

# The Libyan Sybil

## Six Definitives of Italian Libya

### 1924 - 1943

This exhibit is a traditional study of six definitive values with a common design from the Italian colony of Libya.

In 1922, the Italian colonial office issued a new bi-color set of definitives for the colonial provinces and territories in Libya. This definitive series came to be known as the *Pittorica*.

Almost immediately there was a need for new values because of rate changes. This need produced four values with a new monochromatic design showing the Michelangelo's Libyan Sybil from the Sistine Chapel ceiling. These values of 20, 40, and 60 centesimi and 2 lire went on sale in the colonies in April, 1924.

Technically at that time, there was no governmental entity called Libya, but rather the colonies of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, with capitals of Tripoli and Benghazi, respectively. In 1934, they were united into a single colony under the Libya name.

Initially these stamps were produced in the state printing office in Turin, but by 1926 all production had moved to Rome. Changes in perforation equipment in both Turin and Rome produced several perforation varieties.

More rate changes created the need for new values. In January, 1931, the 1,75 and 2,55 lire Sybil values were issued.

These definitives remained in use until the final occupation of Libya by British forces in the north, and French Africa forces in the south in January, 1943. The long life of the issues spanned five different rate periods, so the stamps could pay several different rates over that period.

In 1943, the French overprinted a tiny number of seized Libyan stamps for use (mainly philatelic!) in the sparsely populated occupied territory of Fezzan and the southern Sahara. This included some of the Sybils. In the north, the British inventoried the captured stocks of stamps and destroyed them.



Michelangelo's painting of the Libyan Sybil from the Sistine Chapel that was the basis of the design.



Above, plate proofs of 20 c and 2 L  
Pre-production material for these issues is virtually unknown.

# The Issued Stamps



Four initial values placed on sale in April, 1924.



Two additional values placed on sale in January, 1931.

Below, 1941 philatelic-inspired cover showing all six Sybils and three other *Pittorica* values.





# The Plates



Three digit plate numbers appear in the upper left corner. A variety of marginal inscriptions were used. The 1,75 L block above shows part of "ISTITUTO POLIGRAFICO DELLO STATO" at the top. Right, this imperforate single shows a part of FRANCOBOLLI POSTALI DA CENTESIMI 60.

A total of eleven plates were used to print these values, ranging from 4 for the 20 cents. to only one for the 2,00 L and 2,55 L. Stamps were printed in sheets of 100 (10 x 10).

The paper has a watermark in the left and right margins reading MINISTERO DEL TESORO. The stamps themselves have no watermark.





# Perforations

Changes in perforating equipment created several varieties.



**Horizontal comb perf 14 x 13-3/4.** This was the format of the initial issues printed in Turin. The equipment was later sent to Rome and used for stamps printed there.



**Linear perf 13-3/4.** These were produced by new perforating equipment installed in Turin in late 1924.



**Linear perf 11.** Yet another set of equipment was used in Turin in starting in 1926.



**Linear perf 14.** Produced by equipment used in Rome in 1929. For these six issues, it appears only on the 20 cents.



The 1931 issues were only produced with comb perf 14 x 13-3/4.



## Perforation Errors



60 cents. imperf at left.



60 cents. imperf at top.

20 cents. imperf at top.



**Fakes.** The quality control on these stamps was not the best. Poor centering with large uneven margins occurred. Trimming one or both sides of perforations immediately creates an "imperf." Singles can only be verified as imperf if the margin is greater than 4 mm.

## French Forces Overprint



By February 1943, Free French forces under General DeClerc occupied Fezzan in southern Libya (mainly several oases in the desert). The French overprinted a small quantity of stamps. 1728 copies of the 20 cents. Sybil were overprinted and revalued to 3 francs.



# Usage

20 cents.

During the lifetime of these stamps, the colonies were considered part of Italy, and domestic rates applied between Libya and Italy.

perf 14 x 13-3/4  
13 February 1942  
Tripoli to Argegno, Italy  
5-word card rate



perf 11  
29 April 1927  
Leptis Magna to Bologna, Italy  
5-word card rate



perf 11 and  
perf 14 x 13-3/4  
Both perf types on same  
cover is uncommon.  
13 December 1926  
Tripoli to Genoa  
40 cents. written card rate



# Usage

20 cents.



perf 11  
28 November 1936  
Murzuk to Trieste, Italy  
50 cents. domestic letter rate  
Covers from Fezzan and the  
southern Sahara are  
not common.

perf 14 x 13-3/4  
23 May 1931  
Citta' di Tripoli to Genoa  
50 cents letter rate  
Cancelled by the  
mobile post office on  
the steamship Citta' di  
Tripoli





**20 cents.**

gebissen worden & muss 20  
Tage in Tr. blei- CARTOLIN  
ben nur 40 Spritzen zu RISE  
nehmen. Vorher war er krank  
Halb eine Damsacke & ist  
nur noch Haut & Knochen  
der Kruste. Wenn Gott mir  
nur beschützen möge vor all  
dem Sittenstich der Krank-  
heiten. Ich habe zeitweise sol-  
che Angst weil ich allein bin  
Wer würde mich pflegen,  
wenn was passiert? Ich  
lassen zu wünschen ich  
Nur Gattweib Frauen kann  
mich über dunkle Stunden  
helfen. Mögen sie immer fern  
bleiben, auf dass wir eines Tages  
müde & schwächer wiedersehen  
können. Mach mir die Freunde  
schreibe mir umgehend. Woher in  
Heimatsprache von allen Freunden,

Below, perf 14 x 13-3/4  
18 July 1941, Homs to Germany  
Incorrectly paid at domestic air rate (50 cents. domestic letter + 50 cents. air surcharge).  
Italian and German censor marking and tapes on reverse.





Usage

40 cents.



perf 11  
 18 September 1926  
 Tripoli to Genoa, Italy  
 forwarded to suburb  
 of Milan  
 40 cents. written card rate



perf 11  
 12 October 1929  
 Tripoli to Genoa

90 cents. Registered Card  
 (30 cents. post card +  
 60 cents. open letter  
 registration fee)



perf 11  
10 October 1938  
Tripoli to Lardirago, Italy  
50 cents. domestic letter rate



perf 11  
20 October 1928  
Tripoli to Dresden, Germany  
75 cents. foreign post card rate



perf 14 x 13-3/4  
19 December 1925  
Tripoli to Prato, Italy  
60 cents. domestic letter rate

perf 14 x 13-3/4  
3 May 1925  
Tripoli to New York  
60 cents. foreign post card rate

Learn the most unexpected to me  
at the International Congress of  
ologists, it lasts a week. Am  
invaluable time, taken everywhere to  
dinner, fits and nothing to pay  
quarts of the Italian wine  
anything about the program in the  
I shall write in full when I return  
just now back from an all day trip to  
mine, also now have had a  
own lunch and good breakfast of  
give local coffee, but anything to  
Muglia! Due to all the family

Harris D. Bolt, Esq.,  
30 Broad Street,  
New York City,  
N. Y.  
Unité di America.

perf 11  
2 April 1927  
Berka to Reims, France  
60 cents. underpays  
75 cents. foreign card rate  
deficiency converted to francs  
and doubled.

Bel Signor  
Luigi Agnoli  
10 passage Subé  
Reims

95672 Ed. Dominico Crucitti - Bengasi

1175  
1012...  
5056  
2259  
Gradisca i miei più  
cordiali saluti per  
le feste di Pasqua unite  
famiglia affettuosa  
amico  
Bencam  
Cattol

Usage

60 cents.



perf 14 x 13 3/4

22 April 1936

Military Office No. 109 to Rome

1,75 lire registered domestic letter

(50 cents. domestic letter + 1,25 lire registration fee)



perf 11

3 March 1928

Tripoli to Malta

1,25 lire foreign letter rate



24 Jan 1934  
 Barce to Campolongo  
 del Friuli, Italy  
 1,75 lire registered  
 domestic letter  
 (50 cents. domestic  
 letter + 1,25 lire regis-  
 tration fee)



29 May 1933  
 Tripoli to  
 Friedrichshafen,  
 Germany  
 Registered  
 Zeppelin Airmail  
 (1,25 lire foreign let-  
 ter + 1,50 lire foreign  
 registration fee +  
 5,00 lire zeppelin  
 surcharge)



perf 14 x 13-3/4  
 28 Sept 1936  
 Tripoli to Rome  
 2,00 lire Domestic  
 Airmail  
 (50 cents. domestic  
 letter + 3 x 50 cents.  
 per 5 grams airmail  
 surcharge)

4 May 1935  
 perf 14 x 13-3/4  
 Tripoli to Sao Paulo, Brazil  
 Transatlantic Airmail  
 (1,25 lire foreign letter +  
 7,00 lire airmail surcharge)

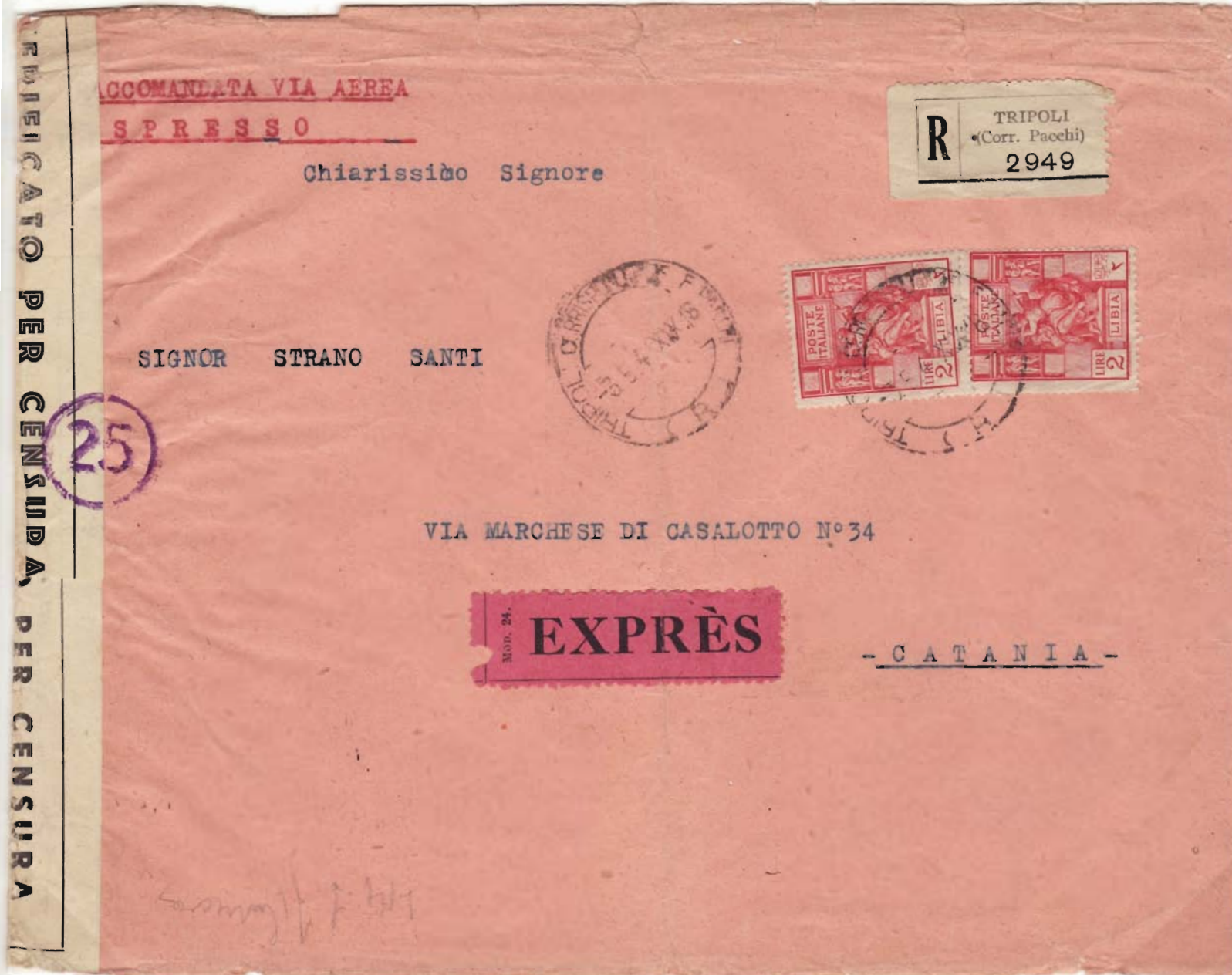
Transported by air-sea-air  
 route, using a ship for the  
 Dakar - Natal Transatlantic  
 crossing. Air France trans-  
 ocean flights were sporadic  
 at the time.





Usage

2,00 Lire



perf 14 x 13-3/4

3 May 1941

Tripoli to Catania, Italy; 4,00 lire Registered Airmail Express

(50 cents. domestic letter + 1,25 lire registration fee + 1,25 lire express fee + 2 x 50 cents per  
5 grams airmail surcharge)

At left, Italian censor '25' in circle and tape, purple seal on reverse

4,00 L = (0,50 per 10 grams)



13 August 1942

Tripoli to Military Office No. 85 out of Benghazi.

Very late for a letter to Benghazi. By August 1942, the city had changed hands five times.

The 2,55 lire value is the most difficult to find used on cover.