

# Marian Stamps

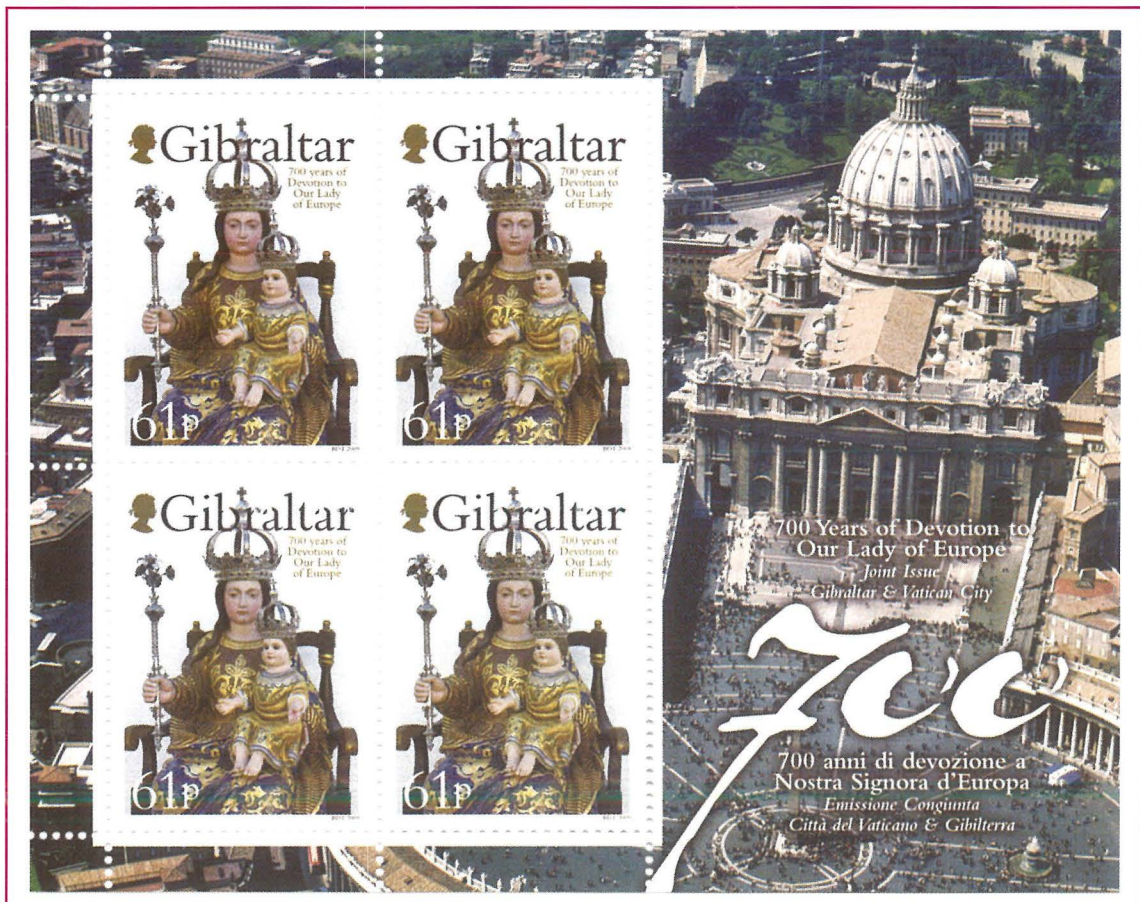
from around the world

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## 700 YEARS OF DEVOTION TO OUR LADY OF EUROPE

### HISTORY

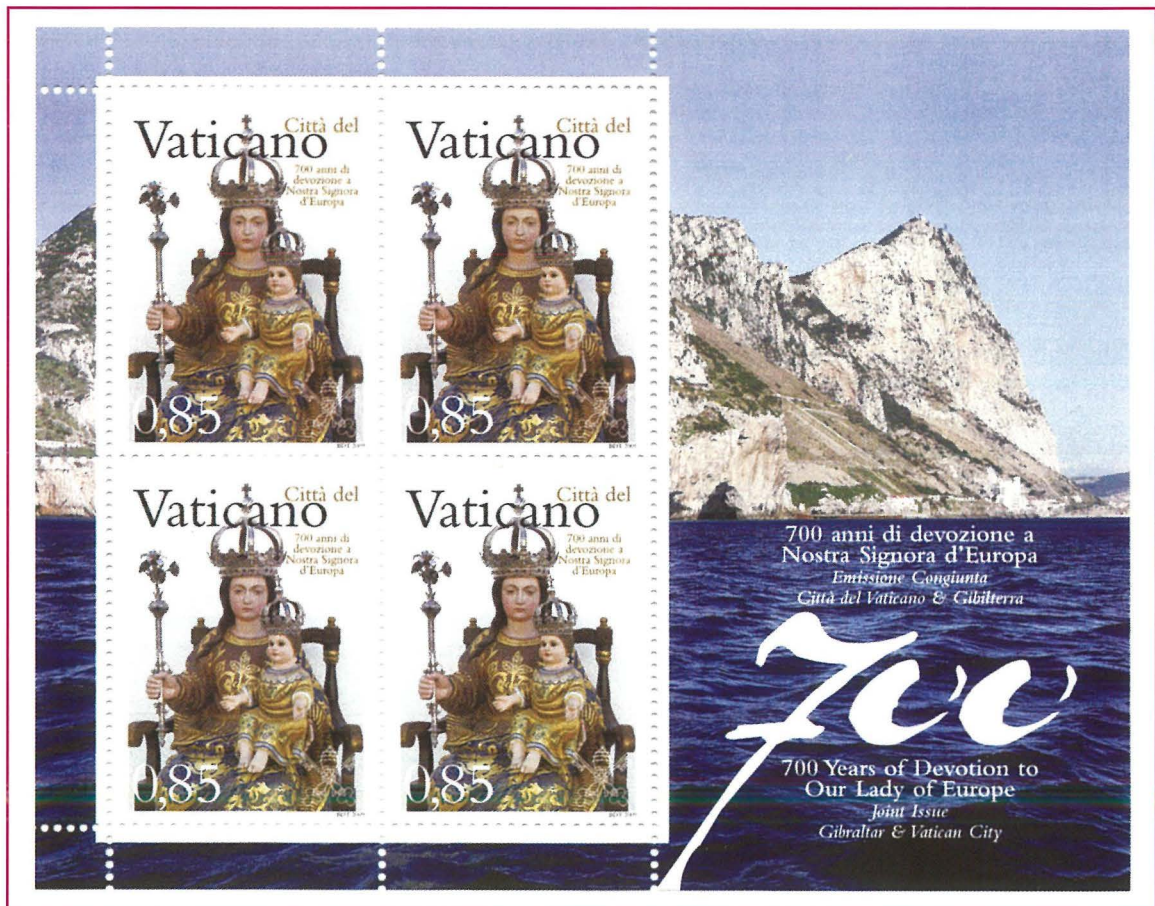
It is historically recorded that Moslem troops first set foot on European land in the year AD 710 and Gibraltar was the first land to be captured. From that moment on a continuous flow of people from Africa to Europe took place until 1309. By that time Moslems built the formidable Moorish Castle,



houses and a Mosque. They settled and developed not only on Gibraltar but also on the Iberian Peninsula. In 1309, however they were beaten and expelled by King Ferdinand IV of Castille. Ferdinand, after thanking God for his victory placed the European continent under the protection of the Mother of Christ, under the title of 'Our Lady of Europe'. In 1333 the Moors re-took the Rock. King Ferdinand's grandson, Henry IV re-conquered once and for all the Rock 129 years later in 1462. Fearing another attack by the Moors, he tried to populate The Rock as fast as possible. It was a great and difficult task. King Henry VI re-instituted the devotion to Our Lady of Europe. He converted the mosque into a shrine dedicated to the Madonna and ordered a carved wooden statue to be placed in this shrine. The statue which is only some 80cm tall represents the Madonna sitting on a simple chair, with her Son sitting on her lap. The Madonna is seen carrying a staff with three flowers, representing Truth, Justice and Love. The shrine prospered. Many were those who presented expensive ex-votos and rich donations. Ships used to salute the Virgin Mary while sailing in front of the Rock.



In 1540 with the help of an Italian renegade, the shrine was raided by the Turkish troops. The statue was vandalized and smashed. All jewels and other treasures were stolen. When the Turks had



their day and were about to leave with their bounty they were intercepted and defeated by Admiral Bernadino Mendoza, commander of the Spanish Fleet.

Many attempts were made to send the statue for repair in Seville, but each time the ship was hindered to set sail by a storm. Taken as a sign from heaven it was decided that a craftsman be brought and do the job locally. Many miracles were attributed to Our Lady of Europe, but the most important miracle was of a fisherman who was thrown overboard in pitch darkness. He prayed with all his heart to Our Lady and was saved. When investigated the fisherman could not describe how he found himself on dry land.

During the war of the Spanish Succession in 1704 a repetition of what had happened by the Turks in 1540 took place. The shrine was stripped of all treasures and the statue vandalized and taken away to Algeciras in Spain. In 1860 an attempt was made to restore the statue and bring it back home. A new chapel was built. Pope Pius IX donated a beautiful altar and a white marble canopy was erected for the statue. It arrived in Gibraltar in 1864. The statue was welcomed with great festivities and a solemn procession. Military bands and regiments took part and the statue was carried through the main streets to her place.

During World War II all the population of Gibraltar was evacuated and the Rock was taken over by the Armed Forces. In 1961 the Military Authorities declared that they did not need the Shrine any more. The shrine was embellished again and converted once more to a house of prayer. On 7 October 1967 feast of the Holy Rosary the statue was returned to the shrine. This Marian Shrine in Gibraltar is visited by many pilgrims, seeking help from Mary before undertaking some important venture.

In 2002, the Bishop of Gibraltar Charles Caruana (of Maltese descendents) took the statue to Rome where H.H. Pope John Paul II placed a crown over the heads of the Virgin Mary and her Son Jesus. Bishop Caruana donated to the Holy Father a replica of the statue. This replica is now housed at the Casa del Clero in Via Scroffa, Rome.

Today there are several Shrines and Churches all over Europe dedicated to 'Our Lady of Europe'.

To commemorate the 700 Anniversary of 'Our Lady of Europe' the postal administrations of Gibraltar and the Vatican issued a historic Stamp joint issue. The stamp depicts the hand carved statue that is housed in its shrine at Europa Point in Gibraltar from where one can clearly see the African Continent. While the Vatican sheetlet shows the Rock of Gibraltar as seen from the Strait, the Gibraltar issue depicts Saint Peter's Square and Basilica in the Vatican.

The joint issue was approved by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and His Lordship the Bishop of Gibraltar Charles Caruana.

The sheetlets design and photography were executed by Stephen Perera and printed in Canada by Lowe Martin. ♦

