

# Handwritten Postal Annotations

## Plan of collection

Speed, coupled with the reliability and security of mail delivery, have been deeply felt necessities since the dawn of postal communication, long before the establishment of a formally structured official service. To this end, handwritten endorsements were added to the front—or more rarely, the reverse—of missives. These notations were intended to indicate to the bearer, as clearly as possible, the nature of the service requested, whether it pertained to standard postal transit or to an additional private service, such as the specific level of urgency required for delivery.

This collection aims to analyze and document the evolution of urgent communications during the pre-philatelic and transitional eras, focusing on the complex dynamic between the sender's requirements and the administrative responses of the postal authorities.

The study focuses particularly on:

Speed Management: the use of manuscript instructions such as "*per espresso*" (by express), "*a cavallo*" (on horseback), and "*per pronto recapito*" (by prompt delivery) as instruments to bypass standard transit times and enforce expedited transport.

The Postal "Condanna": interpreted and applied as a supplementary fee, sanctioned specifically to remunerate the execution of extraordinary delivery services outside the standard tariff.

Symbolism and Faith: the invocation of "divine protection" as a spiritual security protocol, serving as a metaphysical safeguard in an era of high-risk transit and uncertain communications.

This concise overview of the aforementioned primary endorsements, is organized by category:

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## Key references

- Paolo Vollmeier: Repubblica di Venezia, vol.I - II, 20023, Castagnola, Paolo Vollmeier Editore  
Adriano Cattani: Guida alla prefilatelia - Manuale per la lettura storico - postale delle lettere antiche, 2007, Elzeviro Editrice  
Vittorio Mioni: Catalogo dei bolli prefilatelici dei domini estensi 1768-1852, 1982  
Bruno Crevato Selvaggi: Una eccezionale doppia condanna su una lettera veneziana settecentesca, Bollettino Prefilatelico e Storico Postale n. 155, 2009  
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**Urgency endorsements**

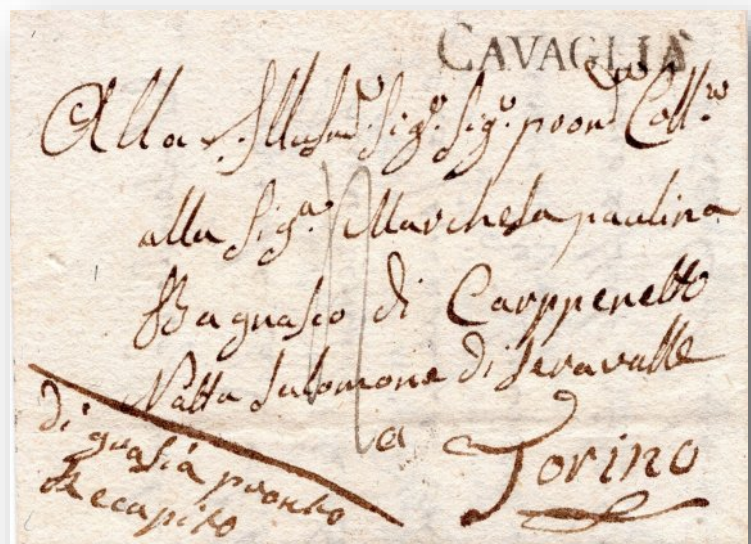
Letter from Venice **September 14, 1654**, addressed to Casale, featuring the Latin handwritten endorsement "Cito Cito". This notation indicates that delivery was strictly urgent and was to be prioritized over the ordinary transit time.



Letter from Padua **March 19, 1603**, to Venice (Parish of San Samuele), featuring a stroke in red chalk (sanguine) to indicate the letter was prepaid. The handwritten endorsement "Subito datta" (Give immediately) was used to order instant delivery. The missive was likely carried by a courier within the Venetian Republic via the Brenta route.



Letter from Cavaglià (Biella) **December 24, 1825**, to Turin, with a "2 decimi" postage-due marking and the handwritten endorsement "Di grazia pronto recapito" (Kindly, for prompt delivery) on the front.



These notations constituted a form of guarantee provided by the sender to ensure secure and timely transit, and were typically directed to private couriers. In rarer instances, such endorsements were addressed to postal officials to ensure a swifter final delivery to the recipient; in these cases, notably, no additional fee was paid to the bearer.



Letter from Saluces (Saluzzo) **December 29, 1811**, to Busca, with the handwritten endorsement "*Raccomandata al Sig. Brig. e Merlo per sicuro ricapito*" (Entrusted to Brigadier Merlo for secure delivery) on the reverse. In this instance, the sender relied on a brigadier for the carriage of the missive to guarantee greater security.



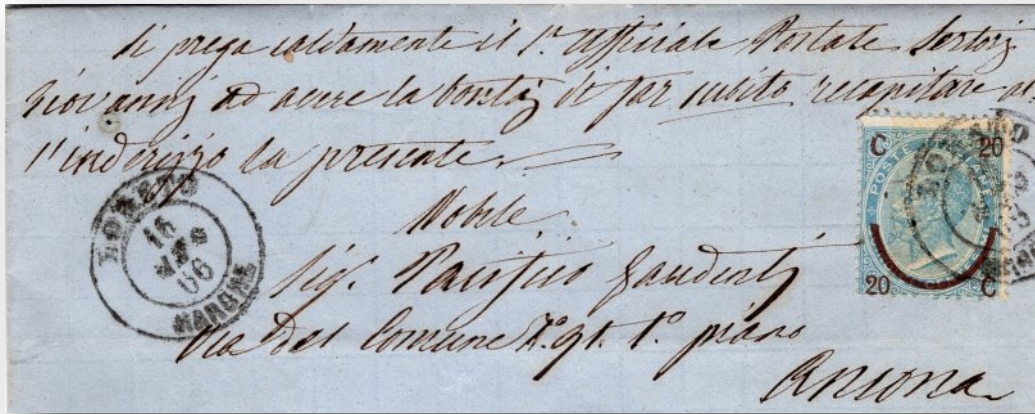
Letter from Modena **June 16, 1804**, to Bologna, featuring the handwritten endorsement "*raccomandata al Sr. Luca Sarri*" (entrusted to Mr. Luca Sarri) for final forwarding, ensuring the security and guarantee of delivery. The letter also bears the notation "*franca*", indicating that no postage was due from the recipient. The manuscript numeral "5" certifies either the payment already made by the sender (a prepaid rate of 5 soldi) or the fee due for the additional hand-delivery service provided by Sarri.



## Manuscript endorsement “raccomandata”

## Late usage of “raccomandata” endorsements for "expedited delivery" purposes.

Manuscript endorsements requesting expedited final delivery are highly unusual for the philatelic era, by which time delivery procedures had long been regulated and formalized under the responsibility of the postal distribution service.

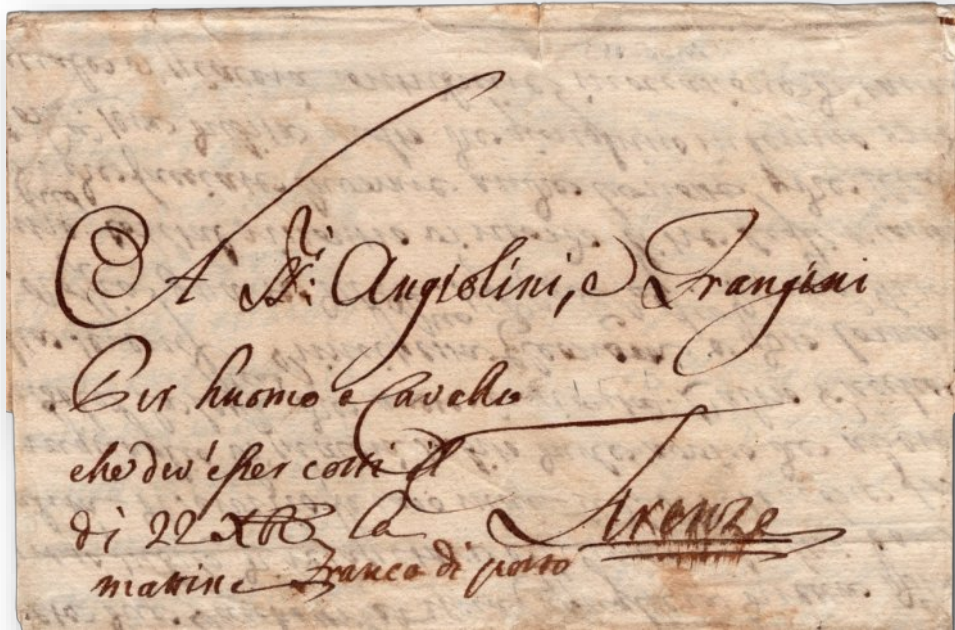


Letter from Loreto **May 16, 1866**, to Ancona, domestic first-rate mail. Manuscript endorsement on the recto: “*Si prega caldamente il Sig. Ufficiale Postale Sartori Giovanni ad avere la bontà di far subito recapitare all'indirizzo la presente*” (“The Postal Official Mr. Giovanni Sartori is earnestly requested to have the kindness to deliver this letter to the address immediately.”)

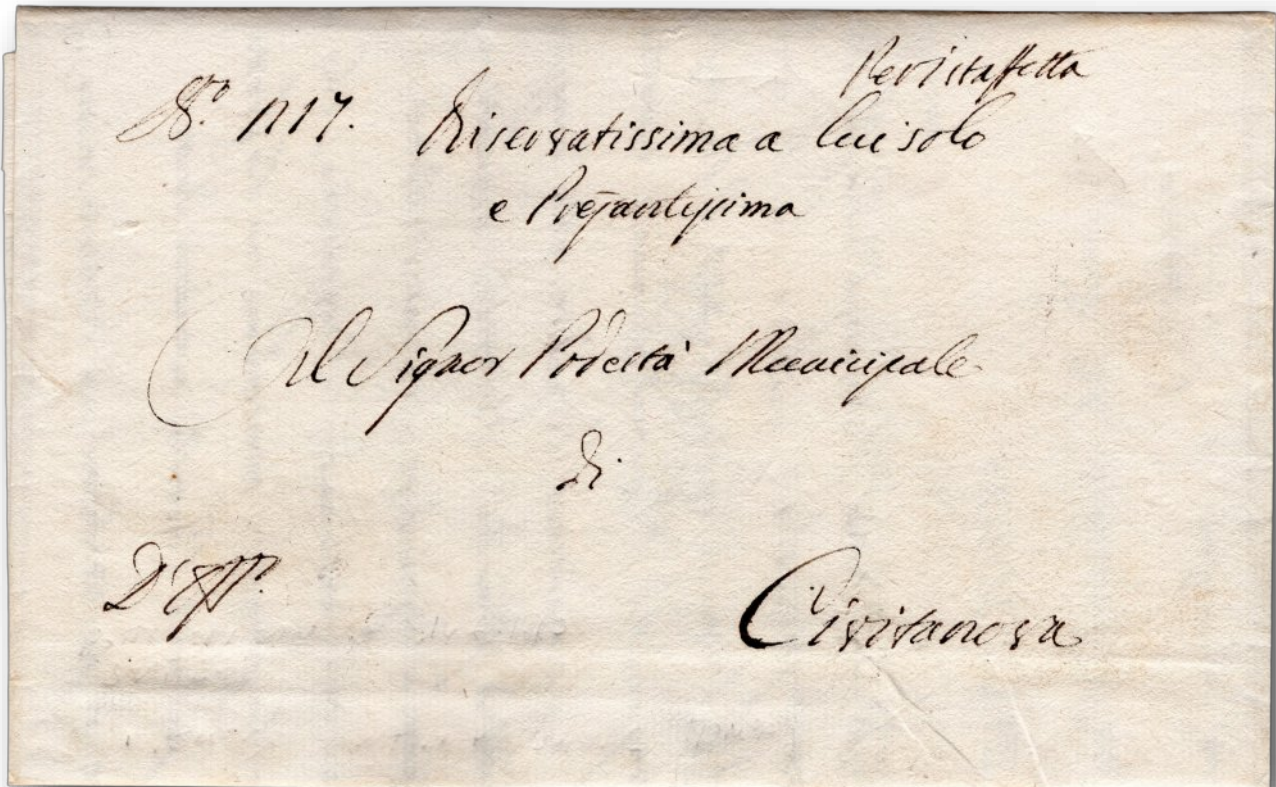


Letter from Fano **August 23, 1868**, to Terni (arrival postmark on the reverse), first-rate domestic mail. On the front, the handwritten endorsement: “*Per il pronto recapito raccomandata al Sig. Capostazione di Stimigliano in Sabina*” (Entrusted to the Station Master of Stimigliano in Sabina for prompt delivery). As Stimigliano is located approximately 40 km from Terni, the sender relied on the station master to ensure the swift final delivery of the letter.

**Note:** Stimigliano began operating as a *collettorìa* (rural post office) in 1864. A pivotal moment occurred with the opening of the Rome-Ancona railway line in 1866, when the Stimigliano Station (Scalo) became a crucial transit point. For several years, both the original *collettorìa* in the ancient village and the service at the railway station coexisted, the latter greatly facilitating the transport of mail dispatches.

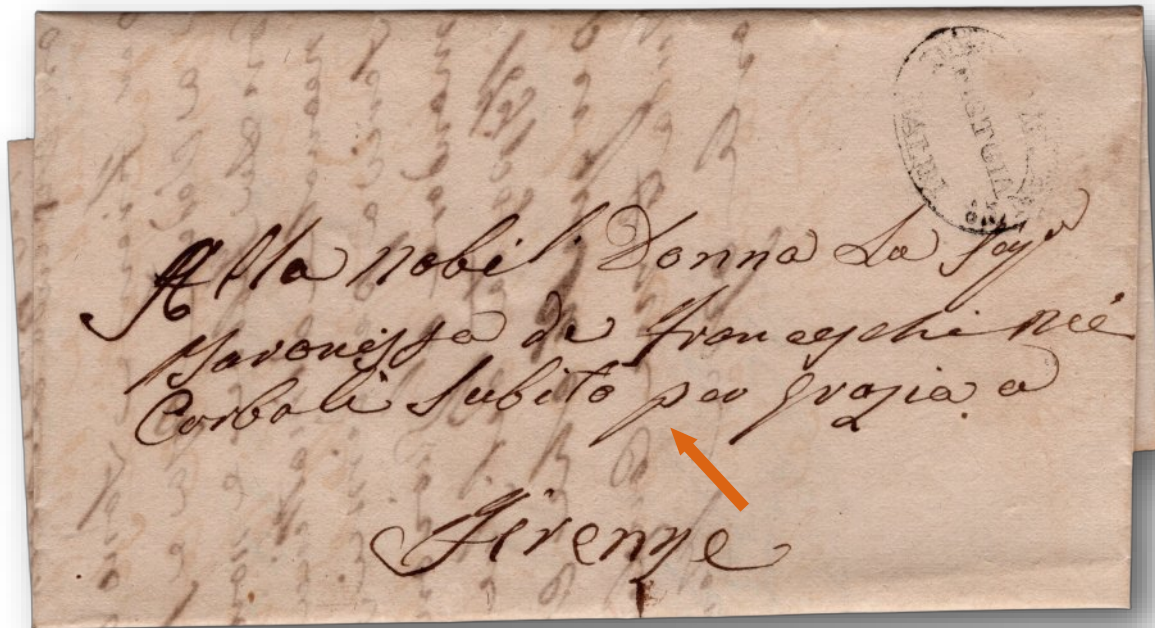


Letter from Livorno **December 21, 1735**, to Florence sent "franco di porto" (postage paid). Manuscript endorsement reads: "per Uomo a cavallo che dev'esser costì il dì 22 XR la mattina" (by horseman, due to arrive there on the morning of 22 December.)



Official letter denoting franking privilege, sent from Porto Civitanova on **June 14, 1810**, to Civitanova. The cover features the manuscript instructional mark "Per istaffetta" (By courier), alongside the urgency and privacy endorsements "Riservatissima a lui solo e Pressantissima" (Strictly confidential to him alone and highly urgent).

Recto

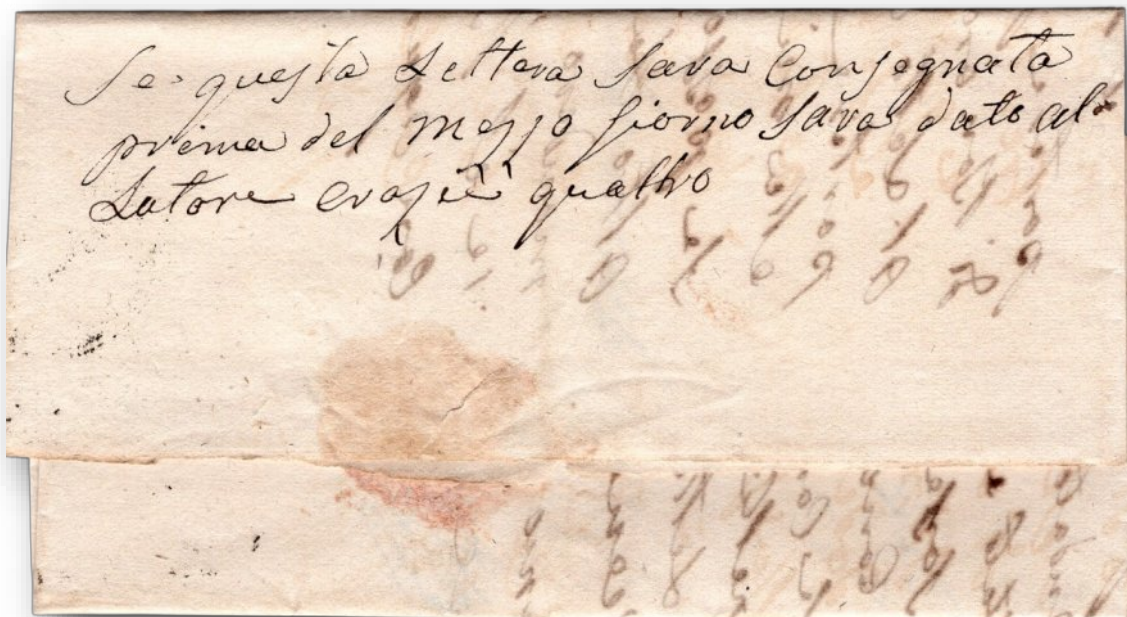


Letter from Montabono (Lucca) dated **July 19, 1847**, addressed to Florence, transported via the Antonio Baldi private diligence company (cachet on face). The Baldi family's activity as postal service franchisees for their diligence lines is well-documented on the Florence-Pistoia route starting from 1847; in this instance, the handstamp confirms its use inbound to the capital.



This document represents the earliest recorded date known to the author for this specific marking, which is recorded until June 1849. The cover also features the manuscript urgency endorsement: "*Subito per grazia*" (Immediately, by favor).

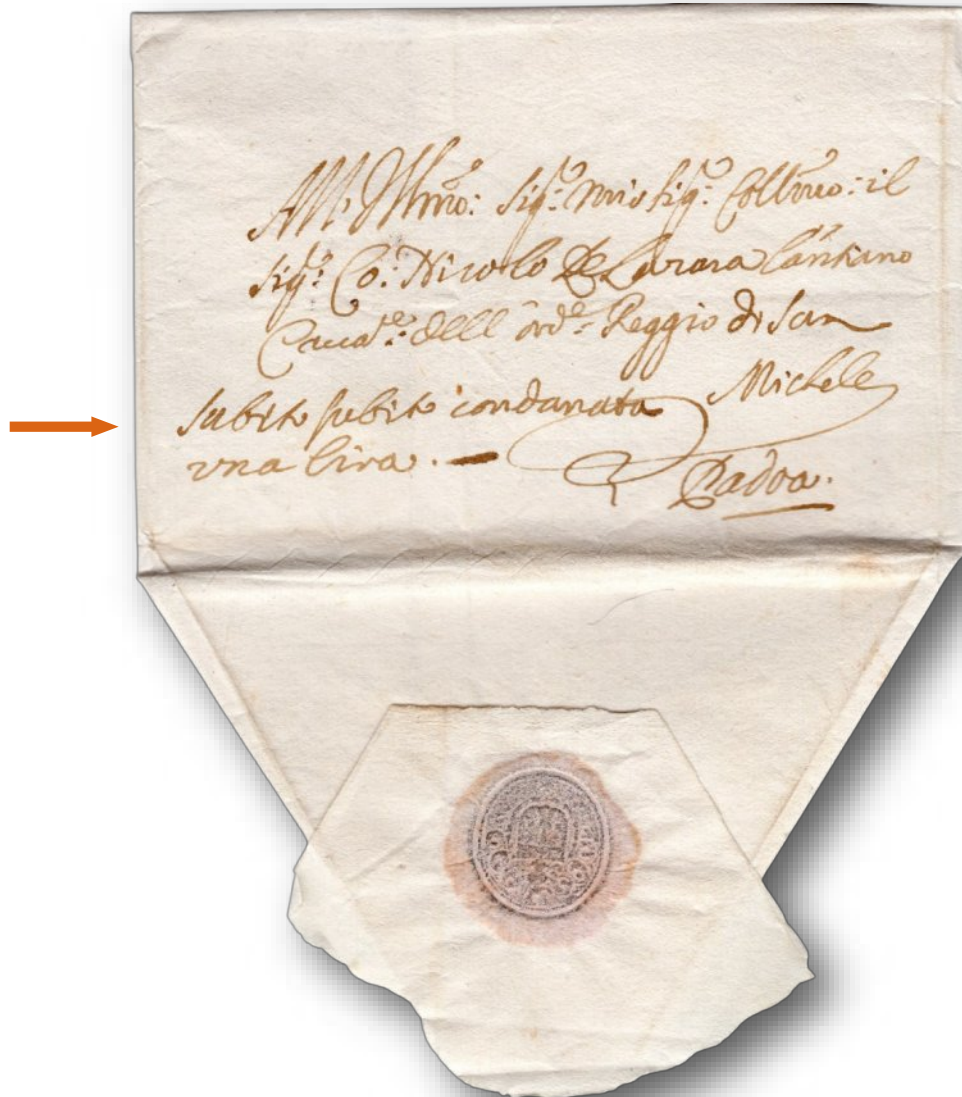
Verso



Manuscript endorsement on reverse: "*Se questa lettera sarà consegnata prima del mezzo giorno sarà date al latore crazie quattro*" (If this letter is delivered before noon, four crazie shall be given to the bearer).

So-called "*condannate*" letters (letters with additional delivery fees) were carried by private individuals, or sometimes by public administrations, who acted as couriers in exchange for a fee paid by the recipient. This surcharge was explicitly indicated on the face—or more rarely on the reverse—of the letter, and was often contingent upon delivery by a specific pre-arranged date or time.

This practice persisted even when letters were transmitted through the regular postal system: while the sender paid the standard postal rate, the recipient was responsible for the "*condanna*", an additional compensation paid to the bearer. Although more prevalent in the Veneto region, this method of conditioning mail delivery was also widespread throughout other Italian regions.

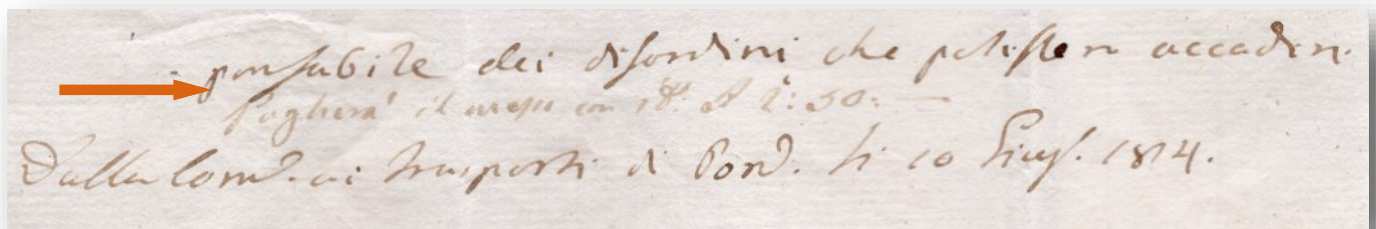


Letter from Venice dated **September 17, 1672**, addressed to Padua, featuring the manuscript endorsement on face: "*condannata una lira*" (*one lira delivery fee*), alongside the urgency plea "*subito subito*" (*immediately, immediately*).

Note: The delivery cost was typically higher than the standard postal rates in force; however, it was always commensurate with the speed of delivery and, in any case, privately agreed upon between the sender and the occasional courier.



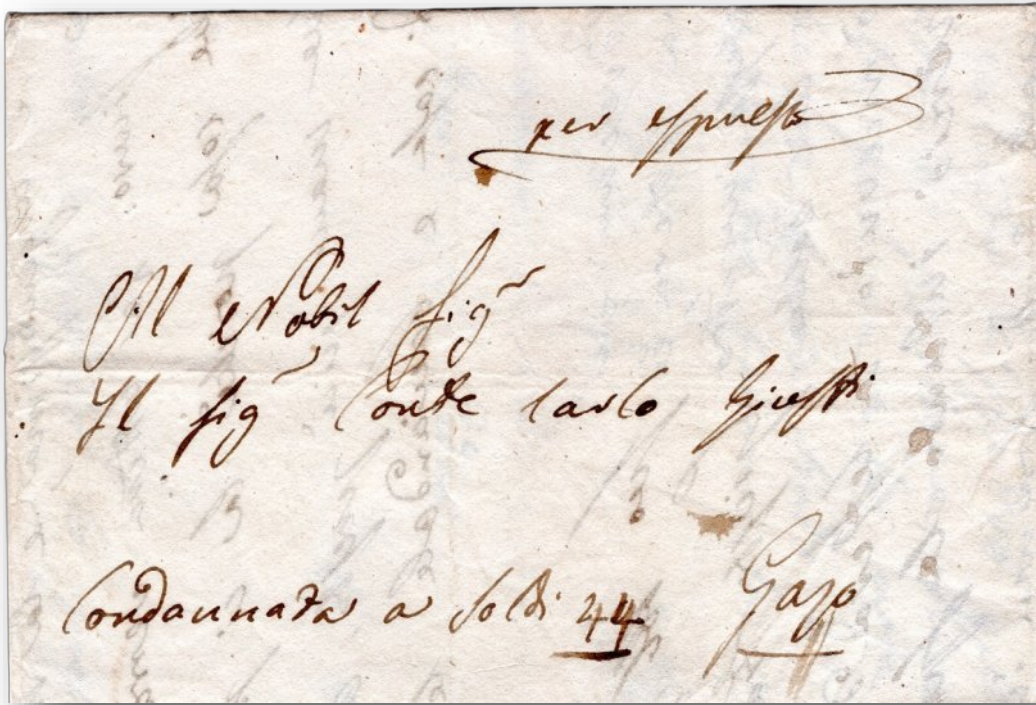
Official letter denoting franking privilege, sent from Pordenone on **June 14, 1814**, to Maniago. The cover features the manuscript endorsement on face: "condannata it. L 2.50". Similarly, the internal text states: "pagherà il messo con it. L 2.50" (the messenger shall be paid it. L 2.50).



Letter from Milan dated **February 21, 1817**, addressed to Vicenza; rated 6 soldi for a single-sheet letter, with the manuscript endorsement "condannata Lire una", to be paid to the final bearer of the letter.

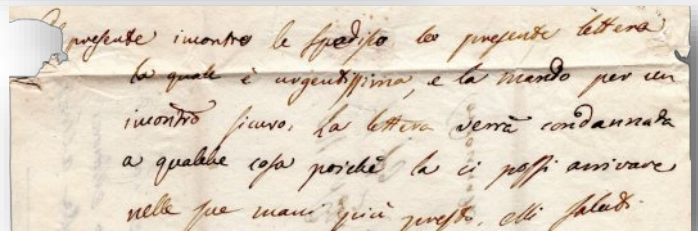
"Condannata" letters

Dual endorsement: "condannata" and "per espresso" (by express)



Letter from Verona dated **July 8, 1823**, addressed to Gazo, featuring manuscript endorsements on face: "condannata a soldi 44" (delivery fee of 44 soldi) and "per espresso" (by express).

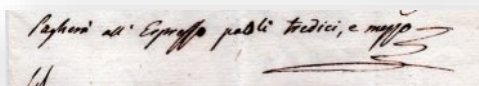
From the contents: "... I am sending you the following letter which is highly urgent, and I am dispatching it via a reliable opportunity. The letter will be 'condannata' for a small amount so that it may reach your hands as quickly as possible ...."



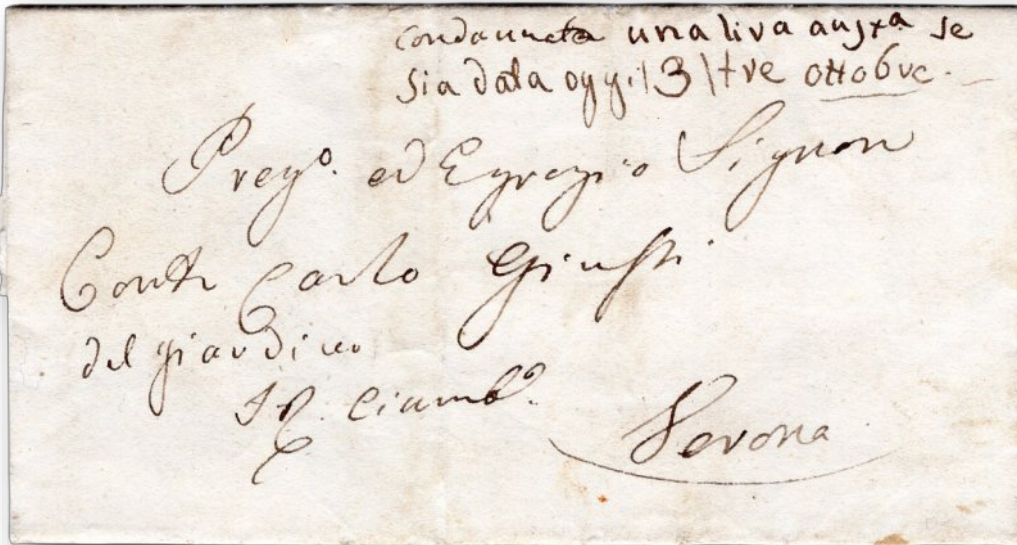
Official letter (conveying the right to franking) from the Prefecture of the Department of Musone dated **April 28, 1809**, addressed to Sassoferato. Despite its official status, the face bears the manuscript endorsement "condannata as 1.35" (delivery fee for 1.35 scudi) and "per espresso" (by express courier).



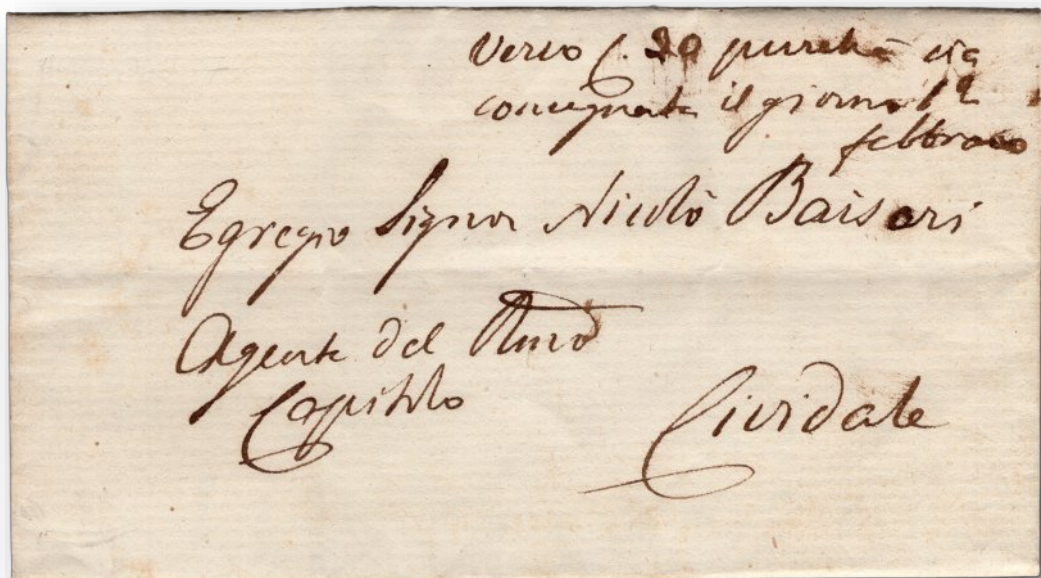
Note: 1 scudo = 10 paoli



From the internal tax: "will pay thirteen and a half paoli to the express courier"



Letter from Colognola (Veneto) dated **October 3, 1847**, addressed to Verona, featuring the manuscript endorsement on face: "condannata una lira aust.a se sia data oggi 3 ottobre" (one Austrian Lira delivery fee, provided it is delivered today, October 3rd).



Letter from Palena (Chieti) dated **February 10, 1857**, addressed to Cividale (Friuli). The cover features a manuscript endorsement on face: "Verso c. 20 purchè sia consegnata il giorno 12 febbraio" (A fee of 20 centesimi to be paid, provided it is delivered on February 12th).

**"per espresso" letters**

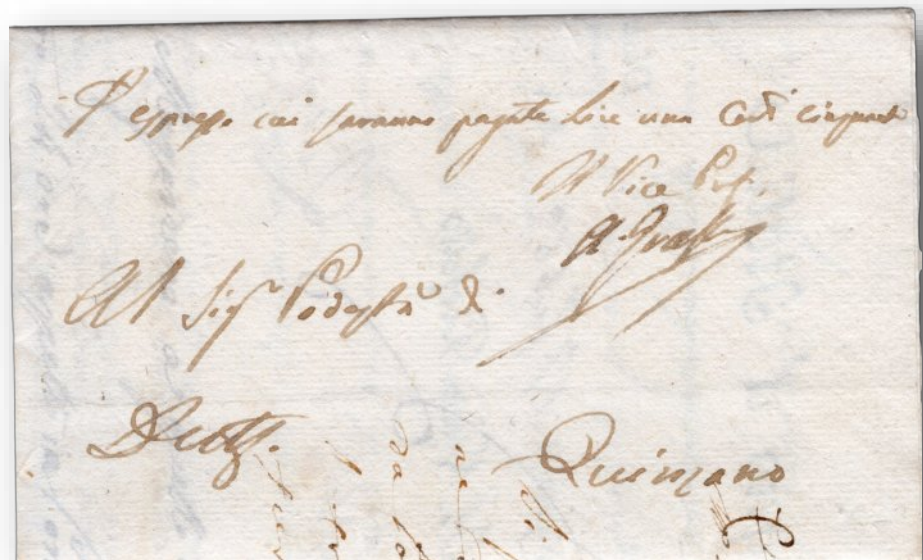
**With indication of "Postage Due"**

An "Espresso" refers to the specific individual commissioned to deliver the correspondence; consequently, the mail is described as being transported "per espresso" (by express courier).

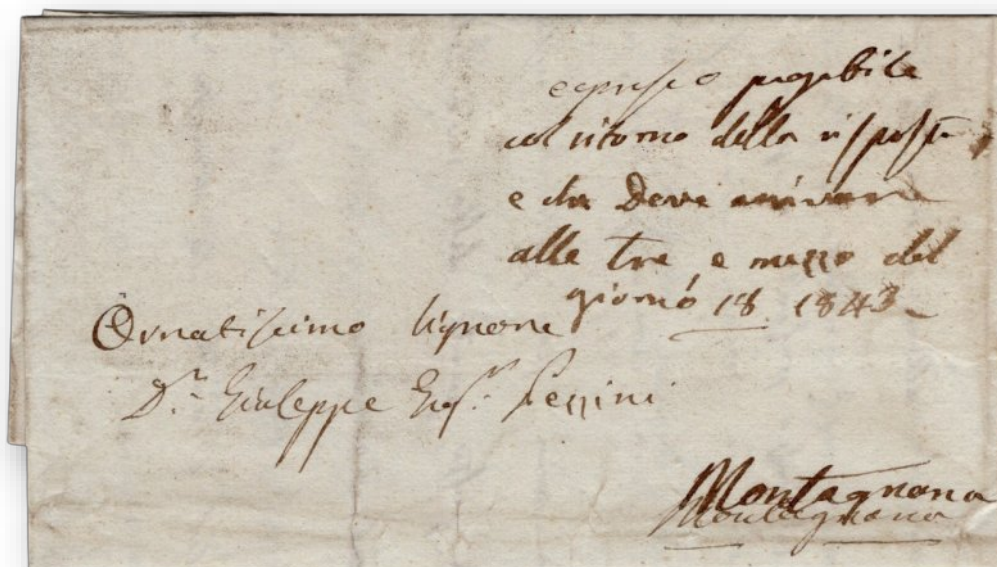


Letter from Scarnafigi (Piedmont) dated **April 5, 1709**, featuring the manuscript endorsement on reverse: "pagaranno all'espresso soldi dieci" (ten soldi shall be paid to the express courier).

Official letter denoting franking privilege, sent from Verolanuova on **February 17, 1814**, to Quinzano. The letter dates from the Napoleonic era in the Department of Mella (active 1797–1816). The cover features the manuscript endorsement on face: "P espresso cui saranno pagate lire una cent.i cinquanta" (By express courier, to whom one lira and fifty centesimi shall be paid).



Local letter (for city delivery) sent within Montagnana on **March 18, 1843**. The cover features a detailed manuscript endorsement on face: "espresso pagabile col ritorno della siffatta e che deve arrivare alle tre e mezzo del giorno 18 1843" (Express courier payable upon the return of the same [messenger], and must arrive by 3:30 PM on the 18th, 1843).

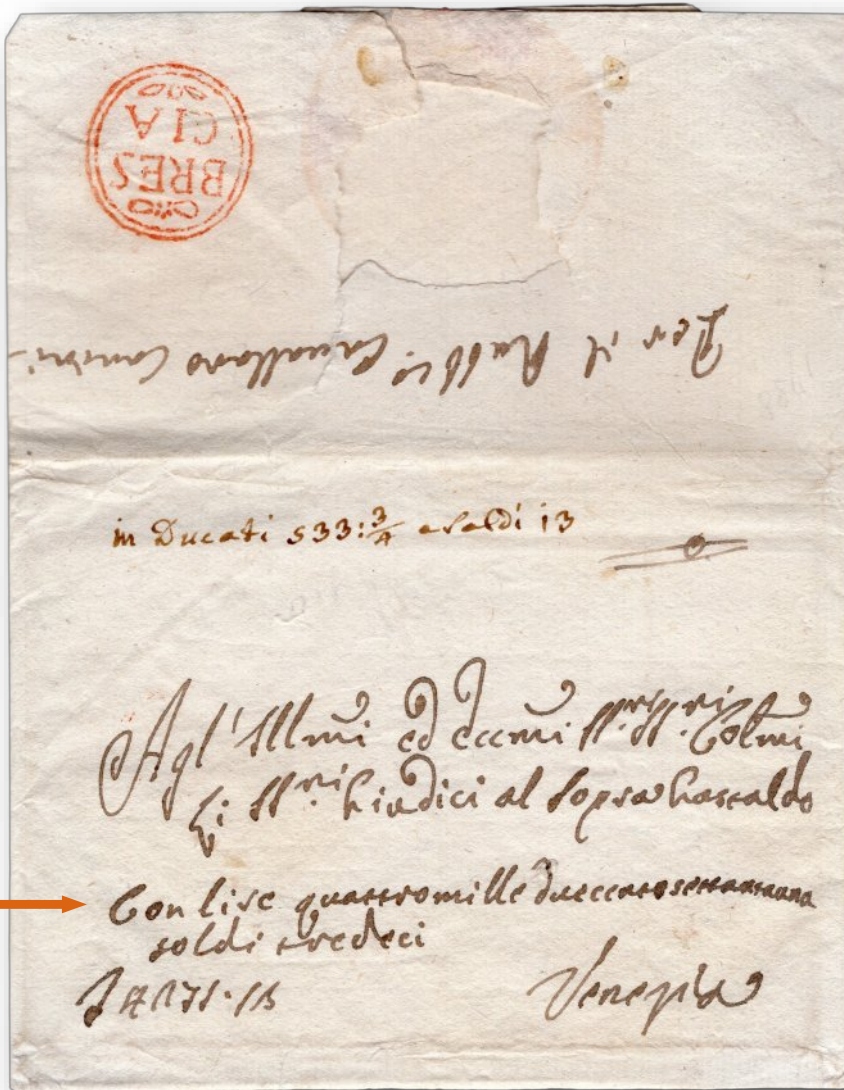




Letter from Milan dated **January 12, 1774**, addressed to Marseille, routed via Genoa. The letter was handled in Genoa by the forwarding agent *Lugini Brentani Cimaroli* (manuscript annotation at side). The "36" marked in the upper right corner represents the total due paid by the recipient in Marseille. According to the 1759 French Postal Tariff, the rate for the Genoa–Aix route was 14 Sols, and 4 Sols for Aix–Marseille, totaling 18 Sols for a single rate. As the letter is marked "1/2" in the upper left (indicating a weight of 1/2 unze, or half an ounce), it was charged at double the standard rate, resulting in the 36 Sols due upon delivery.

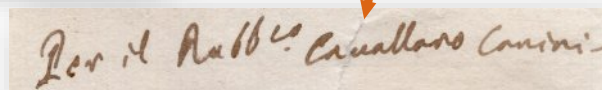


Letter from Barcelona dated **March 14, 1784**, addressed to Milan, transported by the Spanish postal service (indicated by the "Cataluna" handstamp). The letter was carried by the Courier for Italy (Corriere per l'Italia) as far as Milan, where it was rated by weight for 3 Austrian lire and 13 soldi.



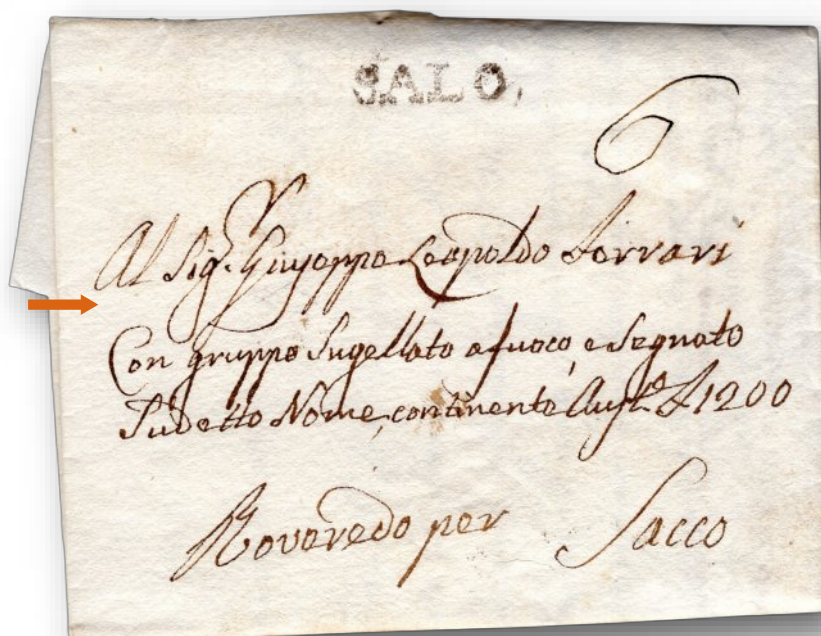
Letter from Brescia (handstamp used 1783–1794) dated March 2, 1788, addressed to Venice, received on March 18 (an unusually long transit time). The letter contained a money transfer; the face features the manuscript endorsement: “*Con lire quattromiladuecentosettantuno soldi tredici*”, repeated below in figures, and at the top as “*in Ducati 533 e 3/4 e soldi 13*”. This latter figure represents the equivalent sum in Ducats, calculated at the exchange rate of 8 Lire per Ducat. The cover also displays a double franchise mark (a small circle crossed by two horizontal lines).

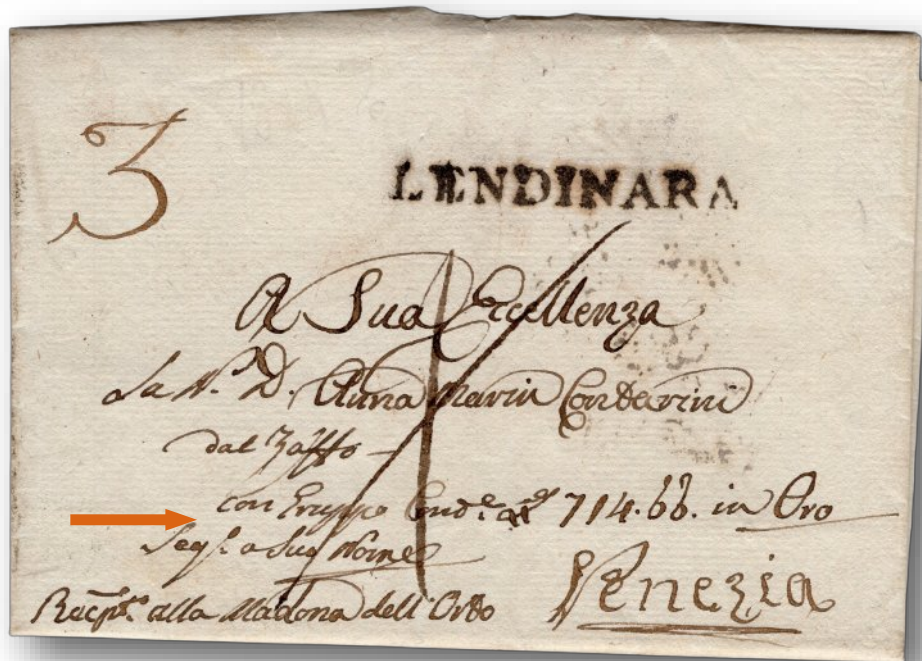
The reverse also bears the manuscript endorsement: “*Per il Pubb.co [Pubblico] Cavallaro Canini*”. The Cavallaro was a public courier commissioned for the transport on horseback of official dispatches, letters, and—as seen in this instance—specie or valuables. Canini operated primarily on the Brescia–Venice route.



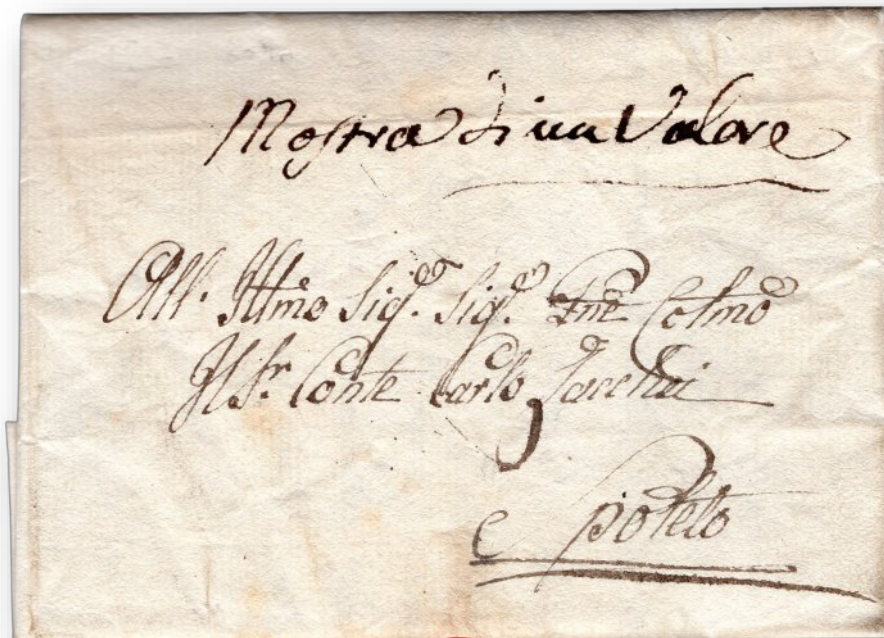
Letter from Salò dated **May 21, 1834**, addressed to Sacco, featuring the manuscript endorsement on face: “*Con gruppo sugellato a fuoco e segnato suddetto nome contenente Aus. L.1200*” (With a fire-sealed parcel, marked with the aforementioned name, containing 1,200 Austrian Lire).

A “gruppo” was a parcel or packet attached to the letter containing valuables; sealing it “a fuoco” (with hot wax) was the most secure method of the era to prevent tampering or theft.





Letter from Lendinara (part of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia following the fall of Venice) dated **July 11, 1819**, addressed to Venice. The face features the manuscript endorsement: “con gruppo cont.te £ 714.66 in Oro Seg.te a suo nome” (with a parcel containing 714.66 Lire in Gold, marked in your name). The letter was rated 3 carantani, the tariff for a single-rate letter (up to half a lotto) within the first distance. The cover also features a St. Andrew's Cross (*croce di S. Andrea*), a postal mark used to confirm the successful delivery of the transmitted valuables.



Letter from Rome dated **April 18, 1807**, addressed to Spoleto, featuring the manuscript endorsement on face: “Mostra di niun valore” (Sample of no value). The contents explain the presence of a small object: “... a small ribbon, which I forgot to include in the box; I am enclosing it in this [letter]”.

### Service markings

### Postage due initially refused

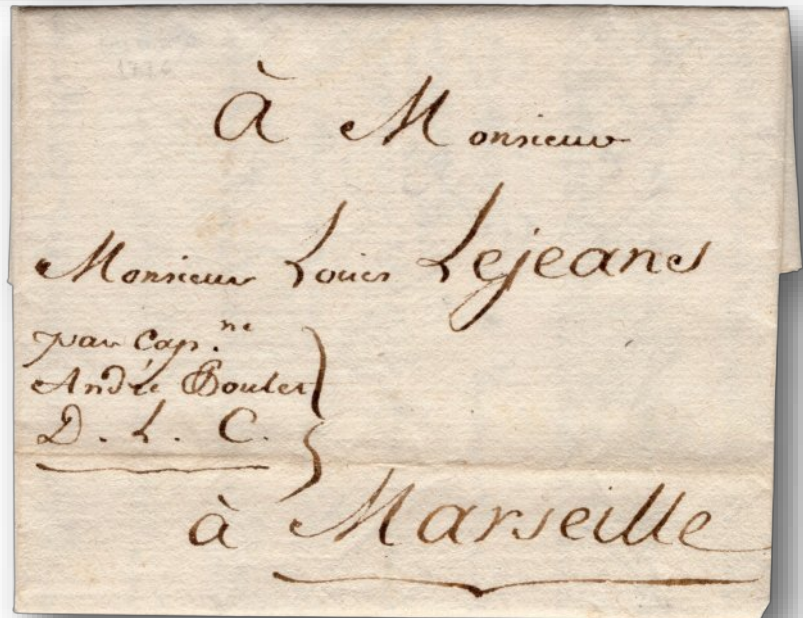


Letter from Pistoia dated **August 1, 1804**, addressed to Tizzana. The face bears prominent manuscript markings: "**N: P:**" and "**Ergo Jacet**".

These notations indicate that the postage due was not initially paid by the addressee; consequently, the postal clerk marked it **Non Pagata** (Unpaid) and **Ergo** (Therefore) **Jacet** (It lies/stays in storage). The markings were subsequently struck through once the payment was finally collected and the letter delivered.

### Divine Protection Endorsements

Maritime letter from Palermo dated **January 10, 1776**, addressed to Marseille. The letter was entrusted for sea transport to Captain André Douler. The face features the manuscript religious invocation "D.L.C.", standing for "Dio Lo Conduca" (May God lead it). Such invocations were commonly used during this era to place the vessel and its mail under divine protection, reflecting the high risks associated with maritime navigation and the constant threat of shipwrecks or piracy.



Early letter from Rome dated **January 22, 1639**, addressed to Genoa. The cover features the manuscript religious invocation "**Dio guardi**" (May God protect [this letter]).