

## VIII

# The Austrian Post Offices

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### Introduction

The Austrian postal services to and from Egypt have been described with uncommon thoroughness by Tchilinghirian and Stephen<sup>1</sup> and by Tranmer<sup>2</sup>. Although nothing major can be added to their works, there remain some additional features to be noted. Earlier, but still valuable, treatments of the postal markings have been written by Mumford<sup>3</sup> and by Mueller<sup>4</sup>.

Austrian mail service to Egypt began as early as 1820 when ships of the Austrian navy, operating out of Trieste, carried certain mails probably confined to official communications of the Austrian Consulate at Alexandria. Since no postal markings identifying such mails with Egypt are known, and no letters carried by this service have been recorded, there are no philatelic consequences to be reported.

True Austrian postal services began with the inaugural run of paddle steamers of the Austrian Lloyd Steamship Company, officially titled 'Oesterreichische Lloyd Gesellschaft', but more commonly known as 'Lloyd Austriaco', since the operating language of the firm was Italian. The ship *Arciduco Ludovico* sailed from Trieste for Constantinople on May 16th 1837 with a stop at the island of Syra where it connected with the *Conte Kolowrat* for Alexandria via Canea, Crete. The trip took two weeks. Passengers, freight, and mail were carried, and on September 1st 1837 a contract was closed designating the Lloyd Austriaco as the mail carrier for the Imperial Postal Administration. To deal with the mails, a post office was eventually established at the Consulate in Alexandria, and a postal agency of the Lloyd Austriaco was opened in 1843 in the Company's offices. Later, agencies were also opened in Cairo and Suez. The Consular post office handled the mails for Europe and the Lloyd agency at Alexandria handled the much smaller port-to-port mail in the Levant. The agencies in Cairo and Suez apparently acted only as forwarding agents for mail directed via Alexandria (and later, Port Said).

The infrequent and slow service via Syra was supplanted in May 1848 by direct steamship service between Alexandria and Trieste, with a stop only at Corfu. The transit time was thereby reduced to five days and the frequency was increased as ships became available. This service had special importance because of its connection with the mails carried by the P&O line between Suez and India and the Far East. The line to Trieste served Brindisi, at the southern tip of Italy, from 1870, when the Italian railways were completed to that port, allowing faster transit by land than through the Adriatic Sea.

An auxiliary line from Alexandria to the Syrian coast, including Beirut, Cyprus, and Rhodes, was inaugurated in 1845 and an express line from Alexandria to Constantinople via Smyrna began operation in 1853. The opening of the Suez Canal brought about a stop at Port Said, not only by ships on the Syrian coast line, but also by a new line connecting India and the Far East directly with Triest. This development occasioned the establishment of an Austrian post office at Port Said for a limited time.

Description of the Austrian postal services from Egypt is conveniently divisible into three categories: the Consular post office at Alexandria, that at Port Said, and maritime mails (posted on board or at ship-side). Of the Austrian Lloyd agencies, only that at Alexandria is known to have used a postal handstamp and it is dealt with together with the Consular post office.

## Alexandria

### Postmarks

The Consular post office was opened in 1845, according to Tranmer, and that is the earliest reported date for an Austrian postmark used in Egypt. Letters were sent without stamps until 1863 when the stamps of Austrian Italy (Lombardy-Venetia), denominated in soldi, were made available. Their use was not obligatory. Although Austria first issued stamps for domestic use in 1850, denominated in kreuzer, they were not authorized for use in the Levant (much later, adventitious use of kreuzer stamps sometimes occurred, probably by travelers who had some in their wallets).

The first postmark was a straight-line ALEXANDRIA, a curious Italo-German (not English) spelling (Fig. 1).

It is seen in black on letters from 1845 and sometimes in blue from 1856, and is even

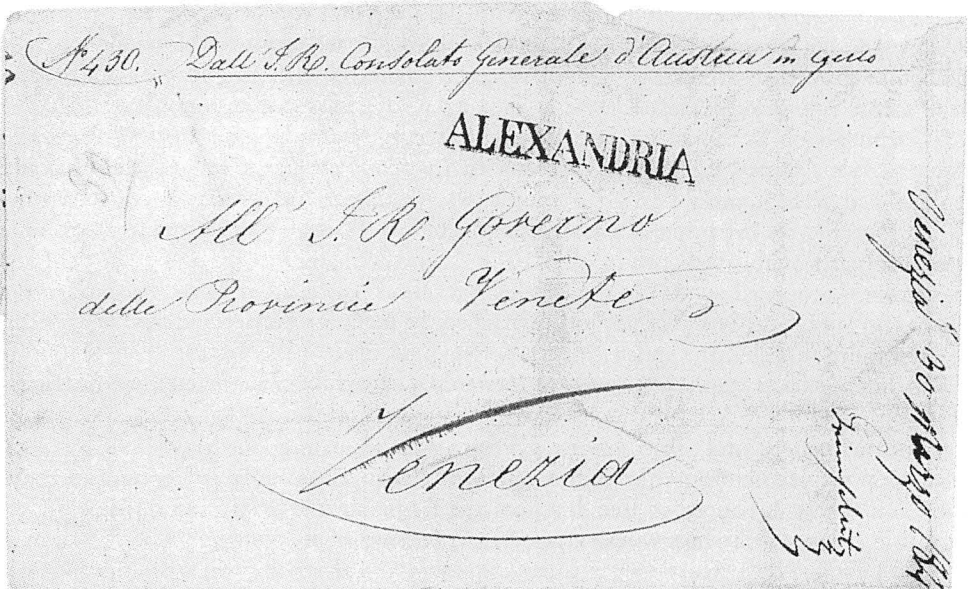


Fig. 1 A cover showing the first postmark of the Alexandria office.

found canceling stamps of Austrian Italy as a rare exception (perhaps it served as a relief canceller when more than one clerk was required to handle peak loads).

A revised version, having German spelling ALEXANDRIEN and a date (day and month) in a second line (Fig. 2), is recorded as early as 1846. It is known in black only, and although it is much commoner than the first type on stampless covers, it is not known canceling stamps. (A straight-line postmark, having the French spelling ALEXANDRIE in sloping letters and with date, was reported "tentatively" by Mueller, but neither Tranmer nor I can confirm its existence, and it is presumed to be a mistake.)

The Lloyd agency was issued a postmark very early, in the form of an oval without date, inscribed entirely in Italian (Fig. 2). It has been recorded in blue and only on stampless covers, the earliest of which is dated 1846. This is clearly the rarest of the Austrian postmarks (two recorded).

All postal activity by the Lloyd agency was required to cease by the Austro-Egyptian Postal Convention of July 1868.

The several circular datestamps (Fig. 3) are commoner than the foregoing postmarks and stampless covers showing them are easily found. They are inscribed in German, ALEXANDRIEN, with a date consisting of day and year only, expressed in numerals. The first general type of datestamp had serified, shaded letters and has been reported in three sizes, 22mm, 23mm, and 24mm, but measurement is sometimes uncertain owing to oily, blurred strikes, and the 24mm version is not believed to be a distinct variety. The smallest is known from 1853 and is often seen in blue, less commonly green, as well as black (often grey-black). The 23mm version has been recorded from 1860, and a possible 24mm version has been reported used in 1868. Their use extended into the period of the Franz Josef soldi stamps issued in 1867, on which they are not uncommon as cancellations.

For registered letters, a special datestamp with the added inscription RECOM. was supplied (Fig. 4). At 26mm, it is larger than the ordinary datestamp; it is known only in black. It is scarcer, and worth a premium of 25-100%. On cover, it is properly accompanied by the boxed cachet bearing a registration number entered by hand.

On Dec. 20th 1872 (Tranmer), a new type of circular datestamp, 20mm in diameter, having sans-serif letters and a two-cipher year-date, was introduced (Fig. 5). Its use continued until the closure of the Alexandria office on Sept. 30th 1889.

It was then returned to Vienna, where it was used with back-dated indicia for canceling remainders to order. A similar datestamp, measuring 22mm, was put into use the next

**ALEXANDRIEN**  
**3. DEC.**



Fig. 2

Second Consular postmark and Lloyd agency postmark.

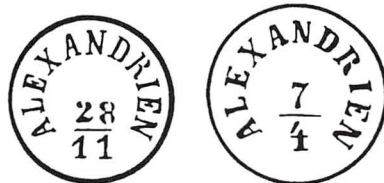


Fig. 3 The first circular datestamps, with serified letters.



Fig. 4 Postmarks for registered letters.

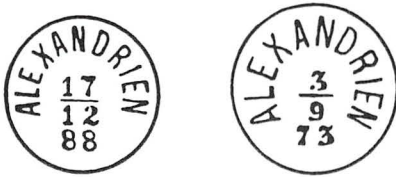


Fig. 5 The 1872 and 1873 datestamps.

year (July 30th 1873), but was withdrawn for undisclosed reasons in February 1874 (Tranmer). With such a short life, it is obviously quite scarce.

Various informational handstamps are found on covers from the Austrian post office in Alexandria. The several P. D. markings ('Pagato sin al Destinazione') (Fig. 6) had the standard function in the 1860s of indicating complete prepayment of postage before the formation of the UPU. The less often seen FRANCO was used in the pre-stamp period only (1859-62), and is usually black, but occasionally blue. It is not common, and the precise reason for its use is not clear.

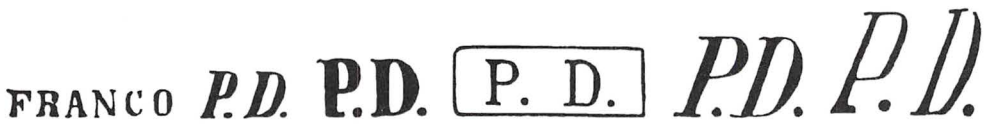


Fig. 6 Informational handstamps.

Official mail made use of a large circular seal (Fig. 7), which was sometimes struck with a datestamp; from the last year of operation, an intaglio seal handstamp exists (one cover known). Both are rare.



Fig. 7 Printed and handstamped seals of the post office.

### Forgeries

The easy availability of unused remainders has provided ready material for forging cancellations, and Alexandria seems to have invited special attention. Five different forged datestamps have been recognized (Fig. 8). Four of them are based on the sans-serif datestamps of 1872-89; each differs either in diameter or height of the letters. The three that are smaller than the genuine 20mm or 22mm measure 18, 18.5, and 19mm



Fig. 8 Forged datestamps.

respectively. The one with the correct diameter of 20mm has letters that are only 3mm high instead of 3.5mm, and ALEXANDRIEN is arranged slightly unsymmetrically, so that the initial A is lower in relation to the date numerals than the terminal N. The most deceptive forgery is of the early serified type. The letters are not so well made (note especially the X). Comparison with the relatively plentiful genuine is the best defense.

## Stamps

The introduction of postage stamps took place during the currency of the 1863 series (perf. 14) of Austrian Italy, and all values are known used in Alexandria. They are extremely scarce. By my subjective estimate, using a point scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the commonest of the Austrian Levant stamps with a genuine Alexandria cancellation, they range from 7 to 9. Covers with this issue are rare.

The 1864 series (perf. 9½) is much easier to find. The 5 soldi rates a 4, the 10 and 15s. a 3, and the 2 and 3s. about 7. Covers are scarce but not rare, except those with the 2s. or 3s. These stamps continued in concurrent use with the following issue until 1869, and covers showing combined use of the two issues are in strong demand.

The 1867 Franz Josef series with coarse beard is known in its entirety with Alexandria cancellations, and the 10 and 15s are among the commonest stamps used there (rating 1). The ratings of the other values are: 2s. – 3, 3s. – 3, 5s. – 2, 25s. – 2, 50s. – 8. One should be alert to forged cancellations and remainders cancelled to order. Covers bearing single 10s. or 15s. stamps are only moderately scarce, but those with the other values are scarce to rare.

The 'fine beard' printings of 1875 were all used at Alexandria, and the 3, 5, 10, and 15s. are little scarcer than the 'coarse beard' stamps. The 2s. and 25s., however, have a scarcity rating of 8 to 10, and covers bearing them are rare.

The same Franz Josef design was used for postal cards and for postal stationery envelopes. All of them were used at Alexandria, but the postal cards are quite scarce, and the envelopes are rare: postal cards, 1873 4s. rose-red, rating 8; 1875 5s. red, rating 5; envelopes, 3s. green – 10, 5s. red – 9, 10s. blue – 8, 15s. and 25s. – R (I have seen these two only with doubtful cancellations).

The Franz Josef stamps continued in use through the formation of the UPU, but were replaced in 1883 with a series in coat-of-arms design. All values, 2s. to 50s., were used at Alexandria, but values other than the 10s. are scarce to rare. Covers with a single 10s. are only moderately scarce, but those with other values are scarce to rare. A postal card of 5s., reply card 5s. + 5s., and a letter card of 10s. accompanied this issue, but I have seen only the simple postal card used at Alexandria (rating ca. 6).

The year 1886 saw the adoption of Turkish currency by the Austrian Levant post offices. The 3s. was surcharged 10 paras, first at Constantinople, then in Vienna; this was followed by surcharging stamps denominated originally in kreuzer. They were used in Alexandria as well, since the Egyptian piaster was at par with the Turkish. All values except the Constantinople provisional printing of the 10pa./3s. exist with Alexandria cancellations, but the popularity of the foreign postal services was declining in Egypt, and examples other than the 20 para or 1 piaster are difficult to find (ratings: 10 para – 6, 20 para – 4, 1 pi. – 3, 2pi. – 6, 5pi. – 8). However, these stamps are not so popular as the earlier issues, and prices are not in proportion to their scarcity; the prevalence of examples cancelled to order also depresses the prices. Covers are very difficult to find, owing to the short period of use of these stamps before the Alexandria office was closed.

Postal cards, 20pa./5kr. single or reply, and a letter card, 1pi./10kr., accompanied this issue, but I have seen only the letter card used at Alexandria. The reply part of the domestic 5kr. postal card is known used back from Egypt to Austria.

The Consular post office at Alexandria was shut down on September 30th 1889, although the ships of the Lloyd Austriaco continued to carry mail to and from Egypt. A description of the postal consequences of this change is included in the section of this chapter on Maritime Mails.

## Port Said

The Austrian post office was opened on April 13th 1869, close to the inauguration of the Suez Canal. Although the Canal immediately became a busy maritime thoroughfare, the business of the Austrian post office did not live up to expectations, and 1872 saw its closure.



Fig. 9

During its short life, the Port Said office used but one cancellation, a 17mm circular datestamp inscribed PORTO SAID / EGYPTEN (Fig. 9), a curious difference from the Alexandria office. No registration markings or special cancellations are known.

In spite of the late date of opening, the 1864 series of stamps was used in Port Said and all values have been reported. Examples are rare and I rate them 10. The 1867 Franz Josef stamps were also used, but although Tranmer states that all values are known, I have not seen examples of the 3s. or 50s. The 10s. and 15s. are rated 8 and the other values 10. The cancellation was struck in black or blue.

The few known covers from Port Said are rare and command high prices. Several of them are addressed to Greece and bear Greek 'Hermes head' stamps to collect the postage due for the services of the Greek post office. No forgeries have been recorded, and the Port Said datestamp was not used posthumously on remainders.

Although the Lloyd Austriaco is recorded as having an agency in Port Said, it is not known to have used a distinctive postmark and it probably did not handle mail except possibly to collect it for handing over to the Lloyd Austriaco ships.

## Maritime mail

A significant proportion of the mail sent from Alexandria by the Austrian Post was brought directly to ship side, for mailing either on board or in a movable letter box at the docking site. In the earlier years, such mail was off-loaded at the ship's destination or at an intermediate port, and was sorted and postmarked there. Ship mail of this sort continued right up to the outbreak of World War I.

The postmarks on letters sorted at the destination port indicated the port of origin: COL VAPORE / D'ALESSANDRIA, COL VAP DA / ALESS, or VAPORE / D'ALESSANDRIA (Fig. 10). The first of these has been recorded from 1858 to 1868, in black (mostly) or green. The second type was put in use on August 30th 1875 and is thus not found from the pre-stamp period. It was used as a cancellation, at Trieste, Constantinople, and Smyrna. The abbreviated name of the port of origin was changeable, so that the same device could be used for mail received from other places. This cancellation is not difficult to find on loose stamps. The third type was introduced in 1884 and is less easily found. Analogous handstamps were in use at Alexandria for mail arriving from Trieste, Constantinople, etc.

The first type of these arrival markings can be found as a cancellation on the stamps

COL VAPORE  
D ALESSANDRIA

COL VAPORE  
D'ALESSANDRIA

Fig. 10 Arrival postmarks  
of Triest, etc.

COL VAP DA  
ALESS

VAPORE  
D'ALESSANDRIA

of Austrian Italy and the Franz Josef issue, as well as on stampless covers; it is much scarcer than the circular datestamp cancellations. The second type is found more often on the coat-of-arms stamps, but it was also used on Egyptian stamps of the De La Rue period, as was the third type. Most often they are on 4m. or 5m. stamps used on postcards.

The first type of arrival handstamp has been forged, although not very cleverly. Several of the letters differ noticeably from the genuine, especially the V, which has a thick arm at the right on the forgery, but at the left on the genuine.

Beginning in 1888, the ships of the Triest-Alexandria line, as well as other lines, had their own circular datestamps which were used to cancel the mail posted on board or at ship side. These were inscribed LLOYD AUSTRO-UNGARICO and carried a Roman numeral at the bottom specific for each ship (Fig. 11). An identified list of the 70 such datestamps is given by Tchilinghirian and Stephen, along with some information about which ships served Alexandria or Port Said. These datestamps are found on stamps of Austria, Austrian Levant, or Egypt, especially as used on postcards.

In 1901 new datestamps that contained the actual name of the ship succeeded the Roman-numeral type and were inscribed OE. LLOYD or OESTERR. LLOYD. These, too, are found on Egyptian stamps, at least as commonly as on those of Austrian Levant.

The names of the ships whose postmarks are most commonly seen on Egyptian stamps are: *Memfi*, *Tebe*, *Apis*, *Cleopatra*, *Semiramis*, *Habsburg*, *Wien*, and *Helouan* (others are possible, since assignment of ships to specific lines varied). When these cancellations are not on Egyptian stamps, identification with mail originating in Egypt is difficult or impossible unless a sender's cachet or an identifying postcard message is present. Oval handstamps, with date or "piroscafo" in the center, inscribed LLOYD AUSTRIACO or OESTERR. LLOYD, were used by the Lloyd Austriaco primarily on documents, but were occasionally used to cancel mail.

In 1911 ambulant sorting offices on the steamers *Wien* and *Helouan* were taken over by the Government Post, which issued special datestamps inscribed TRIEST-ALEXANDRIEN or vice versa; a steamship under way adorned the top part (Fig. 12). There are several variants of this type, most notably one inscribed TRIESTE-ALEXANDRIEN and a corrected state of it with the last E of TRIESTE removed, leaving a space. These attractive



Fig. 11 Ship postmarks.

cancellations are found mostly on the stamps of Austria or Austrian Levant, but they also exist exceptionally on Italian and Egyptian stamps and postal stationery. All are quite scarce. Low values (1, 2, and 3 hellers) of the Austrian issues were cancelled to order with this type of datestamp. The 10 heller (postcard rate) is commonest.

The outbreak of World War I ended the mail service of the Austrian Lloyd Steamship Company. After the war Trieste was awarded to Italy and the company name became Lloyd Triestino. It operated under Italian administration, using at first the few Austrian ships that survived the war. The postal consequences of this are described in Chapter IX (Italian Post Office).

It should be mentioned that the Lloyd Austriaco continued to operate its agency in Alexandria after the Consular post office was closed. It handled occasional mail, presumably as a forwarding agent of sorts, but it did not cancel it. Instead, it applied a large oval cachet in violet, inscribed LLOYD AUSTRIACO / UFFICIO PARTENZE, with ALESSANDRIA across the center.



Fig. 12 Datestamp of the maritime traveling post office.

## Rates

Until the introduction of stamps in 1863, the single-letter rate is reported to be 20kr. to inland Austrian localities, and 15kr. to Trieste. Letters were customarily sent unpaid and they accumulated various manuscript rate and accounting markings. By 1858 the rate was reduced to 15s. per 15g to Austria, Germany, and other European places not served directly from Alexandria, and 10s. for letters to other Levant ports such as Constantinople. Printed matter was charged 4s. per 40g and periodicals cost 2s. (per 40g?). When postal cards were introduced in 1873 their denomination was 4s. The registration fee was 10s.

The soldo was at par with the kreuzer and worth about 2.5 centesimi. The foregoing rates, expressed in kreuzer, also applied to mail from Austria to Alexandria. The Egyptian piaster was equivalent to 10 soldi, and therefore the port-to-port postage of the Egyptian Khedivial Mail Line, 1pi., was identical to that of the Austrian post.



With the advent of the UPU in July 1875, to which both Austria and Egypt were founding signatories, the rate for letters became a uniform 10s. per 15g, and prints were 3s. per 50g. Postal cards became 5s.

Before the UPU, Austria had postal agreements with various countries, allowing mail to be prepaid with stamps of the Austrian Levant to destinations in such countries. Letters from Alexandria to Great Britain (via Ostende) were charged 23s. (seen 1870). Examples are very scarce, since most of the mail was sent by the British postal service. Letters to places in Italy not directly served by the Lloyd Austriaco ships cost an additional 10s. for Italian postage.

A postal convention with Egypt was approved on July 23rd 1868, with effect on October 1st, which allowed letters to be prepaid from anywhere in Lower Egypt entirely with Egyptian stamps for carriage from Alexandria by the Austrian post. A special informational handstamp, *Franca* in cursive letters (Fig. 13), was provided to identify such letters. The simple letter rate was 2pi.20pa. (15s. Austrian plus 1pi. Egyptian), and 25kr. for letters from Austria to interior Egypt (for unfranked letters, the rates were 35kr. or 3pi.20pa., respectively). The rate for Italy was 3pi.20pa., which included 10s. (1pi.) for Italian postage. The rate for Levant ports was 2pi. from interior Egypt.

Before the Austro-Egyptian postal convention, letters to or from interior Egypt required mixed franking for full prepayment. Accordingly, covers franked with Egyptian stamps of the First or Second Issues in combination with Austrian Italy or Austrian Levant can be found. They are somewhat rare and quite expensive. Those with stamps of the Second Issue of Egypt are the scarcer, owing to the shorter span (just one year) of the need for such mixed franking. Covers from Europe into Egypt are very much scarcer.

*Franca*

Fig. 13



Fig. 14 A cover to Italy, insufficiently franked at 15s.

Mixed franking with the *Posta Europea* handstamped franks also exists, especially in the period 1860–65, during which an agreement for postal cooperation was in effect.

Until stamps came into use in Alexandria, the collection of postage due on unprepaid mail required no special markings. When stamps were in use, however, the possibility of insufficient franking had to be provided for. A two-line unframed handstamp, inscribed *AFFRANCATURA / INSUFFICIENTE*, exists on a short-paid letter to Italy (Fig. 14); it is presumably Austrian rather than Italian. Letters to Greece incurred postage due for handling by the Greek postal service; this was collected by means of Greek postage stamps applied at destination.

For mail posted on the *Lloyd Austriaco* ships after the Alexandria office was closed, the rates were 5 heller for postcards, 10 heller for simple letters, or the equivalent in Egyptian stamps (5m. until July 1899 and 4m. thereafter for postcards; 1pi. until 1908, 5m. thereafter for letters).

## References

### Special Acknowledgement

Most of the illustrations of postmarks are taken from *Austrian Post Offices Abroad*<sup>2</sup>, with kind permission of Keith Tranmer.

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