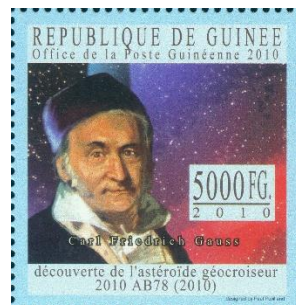
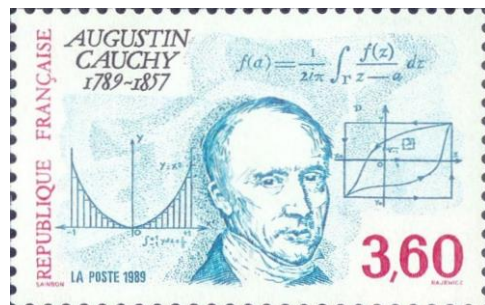
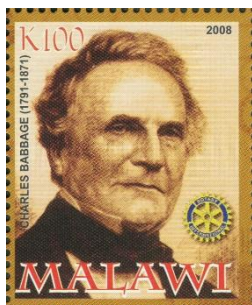
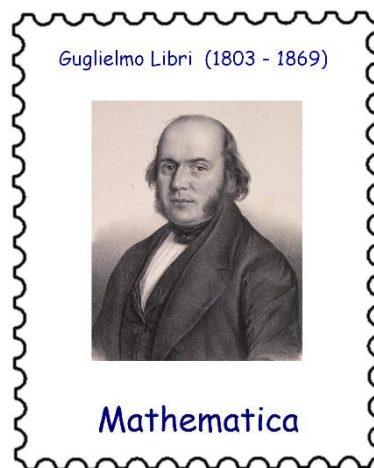


**GUGLIELMO LIBRI** (January 1, 1803 – September 29, 1869)

by HEINZ KLAUS STRICK, Germany

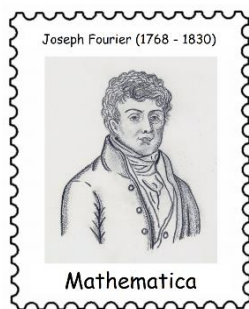
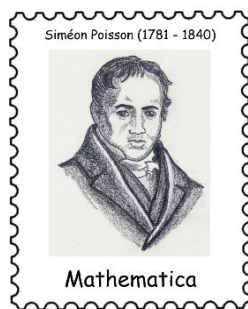
GUGLIELMO BRUTUS ICILIUS TIMELEONE LIBRI CARUCCI DALLA SOMMAIA was born to ROSA DEL ROSSO and Count GIORGIO LIBRI CARUCCI DALLA SOMMAIA. Both parents come from old noble families in Tuscany. They were divorced when the boy was four years old.

Thanks to intensive instruction by private tutors, the boy was able to enrol at the University of Pisa at the age of 14. He attended lectures in law, but became increasingly interested in mathematics and the natural sciences. When he graduated in 1820, he published his first paper *Memoria sopra la teoria die numeri* (Memoir on the Theory of Numbers), which received positive feedback from CHARLES BABBAGE, AUGUSTIN-LOUIS CAUCHY and CARL FRIEDRICH GAUSS, among others.

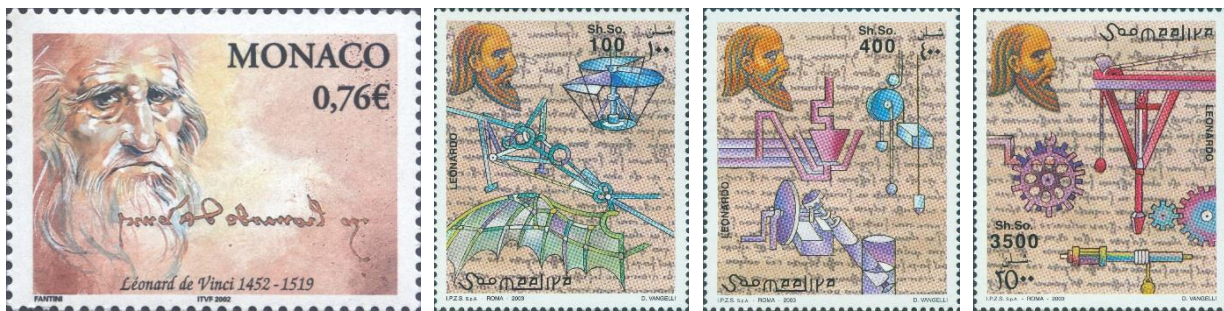


At the age of just 20, LIBRI was appointed professor of mathematical physics at the University of Pisa. However, he soon realised that this job did not suit him very well. He succeeded in convincing the university officials that a (paid) study visit to other European universities would be mutually beneficial.

In Paris, LIBRI was warmly received by mathematicians such as FRANÇOIS ARAGO, AUGUSTIN-LOUIS CAUCHY, SIMÉON-DENIS POISSON, ANDRÉ-MARIE AMPÈRE, JOSEPH FOURIER and PIERRE-SIMON LAPLACE. He submitted further papers to the *Académie des Sciences*. He also maintained lively contact with ecclesiastical and political personalities. He formed a lasting friendship with FRANÇOIS GUIZOT, at that time Secretary General of the Minister of the Interior.



After his return to Tuscany, LIBRI temporarily took up the post as head of the library of the *Accademia di Georgofili* (Academy for the Promotion of Knowledge of Agriculture and Forestry) in Florence. During this time he also wrote several articles (in French - because of the better possibilities for dissemination) on number theory, on discontinuous functions and on thermodynamics.



In 1829 LIBRI travelled to Paris again, where he studied the manuscripts of LEONARDO DA VINCI intensively in the *Bibliothèque Mazarine*.

Inspired by the success of the July Revolution, which had led to the end of Bourbon rule in France, he joined a secret society with the aim of forcing the Grand Duke of Tuscany to give his country a liberal constitution as well. The attempted coup failed and LIBRI fled to Paris, where he knew many friends.

In 1833 LIBRI succeeded ADRIEN-MARIE LEGENDRE as a member of the *Académie des Sciences*, although his often arrogant manner meant that he was not welcomed by all members. FRANÇOIS ARAGO, the permanent secretary of the *Académie*, arranged a lectureship for him at the *Collège de France*, and later also at the *Sorbonne*. However, the initially good relationship between ARAGO and LIBRI soon cooled down.



In 1838 LIBRI became a member of the editorial board of the *Journal des Sçavans*. He wrote further articles on thermodynamics, number theory and the solution of differential equations, which led to heated disputes during the meetings of the *Académie*. In particular he regularly clashed with JOSEPH LIOUVILLE. When LIOUVILLE was defeated by his hated rival LIBRI in 1843 in an application for a permanent professorship at the *Collège* (AUGUSTIN-LOUIS CAUCHY was also among the applicants who were not considered), LIOUVILLE felt downright humiliated and even gave up his previous lectureship at the *Collège*. It was not until 1851, after LIBRI's hasty flight to England (see below), that LIOUVILLE was appointed LIBRI's successor as professor at the *Collège de France*.

Possibly it is the disputes in the *Académie* that led LIBRI to concern himself in the 1840s less with mathematical theories than with the history of their development. His four-volume work on the history of mathematics in Italy from the Renaissance to the end of the 17th century is generally highly acclaimed, even though he often overemphasised the merits of Italian mathematicians in the development of mathematics. However, it is undoubtedly to LIBRI's credit that LEONARDO OF PISA's *Liber abbaci* was (re)discovered by scholars - LIBRI was the first to use the name FIBONACCI.

A particular strength of LIBRI's work is also that it contains extensive quotations from writings - including those that were considered lost. Over the years, LIBRI's collection of original writings (letters, manuscripts and books) had grown to a considerable size. This continued to grow when - not least thanks to his connections with GUIZOT - he was appointed state overseer of all libraries in France in 1841.

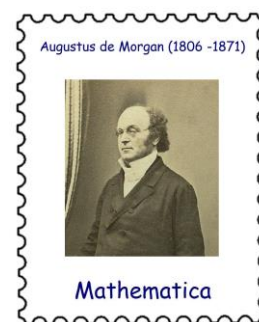


One of his tasks was to inventory the books confiscated from the nobility after the French Revolution of 1789. Subsequently, the government received reports from libraries all over the country about the loss of valuable books - remarkably, each time soon after LIBRI had visited these institutions.

An investigation was initiated but was half-heartedly pursued and abandoned without result. In 1847, LIBRI sold his valuable manuscript collection, including a copy of the *Pentateuch* from the 7th century, to the EARL OF ASHBURNHAM for 200,000 francs (for comparison: the daily wage of a labourer in this period was four francs.)

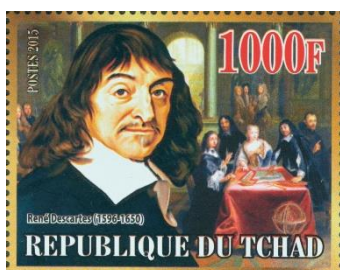
But when, after the revolution of 1848, LIBRI's friend GUIZOT, by now Prime Minister of France, was removed from office, a warrant was issued for LIBRI's arrest. Thanks to a warning, LIBRI was able to escape arrest and before he fled, he even managed to get hold of about 30,000 books and manuscripts and send them to England. In a trial, LIBRI was sentenced *in absentia* to ten years' imprisonment. As a result, his appointments as a Knight of the Legion of Honour and as a member of the *Académie* were also revoked. The French writer PROSPER MÉRIMÉE (poet and author of the novella *Carmen*, among others), head of the French Monuments Authority, was convinced of his friend's innocence and publicly criticised the course of the trial, and he too was put on trial.

In London, LIBRI was warmly received as a supposed victim of the political conditions in France. ANTONIO PANIZZI, the Italian-born director of the library of the British Museum, who had previously brokered the sale to the EARL OF ASHBURNHAM, even succeeded in convincing AUGUSTUS DE MORGAN to stand up publicly for LIBRI, claiming that LIBRI's flight from France was purely political and had to do with his Italian origin. As far as the theft of books was concerned, LIBRI was like many bibliophiles - they were all too easily suspected of having appropriated valuable objects without justification.



LIBRI had come to England without financial means, but this did not last long - he soon became rich again. He gradually sold books and manuscripts from his "holdings", including 72 of the 75 letters from RENÉ DESCARTES to MARIN MERSENNE, as well as numerous original writings by GALILEO, KEPLER, COPERNICUS and CARDAN.

In 1861, large parts of his "collection" were sold in lavish auctions. On the occasion of the auctions (at *Sotheby's*, among others), LIBRI published a catalogue in which he described the significance of the individual objects in detail - this became the model for future auction catalogues.



Around 1868, LIBRI's health began to fail. Since a return to France was out of the question, he went back to his homeland, where he died a few months later.

After LIBRI's death, the internationally respected historian and librarian LÉOPOLD DELISLE, *Administrateur général de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, once again investigated the "LIBRI case" and concluded that LIBRI had indeed wrongfully appropriated most of the books and writings.

After protracted negotiations at government level, he succeeded in returning most of the stolen copies to France in exchange for high compensation, including the collection that the EARL OF ASHBURNHAM had bought in 1847. As it further transpired, LIBRI had already stolen books from libraries in Italy before his stay in France, and these too were bought back by the Italian state in the 1880s.

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<https://www.spektrum.de/wissen/der-notorische-buecherdieb-guglielmo-libri/2099343>

Translated 2023 by John O'Connor, University of St Andrews

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