
More on Francalettere

David Coath (#3722)

I was reading the [June 2004] Bulletin and noted your interest in the Italian Francalettere. I am not going to be of much help but can offer the following. I had noted these Francaletteres at the end of the "Catalogo dei Perfin Italiani" by Enrico Bertazzoli and Beppe Ermentini (2000). It is an excellent reference, presented in paperback with colour plates and large sections translated into English. Francaletteres are covered on page 230.

I asked my wife who is of Italian parentage to translate the page for me, but, due to the non-conversational nature of the text, she was only able to make a rough translation as follows: "A perfin coming from the publicity (advertising) card (ticket?) sold at price indicated in perforation reduced (?) in respect to the face value of the stamp."

Needless to say at the conclusion of this explanation I just hoped that I would never see one so that I would not have to understand what all that meant.

And Paul Mistretta (LM#111)

With this input from David I got interested – Yes (again) the catalog mentioned was right behind me in a file drawer!

The text that David's wife tackled is: "Perfin provenienti de Biglietti Pubblicitari venduti al prezzo indicato in perforazione ridotto rispetto al valore facciale del francobollo." Babelfish is a free translation service available on the web which allows one to enter up to 150 words at a time for translation. So, great! Let's try that. And Babelfish lived completely up to the reputation of the Tower of Babel, translating the catalog explanation as follows: "Perfin coming from de sold Advertising Tickets to the price indicated in perforation ridotto regarding the value makes them of the stamp" Now doesn't that just help understand what is going on?

So, back to the old fashioned Collins Italian*English / English*Italian Dictionary. Beginning with the two translations above and adding the dictionary, I have come up with the following: "Perfin provided by Advertising Offices, sold at the price indicated by the perfin [which is a] reduced [price] with respect to the facial value of the postage stamp." This translation is consistent with the franking values given for the five illustrated francalettere in the Bertazzoli & Ermentini catalog: 1c on 2c (c = centesimi), 4c on 5c, 8c on 10c, 18c on 20c, and 8c

on 10c.

In addition to this information, I also found (while scanning perfin information) a single page copied from Club Library file IT-1 several years ago. On pages 88-89 of this unnamed reference piece under the heading of Franca Lettera I found (again pardon my transliteration from Italian): "1887 – A type of postal card formatted 120 [cm] : 180 [cm]. Within the left perforated margin (the part to be discarded) the words: Publicita circolante permanente; within the right margin: Direzione Via V. Emanuele 40 p. p. Livorno. Within the back [selvedge] on the gummed tongue used to seal the correspondence: LA FRANCA LETTERA (the coat-of-arms of Sabauda) SISTEMA BREVETTATO. Internally is a [letter] sheet that is finely lined [with a grid like graph paper]." This catalog lists 4 of the 5 shown by B&E.

Neither catalog mentions francalettere with non-perfinned stamps. From the discussions above and the description of the auction lot published in the June Bulletin I would speculate that these franca lettera (franked advertising letter sheets?) were sold pre-franked (normally) with a perfin revalued, reduced rate stamp. If this is the case, it would explain the relative scarcity of franca letteri with non-perfinned stamps.