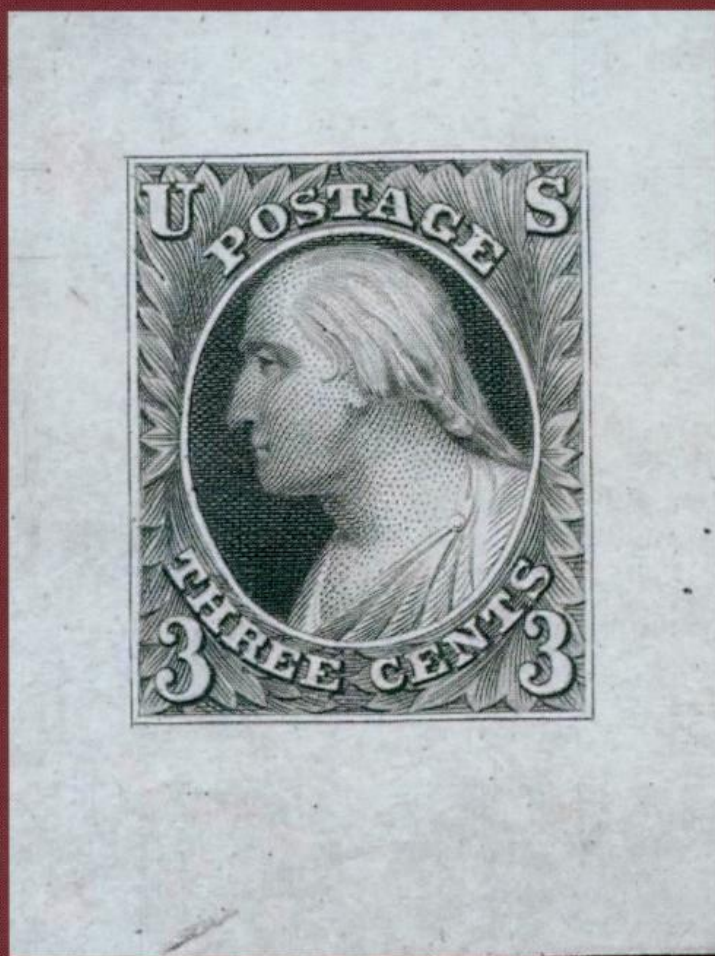


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# *The Collectors Club Philatelist*



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# Book Reviews

**I piccoli valori di Poste Italiane: Emissioni, caratteristiche di stampa e tirature, [Poste Italiane definitive series, low denominations: issues, printing characteristics and quantities printed] by Nicola Luciano Cipriani, published 2016, by C.I.F.O.; saddle stitched, 36 pages (A4), in Italian, colour illustrations throughout. Available from [segreteria@cifo.eu](mailto:segreteria@cifo.eu) or using the website [www.cifo.eu](http://www.cifo.eu) - €10 for members and €15 for non-members (+ Postage & Handling)**

The publisher of this monograph is C.I.F.O. (Collezionisti Italiani di Francobolli Ordinari: Italian Collectors of Definitive Stamps), which gives the reader an idea of how popular collecting and specializing in definitive stamps has become during the last 50 years. Nicola Luciano Cipriani is the vice president of this well-organized and energetic group of collectors; he is also the co-author of an earlier C.I.F.O. book on Priority Mail stamps.

Most definitive series are printed in the tens of millions and more; quite often more than one printing is needed, especially for the heavily used denominations, and in some cases the printing job is given to more than one printing firm. Such details are important to the specialist because they can make a big difference in assessing the rarity of certain stamps and related postal uses. As a result, one of the first tasks a collector of definitive stamps faces is to determine which "printing" a given definitive stamp comes from. Despite the common belief that modern philately is more straightforward than collecting the stamp issues of the classic era, modern definitives are as intriguing and often more so than the earlier issues. Cipriani's monograph makes this point by focusing on the low denominations of the current "Poste Italiane" definitive series.

The author got the idea for the monograph accidentally by noticing the details differentiating three printings of the 5 cent value over a span of only 12 months. There were differences in colors and centering, plus the alphanumeric code printed on the margins that helped to determine the printing and the year of production. The code's position and shifts were also very useful in this respect. The use of a scanner proved unreliable since it tends to alter nuances because of inevitable variations of power supply; possibly a more expensive type of scanner may obviate such a problem.

Low denominated stamps are generally subjected to a great number of printings and new denominations are sometimes needed to take account of changes in postal rates. The stamps examined by Cipriani are the 5, 10, 15, 20 and 25 cent issued at different times between 2010 and 2015. With the exception of the 15 cent issued in September 2015, all the low denominations were reprinted quite a few times. To avoid confusion the author defines the terms "reprint" and "printing" which are often misunderstood. For those who wish to delve further into these terms, Cipriani provides an internet link to a very clear and useful article of his.

The book ends with ten pages devoted entirely to the very clever forgeries of the 5, 10 and 20 cent that surfaced on the market over a year ago. This chapter is exceedingly useful to collectors who will learn about the detection of forgeries, specifically of this definitive series, but also in general to help with the identification of the many forgeries produced to defraud the post office and the collector during the last two decades. Indeed, the forgers have become aware of the interest generated by their products and there have been instances of forgeries produced specifically for the stamp market.

When these definitive stamps were issued, their design was criticized, but this did not lessen the interest of collectors. Research on the "Poste Italiane" definitive series remains a work in progress, in relation both to postal use and the postal rates, not to mention the myriad combinations with stamps from other definitive series.

Cipriani's work was sold out at its Milanofil stamp show launching in March and it is to be hoped that a new printing will be available soon. The book is well produced and profusely illustrated and although it focuses on very technical aspects everything is explained in clear and simple language. Most of the bibliographic entries include internet links for those who wish to delve further into the various aspects covered.

Giorgio Migliavacca

**I Tasso Maestri della Posta Imperiale a Venezia - The Tassos, Imperial Postmasters in Venice, by Bonaventura Foppolo; in Italian and English; published 2015 by Museo dei Tasso e della Storia Postale, Cornello, Bergamo. Perfect bound, 464 (A4) pages, illustrated throughout, 16 color plates. Available from [virginstamps.com](http://virginstamps.com) [PO Box 7007 St. Thomas**



When we thought that we had read everything about the Tassis dynasty and that we knew much more than the average historian would know about the Tassis postal enterprise, here comes Bonaventura Foppolo's book to show us that we had only scratched the surface of a huge meteorite from the past. His work is more than a long-overdue study of a neglected topic because he succeeds in making the story three-dimensional: the men, the ever-changing time, the news – all affected in one way or another by the postal continuum that links humanity.

The Tassis Museum is undoubtedly one of the most active cultural organizations in northern Italy. In 1991, under the auspices of the local municipality, a Tassis Postal History and History Museum was opened at Cornello dei Tasso, near Bergamo – the cradle of the Tassis dynasty. The Cornello museum has gathered a remarkable quantity of documentation on the Tassis family – as postmasters general, as art collectors, and as members of the European nobility – that makes clear their vital and varied contributions to economic life, culture, religion, and diplomacy. The museum has also established an ongoing cultural collaboration with the princely family of Thurn und Taxis, who own and oversee a prestigious postal museum at Regensburg.

In addition, the Tassis Museum has formed a network of scholars at universities in Spain, France, Belgium, Austria, Germany and Italy and to complete the range of highly praised activities, the museum has for the past 20 years been publishing well-researched, lavishly produced, and well-received volumes on the Tassis as European postal entrepreneurs.

During the Renaissance and after, the Tassis postal enterprises spread throughout Europe and the family's rise to the highest ranks of nobility made them prominent personages in the history of their respective countries. Their activities as leading postal operators date back to the 1300s; two centuries later they had proved their reliability and loyalty to the Habsburgs time and again. In 1541 Ruggero Tasso, son of Davide, was appointed Postmaster of the Imperial Post in Venice by Emperor Charles V. Over a period of 255 years, the "Flanders Post", as the Imperial Post in Venice was commonly referred to on both sides of the Alps, operated in one of the most important postal terminals in Europe; its role was crucial for the entire Holy Roman Empire, politically, administratively and commercially. The alley named "Calle della Posta di Fiandra" is a reminder of the postal glories of Venice,

and the visitor can admire the Tasso Palace and the contiguous building from which the "Flanders Post" operated.

The Venetian import-export trade linked the Far East, the Levant, and the Mediterranean littoral to the rest of Europe. The prominent presence of the Tassis in Venice, and elsewhere, was synonymous with the efficient and speedy delivery of mail. Throughout the 1600s, Ruggero's son, Ferdinand, and nephew, Ottavio reached new and most impressive heights both professionally and financially. Their heirs, Ferdinand Joseph and his son Leopoldo operated in the rapidly changing world of the 1700s and had to be very vigilant and astute in order to retain the many postal privileges accumulated by the members of the Venetian branch of the Tassis family. Charles Ferdinand, the last of the Venetian branch, died in a state of insolvency in September 1796 leaving no male heirs. At that point the Imperial Post in Venice was awarded to Prince Colloredo Mansfeld, a close friend of Emperor Francis II. In 1803 Austria secured control of the "Flanders Post" in Venice which, in 1805, was merged with the Vienna post office bringing to an end a private enterprise that had endured for over two and a half centuries.

This new voluminous book surveys the postal activities of the Imperial Post in Venice during that period. The eight extensive chapters of this huge volume leave no stone unturned; chapter I explores the economic and cultural role of Venice in Europe, her postal network and the rise of the Tassis postal enterprise; chapter II deals with the life and times of paterfamilias Davide Tasso (1473-1538) and the family's unswerving allegiance to the Habsburgs; chapter III visits the formative years, the imperial investiture and the sphere of action of Davide's son and successor, Ruggero.

During the twilight years of the Renaissance, the postal service gained momentum, thanks in part to its accessibility by the general public. One of the major obstacles was the tardiness of the Habsburgs in paying arrears to their postmasters general, which wrecked the Flanders regular courier service (*ordinario*) twice, with serious consequences. During the second occurrence, the Venetian Tassis, Ferdinand and Davide agreed to collaborate with plans to reactivate the service on the route from Mantua (Milan) and Trient (Venice) to Innsbruck, Augsburg, Rheinhau-sen, Cologne, and Brussels, and from there to Antwerp, Gent, Bruges and Lille.

These developments are discussed in chapter IV as part of a detailed biographic profile of Ferdinand de Tassis (1575-1648) who was

the recipient of the imperial investiture as Postmaster of the "Flanders Post" in Venice when he was only 9 years of age. In 1623 Ferdinand got entangled into a seven-year-long dispute with his cousin Lamoral, the Postmaster General of the Imperial Posts, who claimed to have control over the Venice branch. After Lamoral's death, his son Leonard II pursued the matter in a lawsuit that lasted four years. It was a hard fought battle, but in the end Ferdinand won the case and was awarded an imperial privilege that entitled him to pass on his title to his male heirs.

Chapter V documents the life of the most famous member of the Venetian Tassis, Baron Ottavio de Tassis (1621-1691) whose investiture as Imperial Postmaster took place at Innsbruck with a public oath to the Emperor followed by generous applause of the entire court. Family never disappoints you, or does it? Ruggero, Ottavio's eldest brother initiated a lawsuit claiming his rights to the succession to his father's post. The Habsburgs court ruled that Ruggero's case was frivolous and baseless; he then decided to appeal to the judges in Venice claiming that Ottavio shared the profits with his brothers in an unfair way. Ottavio's appeal to the Emperor resulted in a favorable verdict and a letter to the Venetian authorities inviting them to honor Ottavio's investiture. Concurrently, the Emperor bestowed on Ottavio the honorary title of Chamberlain of His Imperial Majesty. All of this did not make Ruggero desist from further mischief. In 1652, postal matters took center stage when Ottavio's postal rates were investigated because they were deemed exorbitant by the Venetian authorities. However, the magistrates were hesitant and unable to come to a conclusion on the matter.

Following repeated complaints by couriers and merchants, in 1661 the Senate issued a decree obliging Ottavio to apply the agreed rates. The order fell on deaf ears; while rates were lowered in 1662 and remained valid for decades, it is not clear if these applied to Ottavio's operation or to the *Corrieri Veneti* – the latter being a more plausible conjecture. Ottavio's claim to the right of appointing postmasters in the whole State was rejected despite imperial support. A social climber, Ottavio married Morosina Bon daughter of a most important noble family of the Republic – their only son, Ferdinand Joseph, became the heir to the father's title of "General Prefect of the Post in the city of Venice and all its dominions". Since 1650 this title was transmissible to a son by inheritance or otherwise; the male heir would enjoy the same privilege and title.

When Ottavio was widowed, he repeated

the same feat with his second marriage. His art collection included paintings by Giorgione, Lotto, Antonello da Messina, Raphael, Holbein and Titian to mention but a few. Meanwhile letters from Venice to Flanders were benefitting from a covert alternative route via Verona. Ottavio sought the assistance of his cousin Pietro Paolo Bordogna, postmaster at Trento, but with limited results. This chapter, in particular, offers much insight into international postal traffic and makes extremely interesting reading.

Chapter VI covers the life of Baron Ferdinand Joseph Della Torre Tassis (1652-1721). A patron of the arts, he had to deal with practical matters, including debts left by his father. His imperial investiture as General of the Imperial Post in Venice took place on November 17, 1693. The Republic of Venice was not involved in the direct control of the postal service, leaving it to the initiative of entrepreneurs. The State simply made sure that the service was diligently executed at a fair price, especially as the Republic itself was the number one user of the postal service. In 1662 the Senate decided to secure some revenue with a tax of "one soldo per letter and three soldi per ounce" on domestic correspondence. The measure came into force in 1713 with all due precautions to ensure that there was no tax avoidance of any kind. To certify payment of the tax, handstamps were introduced to mark the correspondence. Official mail from a variety of governmental departments and ministries, all the letters arriving by sea, as well as mail bags transiting Venetian territory (including those transiting through Ferdinand's postal operation) were exempted from the tax.

Chapter VII pores over the life and times of Count Leopoldo Ottavio Della Torre Tassis (1702-1770). During his tenure, the War of the Polish Succession disrupted postal communications and the role of Mantua as a major postal hub was compromised. The immediate beneficiary was the Imperial Post in Venice and a second weekly ordinario between Venice and Augsburg was introduced to speed up postal communications. The whole exercise became necessary to better coordinate ordinarios' connections. Canon Franz De Bors, a plenipotentiary of the Postmaster General of the Imperial Posts, explored all possibilities to do what Henot had done in the late 1500s to restore the postal route to Flanders to its high standards and reliability. It was a tough assignment and the Franco-Piedmontese postal route was becoming a major competitor for mail from Amsterdam and Flanders. In 1734, De Bors was able to negotiate a new route via Switzerland that permitted him to shorten the

transit time and reduce postal rates. Firstly, he convinced the budget-minded Genoese merchants and their Postmaster, and then he was able to conclude an agreement with the Postmaster General of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. In 1743 Leopoldo's inheritance of the title of General Prefect of the Imperial Post in Venice was confirmed. When the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748) broke out, it created new postal problems. In 1750 plans were drawn up to revitalize the postal pre-eminence of Milan and Mantua, much to the detriment of a fast-fading Venice. Actually, the *Corrieri Veneti* were incensed for being bypassed, but it was in the interest of The Imperial Post to keep a good rapport with them and a mutually beneficial postal convention was signed. Transit times were significantly reduced and a round trip from Milan to Amsterdam, via Lindau, took 20 days instead of the earlier 26. The delivery times on the route Venice-Augsburg were also reduced.

Chapter VIII brings our story to an end with the troubled times of Carlo Ferdinando Della Torre Tassis. His fruitless protests, petitions and claims to both the Republic and Venice and the Imperial Postmaster General for the purpose of being paid arrears going back to the 1600s to help him pay inherited loans and debts were unsuccessful. His already poor health worsened after a stroke in 1792 and he died in 1796.

Foppolo is an excellent story-teller and his well-documented exploration of the lives of the Tassis family brings back to life so many little-known but relevant details of the past. In the process he rectifies a number of inaccuracies that have come down to us through the centuries, especially those regarding the Tassis family tree. His book makes fascinating reading, whether you are a postal historian, a student of history, or just a person interested in Italian culture. The volume is lavishly produced, well illustrated, reasonably priced and a goldmine of useful information; the bibliography is extensive and the English translation is excellent and wisely permits access to an international audience. Highly recommended.

Giorgio Migliavacca

**1860 Lettere dalla guerra d'Italia – Sulle tracce dei garibaldini** by Rocco Cas-sandri, Giuseppe Di Bella and Antonio Ferrario, Milan, Italy: Club della Filatelia d'Oro Italiana, 2015. Hardbound, 31X22 cm, 400 pp, color illustrated. Price €50 + postage, available from Angelo Teruzzi, Via Bixio 30, 21029 Mi-