5-1-1963

Marian Philatelic Study Group of Coros, Whole No. 6

A. S. Horn
W. J. Hoffman

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NEW ISSUES

COLOMBIA: Issued Mar. 11, 1963, a two-stamp set commemorating Second Vatican Council, one of which depicts NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA PENA, (Our Virgin of the Rock), in a Holy Family Group. The extraordinary beauty of this statuary group has drawn admiring exclamations: There is the majestic figure of the Holy Virgin, the uncommon and handsome face of St. Joseph, the Patriarch, appearing as though together they supported the Divine Child. The silver heart decorating the Virgin's chest is a repository wherein annually Colombian seminarists place their names. The figure of an angel, holding a monstrance is in the background. (Complete history and illustration on page 21).

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SPAIN: Issued Mar. 24, 1963, 10 peseta value, red violet, IMMACULATE CONCEPTION by Jose de Ribera, known as "El Espanoleto" (1588-1656). This stamp included in a Stamp Day release of a 10-stamp series featuring Ribera's works.

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SWITZERLAND: Feb. 1, 1963, Scott Nos. 398A and 399A. BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF EINSIEDELN; her statue is in center over main entrance. The same design was used in the 1961 definitive issue for a 2 franc blue stamp, Scott No. 399.

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RIO MUNI: Jan. 29, 1963. Scott Nos. 22-23. 2-stamp set. Father Horn informed us it looks as if these stamps do represent The Madonna and Child in native sculpture.

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SPAIN - VALENCIA: Postal Cancellation. Special postal marks to be used May 11-13, 1963 in conjunction with a proclamation in honor of the SANTISIMA VIRGEN DE LOS DESAMPARADOS (Most Holy Virgin of the Abandoned), Patroness of Valencia.

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COSTA RICA: This country overprinted the Christmas Issue of 1962 with new values, in red. Numbered in Scott's as RA-16.

PORTUGUESE INDIA: In 1959 this country overprinted the 1953 issue of native art picturing THE MADONNA, Scott No. 526. The overprint is Scott No. 594.

ETHIOPIA: Scott No. 399. Word has been received from Mr. Josef Franz Aumann, Vienna, Austria, that the Ethiopian Postal Administration informed him there is also a Madonna on the 50c stamp of the Ancient King Series, issued Nov. 2, 1962, depicting an old Madonna Icon of Byzantine style. No further data is available.

FORTHCOMING ISSUES

SPAIN: Presently scheduled for September 1963 issue, set of stamps in honor of The Madonna de la Merced, Patroness of the city of Barcelona.

Spain's 1963 Monasteries set will be devoted to the Monastery of Santa Maria de Barcelona which was founded by the Cistercian monks.

***************

Mr. Eduard Ruttmann, Basel, Switzerland, notable International Madonna Collector and co-author with Father Anheuser, OFM, of MARIJA KÖNGTIN DER WELT, has informed us that Volume 2 of this work will be published in 1964. It will be larger than Volume 1 and will contain Marian cancellations.

***

Mr. Josef Franz Aumann, President of the International Federation of St. Gabriel has written us that articles appearing in the Marian Philatelic Study Group Bulletin will be registered in the GABRIEL INDEX.

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J. H. Sauve was awarded a "Gold Medal Certificate" for his MARIAN STAMPS OF THE WORLD Exhibit at the EKUF-IX in Montreal, Feb. 15-17, 1963. His purely Marian exhibit (excluding churches, etc.) in blocks of 4, contained some 2028 stamps. CONGRATULATIONS.
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Our Lady of Pena - Famous Shrine in Bogota, Colombia

The following was taken from a pamphlet prepared by the Shrine's Chaplain, Rev. Ricardo Struve Haker (also a Marian collector and Editor of "Gabriel---Latinoamericano"), giving an introduction to the Shrine for English visitors. Father Struve Haker has also prepared an illustrated guide (in three languages--English, French and Spanish), which contains some pictures of the works of art at the Shrine.

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Colombia is a predominantly Catholic country; about 99% of its inhabitants profess the Roman Catholic religion. Therefore, Colombia possesses numerous places of pilgrimage, but one of the most famous is the Santuario Nacional de Nuestra Señora de La Pena. Its history dates from 1685. Its first Chaplain, Don Francisco Garcia de Villamena, was baptized in 1640, no more than 100 years after the city of Santa Fe de Bogota was founded by the conqueror Jimenez de Quesada. The church of La Pena played an important role in the events of Columbia's struggle for independence, since its Chaplain, Dr. Don J. Ignacio del Basto, was one of the men who signed the Independence Act on July 20, 1810.

The problem of a purely natural origin of these beautiful figures or of its supernatural origin will never be decided; Spanish people of the 17th century were highly mystical and quite possibly any one of the numerous artists could have carved these figures on one of the rocks of the Eastern mountain ranges of Bogota, but it is an absolute historical fact that at the end of the 17th century a modest, humble man of Bogota, Bernardino de Leon, on one of his excursions to the mountains in search of Indian gold hidden during the years of the Spanish conquest, discovered these figures barely delineated on a rock, which today is distinguished by the reconstructed chapel seen on the hills back of the Sanctuary of La Pena. He carried the surprising news down to the city and shortly thereafter, in order to verify his story or ridicule his simplicity, many people went up into the hills and found the story was really true. As a result of the general enthusiasm, a small chapel soon was erected, holy Masses celebrated, and pilgrimages started to visit the statues, at that time still part of the rock, imploring heavenly aid. When the first Chaplain died in 1710 he left in his will sufficient means to build a bigger chapel, which unfortunately collapsed a year later due to an earthquake (1715).

Destruction seemed so complete that permission was obtained of ecclesiastical and civil authorities to have a stone mason cut and remove the figures from the rock; in an effort which almost exceeded the human forces of the time, the figures were brought down from the hills and are now in the Sanctuary. The famous Spanish artist, Pedro Laboria, in 1740, gave them their final and beautiful form seen today.

The 18th century propagated veneration of the "Holy Family of the Pena" in the entire country. The confraternity of the Pena numbered at this time about 30,000 members, comprising the territory of Colombia, Venezuela, Panama and Ecuador. One of the many proofs for this assertion is the fact that Pope Benedict XIV granted to this Confraternity of La Pena a special papal bull; another proof could be deduced from the extensive list of jewelry pious persons donated to the Sanctuary, which today would be valued at almost 100,000 pesos but which unfortunately was lost towards the end of the 19th century when civil wars raged and religious spirit relaxed.

There has been a continuous tradition of the important role the Sanctuary played in the period of Independence. It is told that the republicans under Gen. Narino gathered in the Chaplain's house and their secret password was "The Holy Virgin of La Pena." The present chaplain is attempting to prove the scientific veracity of this tradition, and
at this point of historical research is authorized to confirm it for the following reasons: (1) The name of Chaplain Alvaraes is found in the list of those republicans who signed the Independence Act of 1810; (2) When the Spanish Crown reconquered Bogota, Alvaraes was thrown into jail for several months because of his suspicious activities during the preceding period; (3) Gen. Narino, after making certain the Republican Victory in 1813, ordered a general pilgrimage in thanksgiving to the "Holy Virgin of La Pena" for the victory obtained.

Despite the enthusiastic chaplains the Pena enjoyed during the 19th century, but due to the civil wars mentioned, veneration of this Sanctuary fell off considerably so that at the beginning of the 20th century even secular priests were reluctant to hold services at this famous pilgrimage shrine, and it passed first into the hands of the Capuchin Fathers, then for a trial period to the Trappists, up until 1941; when a new and vigorous resurrection began so that soon it will occupy its former place among the sanctuaries of Colombia.

At the height of the knees of these stone figures may be seen a horizontal cut in the stone, the explanation being that formerly these figures were clothed according to the 17th and 18th century customs, and it was only when this custom went out of fashion that the absence of the lower part of the bodies became apparent; at the beginning of our century the figures were completed with their lower members cut into the same kind of stone as the statues themselves.

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WHY POSTAL CANCELLATIONS?
W. J. Hoffman

We have been endeavoring to publish in the first year's issues of THE MARIAN PHILATELIC STUDY GROUP Bulletin some of the many phases of Madonna and/or Marian Philately. Our first issue listed the several categories of postal material which could have a place in a topical collection devoted to THE MADONNA.

It is only natural that we first collect the postage stamps since they are the foundation of the hobby, but there comes a time for all collectors when the collection is complete or fairly complete, except for those stamps which are prohibitive in price or difficult to locate, which eventually may be added to the collection. At this point other interests in the field of philately will attract our attention, and it is during this interim that a decision is made to expand into the field of specialization within our own topic. The area of a specialized Madonna and/or Marian collection encompasses the addition of errors and varieties on stamps, die proofs, color proofs, local issues, or philatelic material other than postage stamps. This last could include maximum cards, first day covers, postal cancellations, postmarks, postal meter cancellations, seals, etc. I am certain readers are fully cognizant of the cost of most of the postal errors and varieties to be found on stamps. This was one of the reasons for the decision made in this country to reprint the Dag Hammarskjold issue.

Because the field of collecting postal cancellations is considered a fairly new area in philately, prices of these items are not too prohibitive at the present time. We would suggest that any collector who now foresees that at some time in the future he will have to decide which fork in the road of philately to take in order to maintain interest in his hobby, ought to begin collecting these specialized items. A recent release by the British Postal Administration announced that country's authorizing "pictorial postmarks for tourist and prestige publicity." Other countries, notably Spain, Germany and Austria, have been using this type of cancellation since the 1940's; many of these are still readily available. We feel that the Postal Cancellation "New Issue Service" of the Marian Philatelic Study Group can be of great assistance to those who wish to avail themselves of its service.

Madonna and/or Marian postal cancellations are an ideal complement to a stamp collection which depicts the Blessed Virgin in her many titles and roles. Many of the cancellations pictured in this issue repeat the design used on the postage stamp; many, too, display new titles and additional shrines and statues not previously commemorated nor widely known, while others display her in varying aspects of the same title; for example, the several representations of Our Lady of Montserrat, especially E-56M38 where the title of this shrine is graphically identified as being situated in the "mountains of saw teeth" (Mount-serrat), or "serrated mountains."

The following checklist of Madonna and Marian Postal Cancellations is being offered as a guide to those collectors who wish to follow within this field. We do not guarantee that the list is complete, and in this respect would appreciate hearing from those members who can add further items not here identified.

Grateful acknowledgement is given to Mr. Josef Franz Aumann for the listing of postal cancellations in his "Die Madonna im Briefmarkenalbum." And to Rev. Ricardo Struve Haker for information gathered from "GABRIEL LATINOAMERICANO." Recent issues of "Die Samlerlupe" also assisted in this research. Except for Spain, all other items have been given an arbitrary numbering system since no official listing of all combined issues by these countries has been published. Illustrated items from Spain are listed by the ALFIL catalog numbers. ALFIL lists all Spanish commemorative postal cancellations by the following code:

- E - España (Spain)
- 56 - Year of Issue (i.e., 1956)
- M - Regular Mail; or A - Airmail.
- 38 - Chronological number within the year of issue
The descriptive text for each item follows this format: Number in numerical sequence for each country; City and date of cancellation; Design incorporated in cancellation is written in CAPITAL LETTERS; Text of cancellation is within quotation marks; Other identification.

CHECKLIST OF MARIAN POSTAL CANCELLATIONS
Prepared by W. J. Hoffman

ARGENTINA


Note: Nos. 5 and 6 used Nov. 11-13, 1960. Also on cachets for "First Inter-American Marian Congress, Nov. 1960."


AUSTRIA

1. Vienna, Sept. 10, 1952. OUR LADY OF LOURDES. "I Am The Immaculate Conception, 20 year Parish Maria Lourdes."


5. Linz, May 16, 1954. Picture and text same as No. 4.


10. Mariasell, May 1, 1957. MADONNA WITHOUT MANTEL."Beginning of the 800-year celebration of the Madonna at Mariasell, 1157-1957, Marian Philatelic Exhibition."


22. Lanzendorfe, Feb. 11, 1961. SHRINE BASILICA OF MARIA LANZENDORFE. "800 Years of Pilgrimage to Maria Lanzendorfe, 6 kilometers south of Vienna." Strip cancellation.

BELGIUM
3. Same as No. 2 except "De Kleine Apostel van Maria" (in Dutch).
5. Genval, 1961. MARY WITH CHILD, BOOK. "Publisher, Mary Mediatrix." Private cancellation.

Hasselt, Aug. 6, 1961. MADONNA & CHILD. "Philatelic Stamp Exhibition-Feast of The Virgin of Jesse." (Note: This statue called 'The Virgin of Jesse' since Jesse was father of King David, royal forefather of Blessed Mother.)

BRAZIL
1. Rio de Janeiro, Sept. 8, 1954. Center of cancellation has monogram 'AM' surrounded by rays in starburst pattern. Outer ring reads "Patroness of Brazil-Sept. 1954." "Pilgrimage, Brazil." Inner ring reads "Centenary of the Proclamation of The Immaculate Conception of Our Lady."
2. Campanha, M.G., Aug. 16, 1954. CROSS WITH STAR AND MONOGRAM 'AM', CROSS OF THORNS. "Fifth Centenary Our Lady of Zion College."

CANADA

CUBA

CZECHOSLOVAKIA
DENMARK

ECUADOR
Quayquil, Apr. 27, 1958. SORROWFUL MOTHERS HEART PIERCED WITH SEVEN SWORDS OVER CROWN OF THORNS. "First Day Issue." Same design on postage stamp commemorating the Sorrowful Mother of San Gabriel College.

FRANCE
2. Lourdes, 1957. Same as No. 1.
3. Lourdes, 1958. Same as No. 1 except flag to left.
5. Lourdes, 1960. LOURDES BASILICA IN LANDSCAPE PICTURE. "World Pilgrimage Center." Machine cancelled; flag to left.
8. Le Puy, 1957. There is a machine cancellation from Le Puy in Velay but no details are available.

GERMANY
4. Jungingen (Hohenz) 1947-1948. MADONNA WITH CHILD AND SCEPTRE. "Pilgrimage Place of Our Lady of Einsiedeln."
7. Altötting, 1950-1960. Same as No. 6 except machine cancelled, Type A, flag to left.
8. Altötting, 1951. Same as No. 6 except machine cancelled, Type B, flag to right.
11. Bogen, From 1951. MADONNA IN WREATH OF RAYS. "Visit The Pilgrimage Place Bogen Mountain."
13. Oberhausen (Rhineland), Oct. 5-7, 1957. IMMAGULATA IN FRONT OF CHURCH. "100 Years St. Mary's."

Bogen, 1961. MADONNA OF BOGEN MOUNTAIN with COAT OF ARMS OF DISTRICT OF BOGEN. "Visit the District of Bogen (Bayr Wald) Home of the Bavarian Coat of Arms of Rauten." Red; private meter cancellation from land office of Bogen.


Spayr, Sept.10, 1961. MADONNA & CHILD IN FRONT OF SPEYER CATHEDRAL. "900th Year Jubilee of The Cathedral." (Four crowns above and below The Madonna.)


Obergrombach, June 6, 1962. MADONNA AND CHILD, CHURCH. "Wine and Excursion Resort."


Hungary

1. Szabadka, Apr.20,1941. MADONNA IN COAT OF ARMS. "Vissza tert" (Commemorating return of territory to Hungary.) Additional official cancellation.

2. Eger, Sept.21,1947. OUR LADY, PATRONESSE OF HUNGARY CROWNED WITH CROWN OF ST. STEPHEN IN FRONT OF HUNGARIAN PATRIARCHAL CROSS. "Eger Feast Day of Our Great Lady."


4. Budapest, Szeged, Vesprem, Sept.22,1942. MARIAN MONOGRAM IN LATIN AND GREEK LETTERS, "1.162-1942 Magyar Piaristak" (Hungarian White Fathers). Deals with series of hand cancellations which were in operation in various postoffices.

Italy


Philippines


Portugal


Vila Vicos, Dec.8, 1957. IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. "Patroness of Portugal, Vila Vicos." Special cancellation to commemorate Our Lady under this title as Patroness of Portugal.


Saar

1. Blieskastel (Saar), 1933. MADONNA OF BLIESKASTEL. "700 Years Madonna of The Arrows." (Same design used on Saar stamps, Scott Nos. 118-119.)


Spain

ElOM1 Zaragossa, 1940. No picture. "19th Centenial Virgen del Pilar."

ElOM2 Zaragossa, 1940. No picture. "Certified, 19th Centenary Virgen del Pilar."

Zaragossa, 1940. No picture. "Airmail 19th Centenary Virgen del Pilar, Certified."


Zaragossa, Oct.12,1946. Same as above except "Oct. 18, 1936."


Toro, Sept.5,1954. VIRGIN DEL CANTO. "Coronation of The Virgen del Canto-Toro."

Zaragossa, Oct.7-12,1954. IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. "National Marian Congress Zaragossa."

Vitoria, Oct.7-12,1954. VIRGEN BLANCA. "Coronation of The Virgen Blanca - Vitoria."

San Martin de Provensals, Nov.11-15, 1954. PROFILE BUST OF OUR LADY OF MONTSERRAT. "Philatelic Exposition, San Martin de Provensals."

Madrid, Dec.21,1954. BUST OF VIRGEN BETWEEN TWO STARS. "Commemorating the completion of First Day of Issue of Marian Year Series."

Cartagena, Apr.17,1955. VIRGEN DE LA CARIDAD (Charity). "Coronation of The Virgen de la Caridad - Cartagena."


Olesa de Montserrat, Mar.4, 1956. THREE MARYS AT FOOT OF CROSS. "Presentation of The Passion at Olesa."

Fregenal de la Sierra, Apr.27, 1956. OUR LADY OF LOS REMEDIOS. "Golden Anniversary of the Coronation of Our Lady of los Remedios."

Montblanch, Sept.8-9,1956. VIRGEN DE LA SIERRA MONTBLANCH, CITY WALLS. "50th Anniversary, Coronation of The Virgin of the mountain-Montblanch."

Montserrat, Sept.8-11,1956. HAND SAW OVER MOUNTAIN PEAKS (Seal of the Monastery.) "75th Anniversary Coronation of Our Lady of Montserrat."

Talavera de La Reina, May 30,1957. VIRGEN DEL PRADO. "Coronation of The Virgen del Prado."


No city. Sept. 6-9,1957. OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE. "Fiestas of Our Lady of Guadalupe."


Same as above except broken die; see illustration.

Estella, May 23-25,1958. OUR LADY OF FUY. "Coronation of Our Lady of Fuy. (Between two stars.)"

Andujar, Mar.18,1959. SHRINE OF THE VIRGIN DE LA CABEZA. "Jubilee Year Virgin de la Cabega."


Zaragoza, Sept. 21-24, 1961. BASILICA OF OUR LADY OF THE PILAR, MONOGRAM 'HJS' IN CIRCLE WITH CROSS. "Fifth National Eucharistic Congress."

Jaen, June 9-11, 1962. VIRGEN DE LA NOTA CAPILLA. "Marian Philatelic Exhibition." (Commemorating close of Jubilee Year.)


SWITZERLAND


3. Swiss Motor Coach Service, Apr. 1, 1958. HEAD OF GIRL AND BLAURING MONOGRAM. "25 Years 1933-1958 Blauring Associate Meeting—Einsiedeln." (Blauring Associate is Catholic Girls' Society; Monogram: Ring around M symbolizing keeping together through Mary.)


5. Einsiedeln, Sept. 6, 1957. BASILICA OF EINSIEDELN. "1000th Year of Pilgrimage—Einsiedeln." Companion cancellation pictures OUR LADY OF EINSIEDELN without mantle and same text as No. 2.

TURKEY


VIET NAM

1. Saigon, Dec. 25, 1958. CATHEDRAL OF HUE dedicated to Our Lady. (Her statue is between the two towers depicted on the stamps, Scott Nos. 100 and 107. A Cross replaces statue on cancellation.) "NHA THO PHU-CAM. NGAY PHAT-HANH, DAU TIEN." Issued to commemorate First Day of Sale of above-mentioned stamps.

UNITED STATES — Meter Cancellations


3. Inglewood, California, Dec. 25, 1962. OUR LADY OF PHILATELY. "Our Lady of Philately." Blue, issued by Marian Philatelic Study Group of COROS.

4. Lemont, Illinois. Date of first use not available. MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS and MONOGRAM 'MARIA'. Used by Ave Maria Printery, Franciscan Fathers, Red.


7. Los Angeles, California. THE IMMACULATE HEART. "Please save cancelled stamps for The Immaculate Heart Missions." Red.


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We have entered the field of Spanish Local Madonnas, and plan to make offerings next summer. There is such a short supply of these, both here and abroad, that our offerings will be limited by our success in searching.

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VIRGEN DE LA CAPILLA-PATRONESS OF JAEN

Spain: Postal Cancellation, June 11, 1961 and June 9-11, 1962

This statue is very ancient and derives its name from a primitive "chapel" or Sanctuary where it was originally venerated.

The area of the city of Jaen lay in the advanced frontier of the Kings of Castile and suffered continuous assaults by the Moors, who, encouraged by the internal strife of the Court of Juan II, fought to regain this border territory. No assistance was given to the people who were heroically resisting the Moors, Rare was the night when the Moors did not attack the outskirts, sacking, robbing and taking captive the inhabitants from their homes. Finally, drained of all resources of resistance, and utterly fatigued, they agreed to abandon the city. At midnight, Saturday, June 10, 1410, there appeared a brilliant cortege, walking about the suburbs of San Ildefonso and illuminating the area with a blinding light. The cortege was led by seven youths in white tunics, bearing brilliant crosses, followed by a group of celestial courtiers; behind them came the Holy Virgin holding the Infant in Her arms, and followed by a squadron of armed soldiers. The procession finally disappeared into the wall of San Ildefonso Church (now a Sanctuary).

Eye witnesses to this phenomena declared their testimony before proper authorities and a notary; this original testimonial document is preserved by the National Historical Archives and is dated June 13, 1410.

The people came to give thanksgiving at the site of the "White Cortege" and to build a chapel as testimony of the miracle, and placed within the chapel an old statue then being venerated in the church of San Ildefonso.

"Descenales" means appearing on the "same date and day", and on Sunday, June 11, 1430, Jaen established the Jubilee Year celebration, thus coinciding with the same date and day of the week as that on which the miracle occurred.

On June 11, 1961 Jaen began solemn ceremonies for this great commemoration and ended them on June 11, 1962. The Director General of Posts permitted the use of a specific postmark commemorating this event.

VIRGEN DE LA CANDELLA - VALLS

Spain: Postal Cancellation, Feb. 2-5, 1961

It is not known with any certainty the era of this statue. In the founding document of the "Descenales Fiesta", initiated on Jan. 28, 1791, it is stated that the faithful of Valls had a devotion to Our Lady since 1117 when the Moors besieged the city. Since antiquity she has been called VIRGEN DE LA CANDELLA because she holds a candle in her right hand.

In 1318 Valls was saved from a plague that scourged Europe. Historians paint a desolate picture of it; city and country were so afflicted that sufficient cemeteries were lacking to inter the dead. The Vallense sought the intercession of LA VIRGEN DE LA CANDELLA and were miraculously freed from the plague. The protection of the Virgen continued on additional occasions when the plague struck again--1522, 1530, 1569 and 1651.

In 1687 Valls was invaded by locusts; after laborious and exhausting work, and still unable to check the locusts, the people petitioned The Virgin to aid them, and formed a procession to all the churches. The plague disappeared and the people of Valls, in gratitude and love of their Virgen, initiated the "Candella Fiesta" on Jan. 28, 1791. Coronation of LA VIRGEN DE LA CANDELLA occurred Feb. 2, 1791.

During this Fiesta, Valls is decorated beautifully in honor of its Patroness, and perpetuates its present day Fiesta with special postal cancellations bearing a sketch of this Virgin.

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INNSBRUCK: MADONNA TOP OF ST. ANNE'S COLUMN

Postal Cancellations - 1959 and 1961

Called "Annasaule" (St. Anne's Column) this monument was erected by the Tyrol Diet in 1703 to commemorate the liberation of the Tyrol from the Bavarian army of invaders who occupied the greater part of the province during Wars of the Spanish Succession. The column is located half way down Maria-Theresien-Strasse, in the middle of the street, and named "St. Anne's Column" because the Tyrol was liberated on July 26th--St. Anne's Feast Day. The marble statue on top of the column is not one of St. Anne, as one might suppose, but is a MADONNA.
THE MYSTERY OF ELCHE
Spain: Portal Cancellation, Aug.11-15,1955
The "mystery" is one of the few examples of medieval religious drama which has survived. Known as "The Mystery of Elche" it has been performed annually since medieval times on and immediately before the Feast of The Assumption, Aug. 13, 11-15. The 13th century play has the distinction of being the only remaining work of that period which was sung in its entirety. If not the world's first opera, it is the forerunner of present day opera which did not appear until three centuries later in Italy. The text is written in old Valencian dialect and the Gregorian chants and troubadour melodies which complement it produce a beautiful effect. All the roles are performed by the men and boys of Elche, except that of St. Peter, which is reserved for a priest. Participation in EL MISTERIO is naturally considered a great privilege. It has become tradition for fathers to pass the melodies on to their sons. Although a score does exist, the majority of the performers know nothing of music. The lyrical drama, which lasts some 3 hours, is performed in its entirety in St. Mary's Basilica on Aug. 13th; only the first part is given on the 11th, and the second part on the 15th.

The town also celebrates the Feast of its Patron, St. Anthony, on Aug.13 and fireworks are in order. When the clock strikes midnight, city lights go out and a giant firecracker is released; there follows a fireworks display.

In the morning, after parades and processions, the stage is set for the performance. The theme is simple: It is based on the death and Assumption of the Virgin. The staging, however, is complex and at times breathtaking.

A vast stage is set above the spectators under the cupola; a sloping ramp extends the length of the church from the stage to the central door through which most of the participants exit and enter. The ramp affords unusual staging effects for the colorful processions throughout the play. A piece of staging causing considerable excitement is the ARACELLI, a large round object which opens and closes, rising and descending several times during the play, bearing angels and finally the Virgin on her ascent into heaven. This is most impressive. On its final ascent, before the ARACELLI reaches the dome, it opens and a group representing the Trinity emerges and bestows a celestial crown on the Virgin. At this point, the spectators are unable to further suppress their emotions and break into loud applause and shouts of joy as a rain of gold dust falls on them. (From the Spring 1962 issue of CATHOLIC TRAVELER.)

...submitted by Mr. & Mrs. F.H. Benjert.

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OUR LADY OF BELLEM
Belgium: Postal Cancellation, May 31,1962
In Bellem, a small parish of East Flanders, whose name derives from Bethlehem, there was since the year 1100 a small chapel of Our Lady, and later a church was built. The story of the present statue, made of oak wood, began in a pilgrimage place south of Brussels. In 1635 a pious man hung a small statue of Our Lady on a large oak tree, which up to then was known as "Devil's Oak"--the name was immediately changed to "Jesus Oak." In French the statue was called "Our Lady in Hain." In 1650 a church was built. The trunk of the oak tree can still be seen behind the High Altar of this church.

In 1653 the pastor of Bellem received a piece of this oak tree and had a small statue of Our Lady made. The devotion to Our Lady spread far and wide. On the Feast of The Nativity of Mary, patron feast of the Church, people flock to the church to take part in a procession to the 15 chapels. This pilgrimage is called "Bellemachtend" (The Morning of Bellem.) In 1948 German soldiers took possession of the church. Nothing was saved, not even the statue of Our Lady.

After the war the pastor of Bellem went to "Notre Dame au Bois" (Our Lady in Hain) to the "Jesus Oak", and this time received a small piece of the oak wood. He had carved the face and hands of Our Lady as well as the Christ Child. He dressed the statue in Flemish costume (the original costume was Spanish), and adorned it with jewels. This is the statue of Our Lady shown on the postal cancellation used at the Exhibition in Gent on May 31,1962. (Translated from the German GABRIEL, Sept. 1962 issue.)

...submitted by Mr. & Mrs. F.H. Benjert.

PLEASE PATRONIZE OUR ADVERTISERS
OUR LADY OF THE WILD FERNS - (DUC ME LA-VANG) - South Viet Nan #193-6, July 7, 1962

Permission was obtained to extract the following from an article by Ruth Oswald which appeared in the January 1963 issue of "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart" Magazine.

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The Republic of South Viet Nam issued this set of four stamps honoring the Blessed Virgin under the title "Duc Me La-Vang" (The Blessed Mother of La-Vang), the National Madonna of this land now undergoing intense communist infiltration. This statue of Our Lady with the Divine Infant on her arm (depicted on the stamp against a background of bamboo trees) venerated at the La-Vang Shrine resembles that of Our Lady of Victories in Paris.

La-Vang acquired its name from the tall ferns, different from any others, which grew wild in a remote wooded valley in what was then Central Viet Nam. Today the site is just 20 miles from the artificial line at the 17th parallel devised by the Geneva Agreement of 1954, which cut Viet Nam in half. The northern half is controlled by the communists even though the people wanted nothing to do with communism. They had been tricked by lies and false fronts during World War II and the lengthy war with France which followed, eventually falling under communist control. A million or more refusing to live under communism gained sanctuary in South Viet Nam; this part of the country is about 90% Buddhist and 10% Christian, and most of the Christians are Catholics. These Catholics have great confidence in OUR LADY OF LA-VANG and feel she will protect them now just as she did back in 1798 when the three provinces surrounding the ancient city of Hue were subjected to intense persecutions of Christians.

La-Vang in 1798 was such a wild and remote area that even experienced foresters avoided the place because of the dense jungle growth which harbored all kinds of wild animals, including tigers. Because of its seclusion, and in spite of the dampness and wild animals, Christians considered the area an ideal place to hide during this persecution. Many felt it was better than death and better than prison where many Christians were put, and even though they could have saved themselves by renouncing their religion, they preferred the jungle. This is one of the great manifestations of faith the Christian world has to offer; Thousands of men, women and children ready to face starvation, disease and death rather than give up Christ. These refugees fought off the wild animals and lived as best they could off the land, but since little sunlight filtered through the tall protective trees, the dampness caused many diseases to break out. Yet they stayed, month after month, and each evening held communal prayer, reciting the rosary and appealing to Our Lady for help.

Thus it happened that one night as they prayed the rosary, a strange light appeared among the trees; it rose among the tall ferns and to the astonishment of the refugees, figures appeared: one was a beautiful woman with a child on her arm and she was accompanied by two angels carrying candles which gave light. The refugees recognized her as the Mother of God. She spoke to them and expressed sorrow at the illness among them and for their hardships, but advised them to accept these with joy as heaven was pleased by their sacrifice. Pointing to particular leaves near, she said "Take the leaves of these trees, boil them into a tea; it will cure your illness." She added that their prayers had been accepted and from that time on anyone who came there to pray would be heard and answered. After this promise the Blessed Mother disappeared among the trees, but it was not the last of her visitations.

The people followed Our Lady's instructions and survived. As peace was restored, news of the apparition spread and people came from all over Viet Nam to pray in the forest of the wild ferns. Even Buddhists built a little pagoda there. In 1820 the first chapel of Our Lady of La-Vang was built. So many people were cured on the site and so many prayers answered that larger and larger crowds converged on the Shrine, and this led to disaster. In 1885 new waves of persecution broke out against Christians in Viet Nam and the Shrine was completely destroyed; however, a year later the persecutionists were defeated, peace restored, and the work of rebuilding the Shrine and churches again undertaken. A new and larger Church of Our Lady of La-Vang was consecrated in 1901 by Bishop Gaspar who dedicated it under the title "Protecting Mother of the Faithful."