On May 29, 1933, Nazi Reichsminister of Public Enlighten-
ment and Propaganda Joseph Goebbels departed for Rome
by train. His mission was to cement ties with Mussolini
and make overtures toward a concordat between the Holy
See and the Reich. Perhaps to ensure that Goebbels’ visit
captured Italy’s attention, the German LZ127— Graf Ze-
ppelin—followed him to Rome. Departing Friedrichshafen
shortly after midnight on May 29, the Graf arrived at
Ciampino Airfield at 4:30 in the afternoon. It carried Ital-
ian dignitaries and some covers on an aerial tour over
Rome (known to collectors as the volo circolare), then be-
gan the return trip to Germany (the volo di ritorno) at
about 7:30 p.m.1

Background of Vatican zeppelin mail
Vatican mail had been accepted on Graf Zeppelin flights
since 1930. Such covers from 1930 and '31 are almost al-
ways triple franked with Vatican stamps to pay the basic
letter rate; Italian stamps to pay for airmail service; and
German stamps to pay the zeppelin fee (see Fig. 1).2

These rules were in flux during 1932–33. Triple franking
ended with the South American flight in March '32, for
which airmail and zeppelin fees could both be paid by Ital-
ian stamps. Then, starting with the South American flight
in April '32, Vatican-only franking was permitted (see Fig.
2). For the Rome flight, mixed frankings of Vatican regular
postage and Italian airmail stamps were again required.3

Return leg of the Rome flight
Most Vatican mail carried on the return leg of the Rome

Flight carries the large round flight cachet (in varying
shades of blue and green) applied by the Italian post office
as well as an aqua straightline A FRIEDRICHSHAFEN auxiliary
marking applied by the Vatican.

Postmarks used include the standard Vatican circular date
stamp (CDS) to cancel Vatican postage; an Italian CDS (two
types known) and a machine slogan cancel used to obliter-
ate the Italian airmail stamps; and a round CDS in green,
dated 30 May 1933, that indicates receipt in Frie-
drichshafen. Less commonly encountered is the green ma-
chine slogan applied to some covers at Friedrichshafen.

Vatican covers bearing the proper cachet, but franked with
the Gardens and Medallions series issued on May 31 and
cancelled on that date, were not actually flown. Nor were
cached covers with a May 30 Italian machine cancel.4

Endnotes
1 The itinerary is given in greater detail in E. Violino, Catalogo degli Aerogrammi
2 The exceptions are foreign flights that had specially-issued stamps to pay both
airmail and zeppelin fees, such as the 1931 Liechtenstein flight. These typically do
not bear Italian airmail postage.
3 Some philatelists (notably Violino, op. cit.) have asserted that these changes
proceeded from agreements between the postal administrations involved and the
Zeppelin company. However, no one has been able to locate these agreements. In
any event, the rules were not strictly enforced. From 1932 onward, technically
improper frankings continued to be accepted if the total face value was correct.
In short, the Zeppelin company was not picky so long as they got their money.
(Summer 2008), pp. 6-17.
Vatican Covers from the Return Leg
The Collection of Rev.

▲ Fig. 3: Marked for a fictitious mail-drop over Leghorn (Livorno) that was never on the itinerary for the return flight, this card was instead received in Friedrichshafen on May 30, 1933. It is franked at £3.25, which equals the 25 centesimi Vatican postcard rate to Italy plus the £3 fee for dispatch by zeppelin to Europe. A scarce Vatican-only franking for this flight that was technically invalid but accepted anyway.

▲ Fig. 4: This cover was properly franked pay the £1.25 foreign letter rate plus the Italian zeppelin stamp to pay the zeppelin fee. Shown below the cover are the backstamp cancel applied on arrival at Friedrichshafen applied at Rome before dispatch. The and the time slug (5:00-6:00 p.m.) confirm

▲ Fig. 5: Marked for a fictitious mail-drop over Leghorn (Livorno) that was never on the itinerary for the return flight, this card was instead received in Friedrichshafen on May 30, 1933. It is franked at £3.25, which equals the 25 centesimi Vatican postcard rate to Italy plus the £3 fee for dispatch by zeppelin to Europe. A scarce Vatican-only franking for this flight that was technically invalid but accepted anyway.

▲ Fig. 6: Properly franked with Vatican postage totaling £2.25 (to pay the 75 centesimi foreign postcard rate plus the £1.50 foreign registry fee) and the £3 Italian zeppelin stamp to pay the zeppelin fee for postcards addressed to Europe. The zeppelin stamp is cancelled with an Italian Posta Aerea Zeppelin CDS rather than the machine slogan cancel.

▲ Fig. 7: The £3 and £5 low values of the April 24, 1933, on Vatican mail from the return leg of the Graf Zeppelin postcards to Europe and letters to Europe, respectively, valid only for the Rome flight. Usages of the four high covers each franked with a different value of the serie
The Graf Zeppelin’s Rome Flight: The Story of the Italian airmail set (C42-43)

Edward J. Mullowney

3 Italian airmail set (C42-43) are commonly found in Graf Zeppelin's Rome flight. They paid the zeppelin fees for Italian airmail, totaling €2.75 (to which there was a foreign registry fee of €1.50) and the balance to Rome flight postcards addressed to Europe. The date of this Italian cancel (May 29) indicates that the cover was actually flown.

Fig. 5: This postcard was marked for a scheduled mail-drop over Naples that occurred over Nettuno instead. The lack of a Naples receiving mark and the presence of the green CDS indicating receipt in Friedrichshafen indicate that it missed the drop. Like the card in Fig. 1, it is an improper but tolerated Vatican-only franking at the 25 centesimi + £3 rate for Rome flight postcards addressed to Europe. Not pictured is the Italian machine slogan cancel on reverse, identical to the one in Fig. 3, that proves the cover was flown.

Fig. 6: This postcard was endorsed for a maildrop over Barcelona, Spain during the second South American flight of 1933, which began on June 3. (The A BARCELONA marking is visible between the airmail etiquette and the registry label.) It was carried on the return leg of the Rome flight in a sealed mailbag and so did not receive the customary green arrival postmark at Friedrichshafen or the red cachet for the Barcelona maildrop. It departed with the Graf Zeppelin on June 3 and was properly dropped over Barcelona, where it received the black, octagonal Barcelona registered mail marking at upper left.