongholds of modern philately is CIFO (Collezionisti Italiani di Francobolli Ordinari - Italian Collectors of Definitive Stamps) - a vibrant philatelic club that has a sizable membership and publishes a monthly newsletter. Indeed, many members collect stamps that are centenarians and older, but modern stamps and postal history have gained momentum and followers.



The book opens with a scholarly introduction of the special delivery/express mail, from its infancy in the very early 1500s, to the estafette express of the early 1700s, to the daily "Staffetta Giornaliera" of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and finally the term "Espresso" being used in hand-stamps and labels.

Postally speaking the last two decades of the 20th century marked an age of transformation and renewed efforts to improve efficiency and quality of the postal service. Since time immemorial the speed of postal delivery has been a signpost of progress, much more reliable than other indicators. Beginning in 1994 the postal administration began a process leading to the privatisation of the postal service. The impact of high technology had begun to assist efforts of modernisation. For quite a long time express delivery had lost its "full speed" luster and an international accelerated courier (CAI) was introduced in 1983, followed by *Postacelere* nationwide - swift post - in 1986, and city swift post in 1987. In the mid-1990s Priority Mail was largely used in neighbouring countries and Italy certainly took notice.

Priority mail went through a testing phase from December 1997 to June 1999. On 14 June 1999, a week ahead of the official launching of the new service, the first priority mail stamp was issued by Poste Italiane. The novelty was redoubled by the fact that the stamp was the first self-adhesive postage stamp of Italy; on the down-side the design was uninviting and the drab stamp was nicknamed "label". More priority stamps with the same design and a variety of colours and denominations were issued each year from 2000 to 2009.

This highly informative monograph discusses all of the

above, from testing phase to the production and issuing of stamps in great detail.

The production of these stamps went through its trials and tribulations when printing varieties, die cutter varieties, and unexpected oddities occurred. They are painstakingly discussed and shown; some of them being eye-catching, such as the large encircled "P" prominently featured in the design actually missing or fading; as well as some missing or shifting colours.

Most Italian definitive stamps have been forged to defraud the post office and sometime to trick the collectors, and the priority mail stamps are no exception. This intriguing aspect is well researched and well illustrated.

The next chapter deals with the logistics, the tariffs and postal use. The priority mail stamps issued during the first three years (1999-2001) had face values expressed in two currencies, the lira and the euro. With the introduction of the euro as the sole legal tender on 1 January 2002, both postal rates and the currency featured on priority mail stamps changed. For the historic occasion the newly issued, euro-denominated values underwent cosmetic changes and printing improvements.

The use of these stamps includes the expected misuse in frankings utilising definitive stamps and priority stamps on the same piece of mail. The combinations are endless and when not caught in time, also elusive. Furthermore, in many instances, it was common practice to utilise solely definitive stamps to pay priority mail postage. One thing that Italians do not lack is a vivid imagination.

Add to this powder keg, postal rates and destinations and you have the philatelic equivalent of "senza fine" - endless or "ad infinitum". In fact, meter marks also showed up on priority mail. There is more to priority mail in Italy than you can possibly imagine. In fact, in 2002 Italy began issuing commemorative priority stamps and there was no stopping them in the years ahead. In 2009, a new definitive series was devised to phase out the first design - that was the beginning of the end.

The final 100 pages are devoted to appendices, beginning with a very much needed 13-page checklist-catalogue of all existing priority mail stamps issued; 13 pages, and that is for the standard type, not the commemorative issues.

Easter and Christmas postcards, cards and letter-sheets featuring children's art were issued in 2000 to incentivize the use of priority mail and priority stamps. Summer holiday-goers were the target of the ensuing series of promotional postcards. In 2001, a long series of priority mail promotional postcards featuring "Peace in the World" artwork was issued. In 2004, more cards featured postal poetry, and the following year some more featured the same theme. It must be mentioned that promotional flyers were distributed to the public and mints wrapped in blue paper blatantly sporting the iconic "P" were distributed to the public together with mouse pads, rulers and pencils.



A.R. (Acknowledgement of Receipt ) priority postcards to be used in conjunction with priority mail or ordinary mail were introduced; the two basic types are those for domestic mail and those for priority mail to foreign destinations.

A very handy section deals with the postal tariffs, which, for this special service alone underwent many updates and increases.

Originally received by the public with a cold shoulder, at one point the priority mail stamps became a national joke as it was discovered that they could easily be recycled by using a cheap eraser to delete the cancellation.

However, on the whole, the priority mail experiment was rather successful, but it remained an experiment that was discontinued, although some semblance of it remained as a face-saver, nothing more than a bureaucratic smokescreen. Apparently, by mid-2006 all the regular mail was to be handled at priority mode; such a move would be difficult to implement in postally efficient environments; in Italy it was and remains utopia, at least so far.

The golden P stamps, as they have been nicknamed, were poorly designed and yet they carved their niche in the hearts of collectors. This book tells their story and in the process it draws the blueprint for the collector who wants to specialise in modern philately. The specialist will find all the relevant data in one book, without having to scramble through files, clippings, and drawers.

The authors have gone through a tour de force and have certainly done a very good job and kept the technical jargon to a minimum. The book is well produced and generously illustrated.

Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Giorgio Migliavacca*