

# A 1950 'Dear Doctor' postcard from Fezzan-Ghadames to Switzerland



This Feb. 27, 1950, postcard from Sebha, Fezzan, to a physician at Fribourg, Switzerland, advertised dietary supplements manufactured by the pharmaceutical firm Laboratoires La Biomarine of Dieppe, France. French occupation stamps issued in 1946 for Fezzan-Ghadames in southern Italian Libya — one 2-franc Sebha Fort stamp (Libya Scott 1N5) and one 3f Mosque and Fort Turc at Murzuk stamp (1N7) — paid the required printed matter postage.

Pharmaceutical manufacturers have sent postcards advertising their products to health care providers since the 19th century. American stamp and postcard collectors are familiar with cards mailed by Abbott Laboratories from foreign countries to doctors in the United States and elsewhere in the 1950s and the 1960s promoting the barbiturate drug Pentothal.

Rochester, N.Y., collector Tom Fortunato has not only built an impressive collection of these Abbott Laboratories cards, but he has also constructed a website, [www.deardoctorpostcards.com](http://www.deardoctorpostcards.com), to promote his specialty. He calls them “Dear Doctor” postcards, the salutation on almost all of them. Fortunato’s website includes similar cards mailed by several other

drug manufacturers in different countries and languages.

A firm that made good use of that appealing promotional technique from 1947 to 1966 was Laboratoires La Biomarine of Dieppe, France, manufacturer of three dietary supplements extracted from seawater: Marinol, Ionyl and Plasmarine.

(Biomarine’s Marinol, a calcium and phosphorus mineral extract from seawater, should not be confused with the modern drug Marinol, a brand name for synthetic tetrahydrocannabinol [THC], the active constituent of marijuana, prescribed to relieve unpleasant side effects of anti-cancer and HIV/AIDS treatments.)

I do not collect “Dear Doctor” postcards as such, but I once tried

to collect examples of mail from as many countries, colonies and designated territories as possible. Among the tough challenges was to find a cover from Fezzan-Ghadames, a province of Italian Libya occupied by France from 1941 until Libyan independence in 1951.

The only affordable mailpiece I encountered that originated at Fezzan-Ghadames was the Biomarine card illustrated here. Obviously “affordable” is a subjective term, but in the past six months, I have recorded Biomarine postcards from Fezzan-Ghadames priced from \$100 to more than \$400 on internet philatelic markets, mostly in Italy.

That compares to Biomarine postcards from other locations priced in the \$5 to \$10 range. Evidently collectors of Italian and French colonies compete for Fezzan-Ghadames cards and covers, which are scarcer than mail from those countries’ other overseas possessions.

The advertising message on this card recalled Gen. Philippe Leclerc’s March 1941 victory at a Sahara Desert oasis in Fezzan, the first Free French military success of World War II. In my rough translation, it reads:

Doctor,

Nothing could stop Leclerc’s heroic epic in these desert areas, where an oasis saved an entire convoy. To see men and beasts recover their taste for life, how can we not think of so many suffering people whose health has been restored by several bottles of “Marinol,” “Ionyl” or “Plasmarine,” benefits of life in a desert of anemia!

Respectfully yours,  
Ionyl.

In Fortunato’s Dear Doctor website data, this card is a variety, sent to a Swiss physician on behalf of a Biomarine distributor in Geneva, Switzerland. □