



Mussolini (left) with Hitler (right).

specifically for collecting and not necessarily for regular postal use, provide a tidy profit for the governments that produce them.

Stamp collecting continues to be a popular hobby. However, the study of stamps can also provide important historical information. As government-issued documents, stamps can be analyzed to determine what they communicate about a political regime—its sense of itself and the messages it wishes to convey to the populous. In the case of the *Due popoli, una guerra* stamp which we will discuss here, we can read a clear propagandistic content in support of the Fascist cause.

***Due popoli, una guerra, Ten Lire* Postage Stamp—Analysis**

This stamp, released in 1941 by Mussolini's government, is of a 10 centesimi denomination. The text "Poste Italiane" is noted at the top, while "Cent" and "10" are marked below. The rectangular stamp is divided down the middle, with a profile portrait of Hitler on the left

and a corresponding image of Mussolini on the right. The leaders are separated by a pair of swords, one pointed upward and the other pointed down. To the left of Hitler we see key Nazi symbols, including the imperial eagle (the *Reichsadler*) and the swastika, both mounted on a column. Behind Mussolini the Fascist symbol of the fasces is visible and positioned next to yet another sword. Interspersed throughout the image are a series of oak leaves—symbols of strength.

The stamp communicates power and equality. The leaders stare toward each other with determined gazes and are given equal weight within the composition. Their profiles echo the traditional silhouette view of the leader as seen on ancient coins—no doubt the source of the compositional form here. The symbols of military strength and war which frame them add strong vertical lines to the composition, reinforcing the idea of potency. Neither man wears a helmet, but the suggestion of military costume is indicated by the collars we are able to see in these bust-length portraits. Their heads are silhouetted against simple backgrounds, surrounded by a white haloling effect to isolate and emphasize them further.

The text at the center bottom edge of the stamp reads "*Due popoli, una guerra*," which translates to "Two nations, one war." This stamp commemorates the alliance between Germany and Italy, which, as we have noted, dated from 1939. "The Pact of Friendship and Alliance Between Germany and Italy," known popularly as the "Pact of Steel," was signed on May 22, 1939, and served to establish a political and military alliance between the two countries. The pact was of particular interest to Mussolini as he began to lose his grip on power. He saw his association with Hitler as a way to bolster his position and help him retain political control in Italy. The production of this stamp was intended to convey Il Duce's authority, and in this way, the stamp serves as an excellent piece of political propaganda.

This stamp was one of a series. This particular imagery was repeated in a variety of colors. The version in your *Art Reproductions Booklet* is the black version. The other two editions were printed in red and in green. In addition, there were other Mussolini/Hitler stamps with variations on this imagery, including an example where the leaders were silhouetted against a pair of soldiers and another where they are presented overlapping, as if standing next to each other, and looking toward the Nazi and Fascist symbols we see depicted in our example here.

This stamp was parodied by the British in 1943, when a caricatured "forgery" of the stamp was made. These counterfeit stamps show changed faces of the leaders. Hitler's expression suggests anger—his brow is furrowed, and his mouth is opened as if he is speaking in irritation. Mussolini's face is anxious. His eyes are opened wide in surprise and concern. The text below becomes *Due popoli, un führer* ("Two peoples, one leader"), which is

