

## X

# The French Post Offices

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## Introduction

French postal service in the eastern Mediterranean began with the inauguration of steamship lines in May 1837 consisting of a route from Marseille to Constantinople by way of Piraeus and Syra, and a connecting line from Piraeus and Syra to Alexandria. Service was every ten days, and the ship left Alexandria on May 8th, after having disembarked a postal agent on May 6th for the purpose of opening an agency of the Paquebot-Poste and the Poste at the French Consulate<sup>1</sup>. The French post office thus established, a *Bureau de Recette* (i.e., full-service post office), lasted nearly 94 years, being closed on March 31st 1931. In 1844 a direct line from Marseille to Alexandria was established and Syra was abandoned. Service was at first three times a month but was later reduced to twice a month. In October 1848 service to Alexandria was augmented by a line to Beyrout. On July 8th 1851 the Postal Administration fleet was taken over by contract to the *Compagnie des Messageries Nationales*, the name of which was changed to *Messageries Imperiales* in 1853.

To communicate with the French possessions in the Indian Ocean and the Far East a steamship service was established from Suez, with an overland mail connection to Alexandria, in 1862, and a Consular post office was opened at Suez on October 27th 1862 as a *Bureau de Distribution* (i.e., a lower class of office). Although this office became less important with the opening of the Suez Canal seven years later, it continued to function, with declining business, until December 1st 1888, having been upgraded to a *Bureau de Recette* in 1875.

The close connection of France with the building of the Suez Canal led to the opening of a *Bureau de Distribution* in Port Said on June 18th 1867, well before the Canal was completed. This office became a *Bureau de Recette* on January 1st 1894, and remained open until March 31st 1931.

A French post office was also opened in Cairo (November 1865) as a *Bureau de Distribution*, primarily, it has been said, as an adjunct to the overland Suez-Alexandria mail connection. It was made a *Bureau de Recette* in January 1871. With the opening of the Canal the importance of the office declined, and it was closed on March 11th 1875.

The postal markings of these four post offices have been treated in some detail in

various aspects, not only by Boulad, but by Pothion et al.<sup>2</sup>, by Langlois and François<sup>3</sup>, and the Yvert and Tellier specialized catalog<sup>4</sup>.

## Alexandria

The first date-stamp used at Alexandria was a large (25mm) double circle, CD-1 (Fig. 1); it has been recorded from 27 OC 37 to 8 AP 48, and was probably available on the day of opening. Examples are quite scarce. A smaller (21.5mm) date-stamp, CD-2, was introduced later and has been recorded with dates from 7 JN 39 to 22 MR 59; it is much more easily found. A second version, CD-3, without parentheses about EGYPTE, was partly contemporary with CD-2, but has been recorded over a much longer time, 27 JA 44 to 13 FE 79. The third version, CD-4, is distinguished by having an accent mark on the first E of ÉGYPTE; recorded dates are from 21 NO 55 to 27 MR 96. A date-stamp similar to CD-3, but with smaller letters and of possibly slightly larger diameter (22mm) is illustrated by Pothion and by Langlois and François, and appears to have been introduced in 1876. The year numerals of CD-3 were changed from a shaded, serified typeface to a plain one about 1889, and about 1895 all the date indicia were changed to an upright, sans-serif typeface (it is not certain if these changes represent separate devices).



Fig. 1 The early circular date-stamps (after J. Boulad and Langlois & François).

In August 1885 a quite different type, CD-5, came into use; the inner circle was broken and the bottom inscription became BUR. FRANÇAIS. This is a very scarce marking. Another date-stamp, CD-6, similar to CD-5 but inscribed EGYPTE, appears to have been introduced in the same year (Fig. 2). It had three styles of date indicia: all parts shaded with serifs (1885); day and month shaded and serified, year in plain numerals (about 1890); and all parts plain (about 1897).

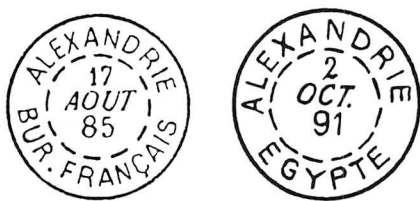


Fig. 2 The later date-stamps.

The foregoing date-stamps are always struck in black. On stampless covers they are usually accompanied by rate markings and a handstamp of the port of arrival. They were usually struck as information on the covers after stamps were introduced, but were occasionally used to cancel stamps, especially those of 1c. to 5c. However, after the use of special obliterators was abandoned, they became cancellation devices.

When stamps were introduced (1857) an obliterator numbered 3704 was provided for Alexandria (Fig. 3). It was ill-designed for the purpose; the numerals are rarely entirely legible, the '4' being especially difficult, often resembling a '1'. New obliterators, having

large, bold numerals, came into use as early as September 1st 1862; 5080 was assigned to Alexandria. It was taken out of use in April 1876, shortly before the Type Sage stamps superseded the classic Liberty/Ceres ones.

Registered letters and *lettres chargées* (see the section on rates for explanation)<sup>5</sup> had no special date-stamps, but were at first identified with handstamp R-1, CHARGÉ, (usually red); the earliest seen is in black, dated 7 Avril 1841. In later years, R-2 came into use, and when R-1 was used, it was accompanied by a descriptive cachet, R-3, applied to the back (Fig. 4). The registration number was applied by hand. The boxes in the descriptive cachet were for the weight, in grams and centigrams, the number of wax seals, and the initials on them, to be entered by the receiving clerk. These cachets are rare; Boulad<sup>1</sup> was able to record only seven examples. None are recorded before 1863, nor after 1891. The R-2 handstamp, however, was in use up to the end. A straight-line handstamp, ALEXANDRIE, in a sans-serif typeface, has been seen struck on blank registration labels; it was also used on international reply coupons and for adventitious purposes.

Postage due was not indicated on unfranked covers except by numerals, in manuscript or simulated manuscript, but when stamps were put into use, a handstamp reading AFFRANCHISSEMENT / INSUFFISANT was introduced for use on short-paid letters (Fig. 5). Examples are very difficult to find. After France became a signatory to the UPU, a T in an inverted triangle (Fig. 6), in use in all post offices, was supplied to the offices in Egypt. Prepaid letters were customarily struck with a PP handstamp (Fig. 7).

A framed handstamp APRES / LE / DEPART (Fig. 8) was supplied for use on letters posted after closing of the mails for the day, to indicate to the recipient that the post office was not responsible for the delay. It is known used at Alexandria from 1863, but examples are extremely scarce. On mail arriving at Alexandria or Port Said that had been posted in the movable box provided on many mail boats, a handstamp BM (*boîte mobile*) in an oval, a standard French marking, also used at other Mediterranean Ports, was applied (Fig. 9). The stamps were then cancelled normally (Fig. 20). (Figs. 5 to 9 are identical to markings used in Metropolitan France.)

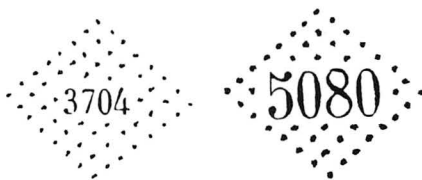


Fig. 3 The lozenge obliterations.

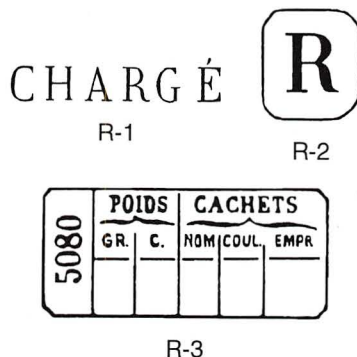


Fig. 4 Handstamps for registered letters and lettres chargées.

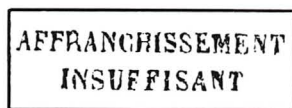


Fig. 5 T-1



Fig. 6 T-2



Fig. 7 Paid



Fig. 8 After departure



Fig. 9 Movable-box

Handstamps



Fig. 10 Special date-stamp for mail via Brindisi.

RETOUR  
A L'ENVOYEUR  
5080

Fig. 11  
Return-to-sender  
handstamp.

A special date-stamp was supplied for use on letters sent by British ship via Brindisi, in place of the ordinary date-stamp, from 1871 to December 21st 1875, reading PAQ. ANGL. / ALEXANDRIE (Fig. 10). It is not common, for the postage rate by that route was higher.

Mail returned to the sender from Alexandria was struck with a three-line handstamp in red (RS-1, Fig. 11). The one example known is on a cover dated May 1867.

Other postmarks bearing the designation 'Alexandrie' are described in the sections on Maritime Mails and Military Mails.

## Cairo

When the Cairo office was opened as a *Bureau de Distribution* in 1865 it was provided with a pearled circular date-stamp, standard for that class of post office (Fig. 12). When it was promoted to a *Bureau de Recette* on January 1st 1871 it was necessary to replace that device with one of the plain devices appropriate to the new class. This was then used until the office was closed. For cancelling stamps, a large-numeral obliterator, 5119, was provided from the outset. Two variants have been observed, which differ mostly in the width of the 9; it is not certain if they were in concurrent use or if perhaps one replaced a lost or damaged device. For registered letters, a descriptive cachet like R-1 of Alexandria was used, numbered 5119 at the left end and accompanied by CHARGÉ in black (27x4.5mm, slightly smaller than R-1 of Alexandria). Only a single example, used on November 3rd 1866, is known<sup>5</sup>. Presumably there were handstamps for postage due and for 'after departure' available at Cairo, but they have not been recorded.

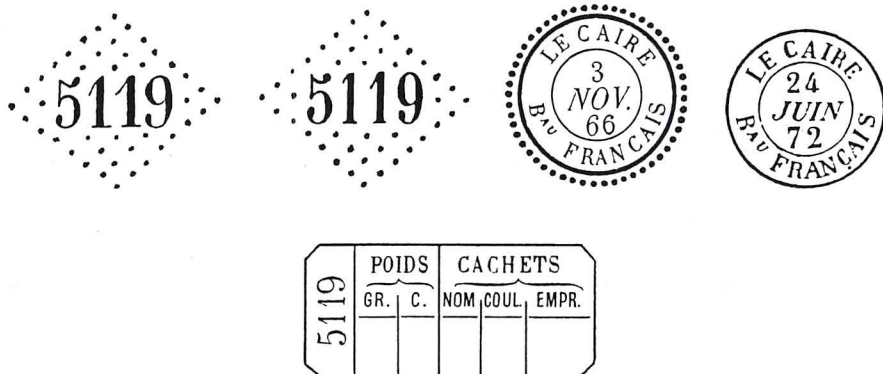


Fig. 12 Postmarks of Cairo (after J Boulad and Langlois & François).

## Port Said

Upon opening as a *Bureau de Distribution* the Port Said office was provided with a 22mm pearled circular date-stamp (Fig. 13). It was not uncommonly struck in blue. A larger version (25mm) came into use later (earliest reported, 1878). In 1886 a double-circle date-stamp having the outer circle broken into dashes came into use. Two versions of it are known; the earlier has the year ciphers in shaded numerals, whereas the later (from 1887?) has the year expressed in large, plain numerals. All of these date-stamps are uncommon to scarce (the first one was not customarily used to cancel stamps).



Fig. 13 Datestamps CD-1 to CD-6 of Port Said (after J. Boulad and Langlois & François).

In 1894, when Port Said became a *Bureau de Recette*, a double-ring date-stamp having the inner circle (instead of the outer) dashed (Fig. 14) was introduced. It appears to have totally displaced CD-3 and it is fairly common. It had two versions: one had the month expressed in shaded, serifed letters, and the other used plain, sans-serif letters. The final date-stamp, CD-5, came into use in 1904 to the exclusion of the earlier types; with a life of about 28 years, it is understandably common. The characteristic hyphen in PORT-SAID and the asterisk above the date are absent in some strikes seen on loose stamps only, in the 1920s; such strikes appear to be from a separate device, which may have been a reserve canceller used principally at the counter and for cancelling to order, or it may even be a forgery.

A large-numeral obliterator, 5129, was supplied to Port Said when it opened; it was struck in blue as well as black. Three types of it have been reported, differing in the shape of the numerals and the presence of breaks in them (Fig. 15). The status of these is



Fig. 14 Numeral obliterations.

somewhat uncertain, for the obliterator has been forged, principally for applying to remainders of the Suez Canal Company stamps.

For registered mail a descriptive cachet like those for Alexandria and Cairo was in use, accompanied by CHARGÉ (27x4.5mm, slightly smaller than R-1 of Alexandria); only two examples have been recorded<sup>5</sup>. Later, the standard R in a chamfered rectangle came into use (seen in red in 1895, in black in 1903 and later). The standard PD in a box, customarily struck in black at other offices, was struck in blue in the period when blue was used for the date-stamp and the obliterator. A return-to-sender handstamp much like that for Alexandria, but inscribed with the name PORT SAID instead of the numeral designator, has been seen on a cover dated Oct. 3rd 1908 (Fig. 15).

Some other postal markings with the designation Port Said are described in the section on Military Mails.



Fig. 15 Use of Return-to-sender handstamp.

## Suez

Like Cairo, the Suez office was provided with a pearled date-stamp (Fig. 16) upon opening as a *Bureau de Distribution*, but in 1874 (or 1875?), when it was upgraded to a *Bureau de Recette*, a plain date-stamp succeeded it. An obliterator with large numerals, 5105, was in use from the beginning until 1876. It has been reported cancelling stamps of the Suez Canal Company (by favor?) as well as French stamps, and in one instance, an Italian stamp. No markings for registered or short-paid mail have been reported for Suez. The postmarks of Suez are extremely scarce, and covers are rare. Datestamp CD-2,



Fig. 16 The postmarks of Suez (after J. Boulad and Langlois & François).

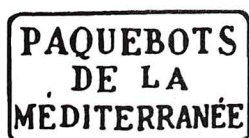
usually used to cancel stamps of the Type Sage from 1876, is rarer than is commonly appreciated, even though it had a life of 14 years.

## Maritime and Arrival Postmarks

This subject has been treated with exceptional thoroughness by Salles<sup>7</sup> and the handstamps have been listed in concise, tabular fashion by Noel<sup>8</sup>; only a very brief outline can be given here, for it is a complex subject. Formal maritime service between France and Egypt began in 1837 and thereafter underwent several changes. Salles has defined five periods, each with different philatelic manifestations: I. packetboats of the Postal Administration (1837–51); II. “Paquebots de la Méditerranée” (1851–66); III. the Mediterranean Lines (1866–72); IV. other Mediterranean postal services up to 1893, subdivided into those without postal agents on board, and 1880–93, the period of ‘Union’ date-stamps; and V. the period after adoption of the UPU paquebot convention in 1893. In this chapter, however, the subject is organized with primary attention to the type of marking.

The earliest letters arriving from Egypt and elsewhere in the Mediterranean were struck with an entry postmark, inscribed PAQUEBOTS DE LA MEDITERRANÉE in a rectangle (two sizes) at Marseille, or in an oval at Paris (Fig. 17). The rectangular ones were struck in black in 1839, then in red; examples have been recorded from 1837 to 1851. The oval one was usually struck in red, but blue has been recorded in 1847; examples are known from 1837 to 1848. These postmarks of entry are to be found on some Waghorn covers.

Fig. 17 Postmarks of entry applied at Marseille or Paris.



Also applied on arrival at Marseille was a date-stamp reading PAQ. ANG. / MARSEILLE, specifically for letters carried by British ships, which mostly would have come from Egypt (but mail could be picked up at Malta). It is known only in black, on covers dated from 1845 to 1870.

There are two transit postmarks that were applied only at Alexandria, used on mail arriving from India or the Far East (Fig. 18). A rectangular one has been recorded from October 1837 to February 1839, and was apparently superseded by a circular date-stamp that has been recorded from March to September 1839 (exceptionally, an example has been reported used in 1861). Both of these postmarks are known only in black.

Beginning in 1851, when the shipping was contracted out to the Messageries Nationales, the individual ships were provided with circular date-stamps bearing the name of the ship for use on mail posted on board or at



Fig. 18 Transit postmarks applied at Alexandria.

dockside (Fig. 19). These were struck on unfranked letters, and were also used to cancel French stamps, until late 1857, when an obliterator having an anchor in a lozenge of dots was provided to all postal agents for cancelling stamps on board. The number of ships involved was quite large, and not all of them called at Egypt. Several of them had

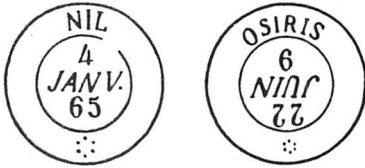


Fig. 19 Ship postmarks, 1851–66 (after Salles).

Egyptian names, such as *Alexandre, Nil, Said, Caire, Louqsor, Menzaleh, and Sinai*, but such names do not necessarily imply use in the service to Egypt. A complete list with tables of sailings can be found in Salles' work<sup>7</sup>. Whereas loose stamps are not difficult to find with the anchor cancellation (in no way specific to Egypt), covers are very scarce to rare and are much in demand.

The ship postmarks were found to be confusing (this should have been obvious from the first), since so many of them had the name of an important city or port as the ship's name. Beginning in November 1866 the ship-named date-stamps were abandoned in favor of ones with inscriptions that identified the shipping route by means of a letter, and the actual ship by means of a number. Some were circular, but most were octagonal (Fig. 20). Many of them bore the name of the port at which the mail was received (Alexandrie, Port Said, Suez) as well. These postmarks were used to cancel stamps after April 1st 1876; before then, they were used in conjunction with the anchor obliterator. Only a few of the route lines included Egyptian ports of call:

- Line M Marseille – Alexandria – (Far East) [rare]
- Line N (Yokohama – Shanghai) – Hong Kong – Suez – (Marseille)
- Line V Marseille – Alexandria
- Line X Marseille – Smyrna – Alexandria [rare]
- Line T (Noumea) – Reunion – Suez – (Marseille)

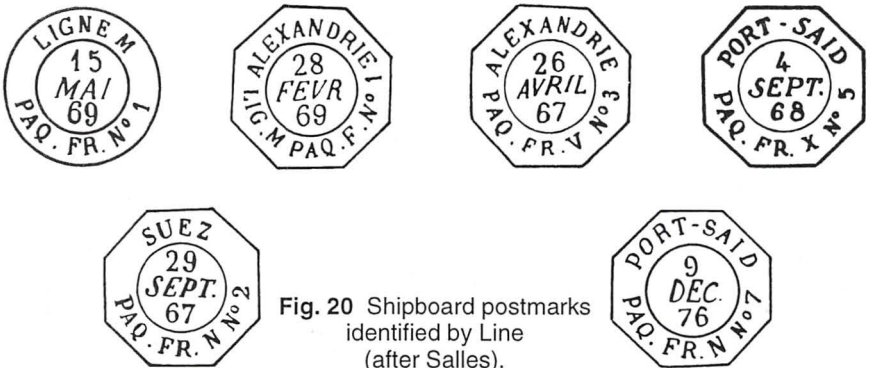


Fig. 20 Shipboard postmarks identified by Line (after Salles).

A list of all the lines is given by Salles, who also illustrates many more of the types than can be shown here. The stamps cancelled by these date-stamps were nearly always French or French Colonial, but exceptionally Egyptian stamps can be found with them (I have seen only Fourth Issue stamps so cancelled). Since the postal agents were withdrawn from most of the Mediterranean lines in 1873, while the anchor obliterator was still in use, cancellations on stamps are from the lines that served the Indian Ocean and the Far East via Suez. Examples have been reported as late as 1907.



From 1873, in the Mediterranean, letters mailed at ship side or on board were cancelled on arrival with the normal cancellation of the port (numeral in grid of dots), but in addition, BM in an oval (*boîte mobile*, movable box) was struck alongside (Fig. 21). This system continued until the UPU paquebot convention came into force in 1893. In the Indian Ocean and Far East, traveling post offices on board ship were in use from 1888 until 1941: Marseille–Reunion, Marseille–Shanghai, Marseille–Kobe, Marseille–Yokohama, in each case vice versa. Their date-stamps were normally used on French or French Colonial stamps, but they can be found exceptionally on Egyptian stamps.

At various times, during outbreaks of cholera, letters from the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, were disinfected, usually at Malta or Marseille (Chapter XL). This subject has been comprehensively treated by Carnévalé-Mauzan<sup>9</sup>, who illustrates the various handstamps and gives the period of use.



Fig. 21 A cover showing use of the BM postmark at Alexandria.

A large group of arrival (or entry) handstamps was in use in France, mostly at Marseille, but also in Paris, from 1853. A number of them incorporate SUEZ or ALEXANDRIE, although they were not applied in Egypt. They were in use from 1860 to 1887, and were generally struck on covers already cancelled at the place of origin, although they were sometimes used to cancel stamps after April 1st 1876. The distinguishing feature of the group is the presence of abbreviations indicating the general area of origin, plus "V. Suez", or "V. S." (for *voie de Suez*). For letters arriving from French Colonies, such as Indo-China, the inscriptions included COLONIES FRA., also abbreviated COL. FR. or COL. F. On mail arriving from British possessions, the inscription was POSS. ANGL., also abbreviated POSS. A. or POSS. AN., and from Dutch possessions (Dutch East Indies), POSS. NEER. Some incorporated PAQ. (paquebot) and some included MARSEILLE as well. Both circular and octagonal shapes were used (Fig. 22).

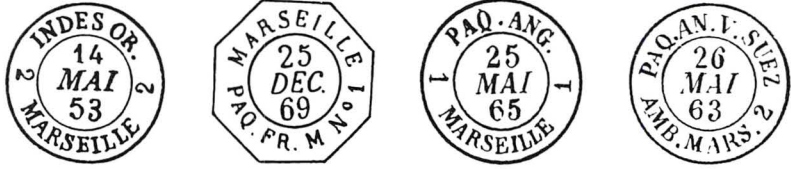


Fig. 22 A selection of postmarks of entry applied in France (after Salles).

The inauguration of the paquebot convention of the UPU did not bring the foregoing markings to a complete end, but their use was greatly curtailed when they were largely superseded by the system of delivering ship mail to the port post office for cancellation. There the stamps were cancelled with the normal cancellation accompanied by the word paquebot struck near them, or by a date-stamp incorporating the same word. In this way, letters to the French post offices in Egypt (at the purser's choice) were cancelled with the date-stamp of that office. Most commonly, such letters bore French stamps, and that is the origin of some of the French stamps cancelled in Egypt after the special stamps for the French post offices had taken their place (Fig. 23).

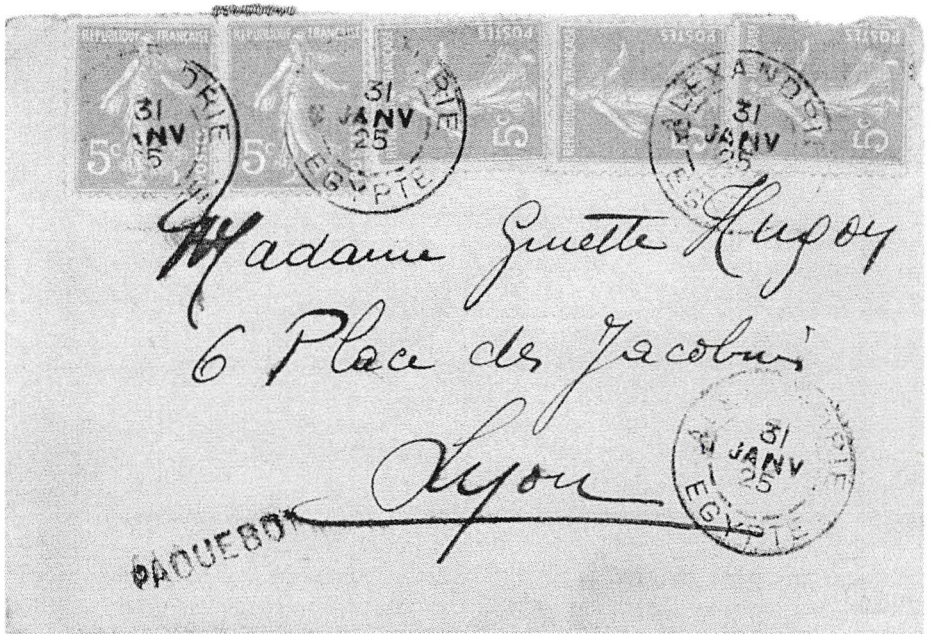


Fig. 23 A paquebot cover showing 1925 use of French stamps cancelled at the French P.O., Alexandria.

## Military Mails

The French post office at Port Said had special date-stamps for mail received from soldiers passing through the Suez Canal in connection with various colonial campaigns or the Boxer Rebellion. They are variously inscribed COR(R). D'ARM(ÉES) / PORT SAID or CORPS EXPRE de MADAGASCAR (or TONKIN) (Fig. 24). These are mostly seen on covers



Fig. 24 Military date-stamps in use at Port Said and Alexandria.

sent under military franchise without stamps, but they exist with French or French Colonial stamps as well as, exceptionally, with Egyptian stamps of the Fourth Issue. In any form they are quite scarce.

The World War of 1914–18 brought some French troops to Egypt, and with them, date-stamps of the standard French military type inscribed TRESOR ET POSTES (Fig. 25). Examples are often seen on stamps of the French offices, on philatelic covers or in blocks apparently cancelled to order. However, personnel of the French naval units in the ports made use of the CORR. D'ARMEES / PORT SAID date-stamp, and an analogous one inscribed ALEXANDRIE FR. The general subject of the French military posts has been treated in detail by Delost<sup>10</sup> and by Waugh and Luft<sup>11</sup> (Chapter XXXI).

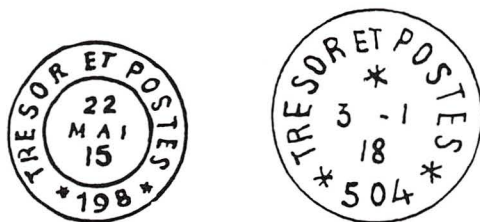


Fig. 25 Examples of the TRESOR ET POSTES datestamps (after Deloste).

## Stamps Used

### Forerunners and Co-runners

Probably all stamps issued by France between 1857 and 1898 were in principle available for use at each of the French post offices in Egypt. However, not all have actually been recorded. The scarcity and value depend on both the denomination and the office where used, the general order being Alexandria commonest, Cairo and Port Said much less common, and Suez quite scarce. Denominations below 10c. were much less used than the higher values (except the seldom-used 5fr. stamps). Factors have been published by Yvert & Tellier<sup>4</sup> that reflect scarcity and value; the numbers given in Table 1 are modified from them, with additions. A + sign indicates a more recent report, and the presumption of a high factor. The commonest item is given the value 1.

Domestic French stamps were also used occasionally in the 1900–21 period, and also on paquebot letters that were delivered from French ships to the French post office in Alexandria. Stamps of French Levant with surcharged value in piasters have also been seen on non-philatelic covers (1920) from Alexandria, but it is not known if they were sold there.

TABLE 1				
FRENCH STAMPS USED IN EGYPT (with value factors)				
Stamp	Alexandria	Cairo	Port Said	Suez

*Empire imperf.*

1c.	40/60			
5c.	30/30			
10c.	4/8			
20c.	6/12			+
40c.	10/10			
80c. carmine	40/-			
80c. rose	30/30			

Above, the first number for 3704, the second for 5080.

*Empire perf.*

1c.	20	70		
5c. on green	8	50	90	
5c. on blue	20	+		
10c.	2	35	40	60
20c.	3	35		60
40c.	15	30	40	50
80c.	8	35	50	

*Empire laureated*

1c.	20	50	+	
2c.	20		90	
4c.	40			
10c.	2	30	35	50
20c.	2	30	35	35
30c.	8	35	+	70
40c.	6	25	32	35
80c.	10	30	35	20
5fr.	400	500	500	

*Siege of Paris*

10c. on yellowish	30	+		
20c	12			
40c	2	25	35	60

*Bordeaux*

1c.	100			
2c.	240		280	
10c.	35	140	100	
20c. T.II	35	70	120	160
20c. T.III	25		100	150
40c.	60	60	70	140
80c.	200	280	240	

TABLE 1 contd.

Stamp	Alexandria	Cairo	Port Said	Suez
<i>Ceres</i>				
1c.	16			
2c.	16	50	90	
5c.	8	35	45	80
10c. on rose, small nos.				
10c. on rose, small nos.	6		35	
10c. on rose, large nos.	6		35	
15c. small nos.	8	35		
15c. large nos.	8		35	70
25c.	6	30	35	70
30c.	4	25	25	60
80c.	5	25	25	60
<i>Type Sage</i>				
1c.	10		8	
2c.	10		8	
3c.			8	
5c. green T.I	70			
5c. green T.II	3		2	
5c. yellow-green T.I	2			70
5c. yellow-green T.II	2		10	
10c. green	12			70
10c. black on lilac	1		8	
15c. grey	6		10	
15c. blue	2		6	
15c. blue, quadrillé paper	1		4	
20c. red on green	6		8	
25c. ultramarine	10			
25c. blue	12		10	
25c. black on red	16		20	
25c. yellow	1		4	25
25c. black on rose	1		3	
30c. T.I	6		10	
30c. T.II	6		10	
35c.	25			
40c. T.I	18			
40c. T.II	6		8	
50c. T.I	8			
50c. T.II	4		10	
75c. carmine	10		20	
75c. rose	30			
75c. violet on yellow	40			
1fr. T.I	8		20	
1fr. T.II	4		8	
5fr.	30		+	

TABLE 1 contd.

Stamp	Alexandria	Cairo	Port Said	Suez
<i>Postage Due</i>				
1c. black	+			
5c. blue (1894)	8		5	
10c. brown (1893)	6		4	
15c. green			6	
20c. olive green (1906)	10		6	
30c. black	16		20	
30c. carmine (1894)	8		8	
50c. black	35			
50c. brown-violet (1895)	8		+	
<i>French Cols. Postage Due</i>				
2fr. brown imperf.			+	

### Postal Stationery

The postal stationery of France that was issued during the forerunner period of the French Offices included postal cards (single and reply), letter cards, and envelopes, but very little of it seems to have been used in Egypt. I know only of the 5c. Type Sage green on bluish envelope, the 25c. black on pink letter card, and a few postal cards. The earliest postal cards were formular cards, sold with the appropriate adhesive stamp(s) affixed (15c. for overseas mail). Examples exist with the 15c. Ceres, obliterated 5080, and with the 15c. blue Type Sage, cancelled with the date-stamp. In the late 1870s postal cards with an imprinted Type Sage 10c. denomination were issued in a variety of formats and tints of paper; some of them, at least, saw use at Alexandria. Postal stationery wrappers were issued in France in 1882, but I have not seen any used in Egypt.

Money order forms impressed with the Type Sage design, without denomination, in red-brown were issued in France in 1891, and were used in Egypt with an identifying straight-line handstamp; I have seen one struck with ALEXANDRIE ÉGYPTE. International Reply Coupons were introduced in France on October 1st 1907, and were supplied to Egypt. I have seen one with a straight-line handstamp ALEXANDRIE and manuscript alteration of the denomination to 20 milliemes, postmarked 1923; probably other types of coupons exist. Cards (or folders) for Avis de Reception were provided on pink-buff or greenish stock; I have seen examples used at Alexandria in the 1920s.

### Special Issues for Alexandria

By a decree of October 6th 1899 the French post offices at Alexandria and Port Said were required to use stamps specifically overprinted for them. The resulting stamps, of considerable variety, are listed in the Gibbons, Scott, and Yvert catalogs, among others, and it is not necessary to repeat the listings here. However, there are details not available in all the general catalogs, and a few discrepancies; they are described in the following paragraphs, which are designed to be used in conjunction with a suitable catalog.

The first stamps were overprinted ALEXANDRIE in Paris. They are relatively free of errors, but a double overprint on the 25c. is reported by Yvert, but not by Gibbons or Scott. Those denominations having a blue overprint are reported by Yvert in two shades:

bright blue and blue-black. They can be distinguished properly only on unused stamps, because soaking alters them. There were no errors, but at least one sheet of the 10c. was printed *à cheval*, the overprint being shifted prominently to the left.

In October 1902 to March 1903 a definitive set appeared. Since this set remained in use until 1921, different printings in later years produced some distinct shades and paper varieties, which are listed only by Yvert. An error, the 2c. imperforate, is listed by Gibbons and Yvert. The 1fr., 2fr., and 5fr. have been forged.

In 1920–21, shortages of stamps at Alexandria led to the temporary use of stamps for Port Said, as well as some of France.

The UPU Congress of Madrid in 1920 set new rates in recognition of the changed financial circumstances, especially the instability of some currencies in the aftermath of the World War. The letter rate was set at 25 centimes of the gold franc, which no longer corresponded to the money in circulation in France. Accordingly, the stamps for use in Egypt were overprinted in Egyptian currency, which was stable at that time. This action prevented speculation with currency as the value of the franc fell in relation to the Egyptian pound. The first overprints were made in Alexandria by S.A. des Publications Egyptiennes (formerly Penasson) by typography, and issued April 7th to 15th 1921. The work was done on panes of 25, set from loose type, but a second printing of the 2m., 4m., 5m. on 1c., 6m., 8m., 10m., 12m., and 15m. on 50c. was made on May 7th by lithography, the stones for which were produced by transfers from the typographic setting. The two printings are difficult to distinguish when used, but unused typographs show a clear embossing on the gummed side, whereas the lithographs are quite flat on the back. The ink of the lithographs is slightly blacker and thicker.

The original typesetting made use of a small number of 'fat' numerals. These occurred on position 25 of the pane of the 3m., positions 15, 20, and 25 of the 6m., and positions 10, 14, 20, 24, 25 of the 8m. These varieties were corrected before the lithographic plate was made. Other varieties include wide spacing of the numerals from 'Mill.' on the 15m. (6.5mm instead of 3mm), and a broken second 'l' on the 12m./40c.

Errors among the lithographs were inverted surcharge on the 10m./25c., and double surcharge (one pale) on the same stamp. The typographed 3 Mill. surcharge was erroneously applied to one sheet of 150 of the 3c. of Port Said, and the 15 Mill. surcharge was erroneously applied to one sheet of 150 of the 2c. of Port Said. Albani and Zeitoun<sup>13</sup> report double surcharges of the "3, 4, et 15m. s./2c. et le 3m. erreur sur Port Said", but consider them to be essays. Yvert reports an error '30 missing' on the 30m./1franc. Finally, there is an enigmatic corrected error: 30m. on 15m. on 1 franc, of which one sheet of 150 is said to have been printed. This suggests a special printing, since the surcharging was normally done on panes of 25.

The recorded quantities do not distinguish between the typographs and lithographs. The 10m., at 46,500, had the largest printing. The lowest quantities were for the 30m./1fr. (1200), 60m./2fr. (725), and 150m./5fr. (375). The intermediate values were 4000 or more.

This provisional printing was quickly followed by larger quantities printed in Paris (1921–23) from different type. Most values were issued in May 1921, followed by:

August 1921	4m./10c. green, 15m./50c. blue	5 June 1922	1c.
September 1921	10m./30c.	November 1923	5m./3c.
October 1921	60m./2fr. violet and yellow 60m./2fr. orange and green		

The maximum quantity was 279,000 of the 15m./50c. blue, but all were 10,000 or more except the 60m./2fr. violet and yellow (225). The only significant variety was a large space (1.25mm instead of 0.75mm) between 3 and 0 on the 30m./2fr. The only reported error is '60 omitted' on the 60m./2fr. orange and green (listed by Gibbons only).

A further printing was made in Paris with the innovation of bars blocking out the original denomination; this printing was issued in April to August 1925. The bars were added in a second step, and their position consequently varies. However, part of the supply of the 15m./50c. was prepared by printing everything in one step. There is no difference in result except for the constancy of the spacing, which is 16.5mm top to bottom on the one-step stamps. This denomination also has the only variety: 2mm instead of 1.25mm between 1 and 5.

The definitives in millieme currency that followed the surcharges were issued on 2 Sept. 1927, Nov. 1928 (3m., 20m.), and Feb. 1928 (100m., 250m.). The high values of this set are quite difficult to find used.

The semi-postal stamps began with a 5c. + 10c. Red Cross stamp issued in 1915, and demonetized on 1 April 1921. A total of 100,000 were issued in sheets of 150; surprisingly, no errors occurred. 'Sinking Fund' stamps (*Caisse d'amortissement*) were issued yearly, in different colors, from 1927 to 1930 (orange, issued Nov. 1927; magenta, Dec. 1928; red-brown, 1 Oct. 1929; violet, Dec. 1930). The same plate was used in each case; it had one variety: dot omitted over 'i' in 'Caisse' (positions 50, 76, 144). Except for the first one, these stamps are very difficult to find used, and are rare on non-philatelic covers.

Postage due stamps of France without overprint of any kind were used until the necessity for currency overprints occurred in 1921. A set was then surcharged in Paris in sheets of 150; they were intended for use equally in Alexandria and Port Said. Varieties include slightly wider spacing on the 10m. and 15m. (the latter in position 16) and a more distinct spacing, 0.75mm instead of 0.2mm, on positions 41, 91, and 141 of the 30m. The only error is reported by Yvert only: double surcharge of 30m./1fr. These stamps were issued in January 1922. Definitive postage dues were issued in February 1928 (March 1930 for the 30m. green).

The only essays known are for the 1902 definitive ordinary stamps. They consist of the three designs without denomination, in a variety of colors. The only proofs are more in the nature of presentation souvenirs. They consist of the Sinking Fund stamps of Alexandria and Port Said, printed as die proofs side by side in imperforate sheetlets (*Epreuves de Luxe*) of one each, in each of the issued colors.

Stamps for Alexandria were used provisionally in Rhodes in 1915; examples are very scarce.

### Postal Stationery for Alexandria

The postal stationery issued to Alexandria followed much the same pattern as the stamps.

In 1900 the following items were overprinted ALEXANDRIE: 10c. black on greenish postal card and 10+10c. black on bluish reply card (with and without date number at lower left), 5c. yellow green small envelope (with and without a number under the flap), and 25c. black on pink letter card (with and without date number), all of Type Sage.

In 1903, definitives replaced them: 10c. and 10+10c. rose on greenish postal and reply cards (with and without date number); 5c. green small envelope, and two letter cards,



15c. brick red on ivory, 25c. blue on pink.

In 1906, the 15c. letter card was surcharged "Of.10", and a 15c. red on greenish envelope (two sizes: 122x95mm; 146x112mm) was issued with the same surcharge. The latter was replaced by a definitive 10c. envelope, carmine on greenish (two sizes) in 1906, and the same was done for the letter card in 1908 (carmine on ivory).

Only the 10c. postal card was surcharged in Egyptian currency in 1921 (10m. on 10c.); a definitive, 10m. brick red on greenish, replaced it in 1923.

In general, non-philatelic use of any example of the postal stationery is scarce.

## Special Issues for Port Said

The stamp issues for Port Said parallel those for Alexandria with an important difference. The Port Said postmaster was philatelically minded, as was a significant part of the populace, and created varieties and contrived covers resulted. When the decision to provide overprinted stamps was announced, the Port Said office did not wait for supplies to arrive from Paris, because the Postmaster wanted to have the special stamps on hand for the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Suez Canal and the inauguration of the statue of De Lesseps. With the approval of the French Consul, all values but the 2fr. are said to have been overprinted by a local French printer, a Mr. Colomb, in a quantity of 200 (150?) each. The 10c. had already arrived from Paris on October 10th, and provided a model. The local overprint matched it in size, but not in typeface; block, sans-serif letters were used, and the overprint was in red on all stamps (Fig. 26). These provisionals were put on sale on November 17th and were used through the 24th, when the shipment of all values arrived from France. These stamps are legitimate and rare, but are almost unknown to collectors, and are inexplicably ignored by the general catalogs<sup>12</sup>. Position 5 in each pane of 25 shows a dropped hyphen. The 5c. exists overprinted on the green stamps (unissued?) and the yellow-green.

Of the Paris printing, the 25c. is recorded inverted by Yvert, and double by the general catalogs, as are the 30c. inverted and the 50c. Type II double. These errors do not appear to have been put on regular sale. Yvert reports another error, the 2fr. in a pair, one without overprint. A variety, right dot above ï in SAÏD missing, is the result of plate wear, and can be found on some values.

The celebrations of November 17th caused a run on the supply of the 25c. (unoverprinted), and another provisional was created locally by surcharging the 10c. (the only one of the Paris overprints on hand) with a new value of 25c. An initial quantity of 2700 were surcharged by handstamping them "25c" in vermilion. The ink was not dense enough to cover the old value well and it was decided to use a much heavier surcharge in words, VINGT-/CINQ, printed by typography in a stronger red. This was applied to the 2700 stamps already surcharged, plus a proof sheet of 150 surcharged 25c. in black, and 6150 unsurcharged stamps. They were not sold directly to the public, but were applied to letters by the postal clerk.

There are two types of the VINGT-CINQ surcharge: a hyphen 1.5mm long, or a very short hyphen like a square. In the setting of ten (5x2), the long hyphen was in positions 8, 9, and 10. Handstamping can be expected to lead to errors, and Yvert records the "25c" inverted and sideways. The error, VINGT-CINQ inverted (genuine existence has been confirmed), is listed by Gibbons and formerly Yvert. Yvert also lists the inverted VINGT-CINQ on the sideways "25c". The size of the setting caused one row of the overprint to fall on the bottom sheet margin.

Forgeries of this provisional, even on cover, are prevalent. The genuine surcharge is centered low, so that the lowest parts usually fall slightly on the top of the stamp below.

The definitive stamps to replace the overprinted ones were issued in stages:

October 1902	1, 2, 3, 4, 5c., and 40c. to 5fr.	February 1903	20, 25, and 30c.
December 1902	10c.	March 1903	15c.

They remained in use until 1921 without change, except for shade variations in later printings, especially of the 1, 3, 5, 15, and 30c. values. The three high values have been forged<sup>12</sup>. In 1906-07 a small supply of the 5c. and 10c. was sent to the French post offices in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, Harrar, Diredaoua) as an emergency measure; examples used at the Ethiopian offices are rare. In 1920-21, most of the Port Said stamps were used in Alexandria also.

Provisional surcharges in Egyptian currency were typographed at Imprimerie Barsotti, Port Said, in panes of 25:

2m. on 5c.:	9000	15m. on 4c.:	12,000
4m. on 10c.:	19,000	15m. on 50c. Type I:	1050
5m. on 3c.:	6000	15m. on 50c. Type II:	2000
5m. on 4c.:	10,500	30m. on 1fr.:	475
10m. on 4c.:	3000	60m. on 2fr.:	2150
10m. on 25c.:	13,500	150m. on 5fr.:	745
12m. on 30c.:	2600		

In error, the 5 Millièmes surcharge was applied to the 3c. of Alexandria (1 sheet?). Several inverted surcharges are listed in the general catalogs; Gibbons and Yvert, but not Scott, list double surcharges on the 10m./4c. and 15m./4c. The two types noted for the 15m./40c. are the result of the use of separate plates: Type I, no bar between 15 and MILLIEMES; Type II, hyphen present.

The surcharging plate was set from type, and the numerals of value were changed as required. As a result, the same constant typesetting varieties occur on the 15m./40c., 15m./50c., 30m./1fr., 60m./2fr., and 150m./5fr. In positions 10, 15, and 20 of the setting, the second 'i' is replaced by a numeral '1'. In position 23, it is replaced by a 't' (the latter variety has not been seen on the 15m./50c. Type II). On the 5m./3c., 10m./4c., and 15m./4c., position 25 has a circumflex accent, 'ê', instead of a grave accent, 'è', on the first 'e'. This feature was corrected during the printing, as was a variety occurring on the 2m./5c. alone, the first 'l' replaced by an 'i' in position 16 ("Millièmes").

From May 1921 to September 1923 currency surcharges printed in Paris were supplied to Port Said, as for Alexandria, in a sans-serif typeface. Of the denominations up to 30m., the quantities were 22,000 or more. There were two colors of the basic stamp used for the 60m. surcharge, violet and yellow (2175 stamps), and orange-red and blue-green (11,000 stamps); 6000 of the 150m. were issued. There are distinct shades of the 6m./15c., 8m./20c. and 10m./25c. blue. The only variety occurs on the 30m./1fr.; in position 11, the numerals are 1.25mm apart instead of 0.75mm

In November 1921 six of the denominations were again produced locally: 5m./1c. dark slate and pale grey; 5m./2c., 10m./2c., 15m./15c., 15m./20c., 30m./50c., 60m./50c., and 150m./50c. The occasion for this issue is said to be the passage of the ship carrying Marshal Joffre to the Far East; they were issued on November 17th. The printing was done on panes of 25 as before, but the large number of errors produced suggests very

careless work or philatelic influence. Three of the errors involve a wrong surcharge or a wrong basic stamp: 2m./1c. dark slate, 2m./2c., 10m./15c. Yvert states that they were printed in sheets of 150, unlike the normal stamps; their status is suspect. Another pair of errors involves the use of stamps of the French Levant: 2m./2c., 5m./1c. pale grey. Several inverted surcharges are listed in the general catalogs, but no double surcharge (Albani and Zeitoun<sup>13</sup> record a 15m./20c. with double surcharge inverted, which they state to be an essay).

The most spectacular variety has the numeral 5 inverted in the 5m./1c. (both shades). The three high values have in common the variety, numeral '1' in place of the second 'i' (position 22), and broken initial M.

As with Alexandria, a second Paris printing was produced with bars obliterating the original value. Whereas Gibbons gives 1924–25 for the date of issue, Yvert states March–May 1925. The only variety is the spaced 30, as for Alexandria.

Definitives in Egyptian currency were issued as follows: November 1927 – 15m., February 1928 – 50m., 100m., 200m., November 1928 – 3m., 20m. They are particularly scarce in used condition.

The semi-postal stamps issued for Port Said paralleled those of Alexandria.

Postage due stamps of France were surcharged in Egyptian currency in Port Said (Imprimerie Barsotti) in the same font as used for the ordinary stamps, in rather small quantities:

12m. on 10c.	1,700	30m. on 20c.	600
15m. on 5c.	500	30m. on 50c.	75

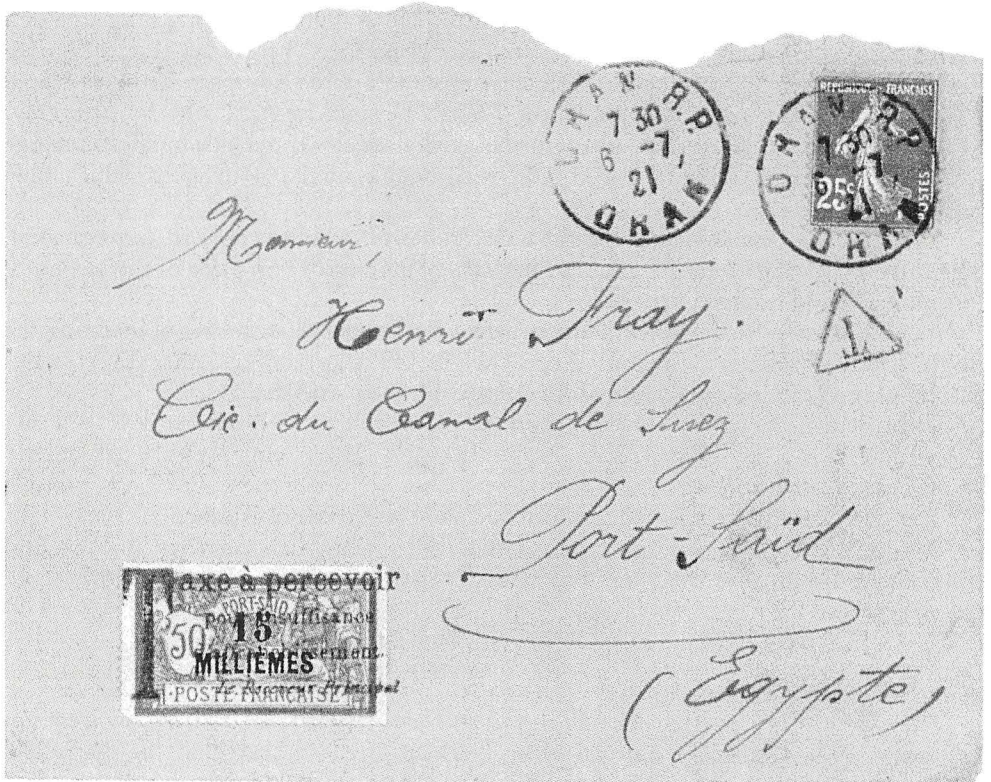
They were issued on June 21st 1921, except for the 30m./50c., which was issued in February 1922. The only recorded error is an inverted surcharge of the 30m./20c. Forgeries exist, especially of the rare 30m./50c. Many can be detected by the fact that they were made from basic stamps having the wrong shade or paper (the genuine were all on "Grande Consommation" paper, and the 50c. basic stamp was in a dull, dark shade, approaching claret).

A second local surcharge, this time printed by Paul Barbey in Cairo in a setting of two panes of 25, was issued on November 21st 1921; the typeface was sans-serif, like the Paris surcharges on the ordinary stamps. The 2m./5c. was normally to be surcharged in carmine, but in error, some were surcharged in blue. Another error (50 stamps printed) is the 15m. on 10c. instead of on 50c. The 10m./30c. and 15m./50c. are listed with inverted surcharge. One should be alert to forgeries of this surcharge, with or without forged cancellations.

Four typesetting varieties exist on each denomination: first L replaced by I; accent missing from the first E; second M inverted; S omitted. A variety peculiar to the 10m./30c. is Q in place of O which occurs in position 25 of the left pane.

Presumably as a result of shortage of postage due stamps, ordinary stamps were pressed into use for the purpose in the 1920s. On November 21st a special cancellation was used for ordinary stamps used as postage dues. It was a rectangle, inscribed "Taxe à Percevoir pour insuffisance d'affranchissement – Le Receveur Principal", struck in purple (Fig. 26).

A prevalent forged cancellation, found on postage due stamps as well as ordinary surcharged stamps, has a very thick circle, and lacks the hyphen between PORT and SAID.



**Fig. 26** Use of the special postage due cancellation on ordinary stamps.

At this date the letter rate had been raised to 50c., equivalent to 15m., and this letter was thus short paid by 25c., equivalent to 7½m.; double that amount was charged.

### Postal Stationery for Port Said<sup>14</sup>

One would expect that the postal stationery provided to Port Said would be the same as for Alexandria, but there are some differences. Among the postal cards, Port Said received no 10m./10c. surcharged item of 1921. Among the letter cards, Port Said received an overprinted 15c. blue (1900), which was not provided to Alexandria. Among envelopes, Port Said was issued a 15c. blue on greenish in 1900 (two sizes: 122x95mm; 146x112mm), which Alexandria did not have. Port Said was also issued a 15c. red on greenish definitive envelope (two sizes) in 1903, unlike Alexandria. All of the postal stationery is very difficult to find used, especially non-philatelically.



Fig. 27 A selection of postal stationery for Port Said.

## Postal Rates

Four periods can be considered with respect to postal rates: pre-stamp to 1856; pre-UPU (to December 31st 1875); the UPU period, 1876 to 1920, and the post-war period, 1921–31. In the first period, letters were usually sent unpaid. The charge was written or handstamped in cursive numerals, expressed in decimes if addressed to a French post office. In the second period, the rates depended on several factors, especially the nationality of the ship carrying the mail, the route taken, and any postal agreements that existed with foreign countries. The UPU period was one of uniformity and stability for about 45 years. The last period was one of changing rates as a result of unstable currency. Until about 1920 the rate of exchange was essentially constant, 1fr. = 4 'piasters tarif' (i.e., silver), but when the franc ceased to be based on gold, its value fell in relation to the piaster. Table 2 summarizes the principal features of the rate structure over the years.

The special rate for letters via British packet to Brindisi and through the Mont Cenis tunnel paid for the faster service by that route compared to the all-sea route to Marseille.

In Table 2, from 1876 to 1881, Group 1 countries had a lower rate than Group 2 countries. Group 1 consisted of Europe and the Mediterranean countries at first; from April 1st 1879 Canada, USA, and French Colonies were added. The distinction was abolished on October 31st 1881.

Postcards with no more than 5 words (greetings, etc.) qualified for the printed matter rate.

Postage due charges were rounded up to the nearest 5c. from October 1907. Later, minimum postage due charges were established: 1910 (5c.), 1 AP 21 (30c.), 1 AP 24 (45c.), 16 JY 25 (40c.), 1 FE 26 (50c.), 1 AU 26 (60c.). The values in parentheses did not apply to letters arriving in Egypt, of course, because transactions were in Egyptian currency from April 1921. However, they are useful in understanding short-paid letters sent from Egypt to France. For similar reasons, Table 2 includes in parentheses the rates from France to Egypt from 1921 (the rates from Egypt to UPU countries, including France, from 1921 to 1931 were 15m. for the first 20g, 10m. per additional 20g; postcards 10m.; registration 15m.).

In addition to the rates given in Table 2, higher rates were in force to many countries other than France in the pre-UPU period, but the subject is too involved to treat here. Further details can be found in Alexandre et al.<sup>16</sup> and Richardson<sup>17</sup>.

It should be noted that the stamps of the French offices were not valid for franking letters within Egypt. Even when letters were sent from one of the French offices to another country and were then forwarded to an address in Egypt, they were treated as unfranked.

TABLE 2 — POSTAL RATES						
Date	Letters		Registration	Samples	Prints	AR
	Paid	Unpaid				
1 AU 49	1fr./7.5g	1fr./7.5g	+1fr./7.5g	1fr./22.5g		
1 JA 56					8c./40g	
1 JA 57	50c./7.5g	1fr./7.5g	+40c.	8c./40g		
1 JA 58	1fr./10g Au	1fr./10g Au	2fr./10g		15c./15g	
1 JA 62	50c./10g	1fr./10g	+40c.			20c.
1 JA 65				8c./40g*		
1 JA 66	40c./10g♦	60c./10g♦				
1 JA 71	1.30fr./10g*	1.40fr./10g*	+80c./10g*	18c./40g*		
1 JY 71	80c./10g	1fr./10g	+80c./10g	20c./40g	12c./40g	
MR 75						
v. Mars.	80c./10g*	1fr./10g*	+80c./10g			
v. Brindisi	80c./10g*	1fr./10g*	+1fr./10g*	18c./40g*		
1 JA 76 Grp.1	30c./10g	60c./10g			5c./50g	
Grp.2	40c./10g	70c./10g			8c./10g	
1 MY 78 Grp.1	25c./15g	50c.	+50c.			
Grp.2	35c.	60c.				
16 JA 79			+25c.			
1 AP 79 Grp.1			+10c.			
Grp.2			+10c.			
1 OC 81	25c. Grp.1,2					10c.
1 OC 07	25c./15g					
over 15g	15c./15g					
1 MY 10	25c./20g					
over 20g	15c./20g					
1 AP 21	(50c./20g)		(+50c.)		(10c./50g)	(50c.)
over 20g	(25c./20g)					
1 AP 24	(75c./20g)		(+75c.)		(15c./150g)	(75c.)
over 20g	(40c./20g)					
16 JY 25	(1fr./20g)					
over 20g	(50c./20g)					
1 OC 25	(1fr./20g)					
over 20g	(60c./20g)					
1 FE 26	(1.25fr./20g)		(+1.25fr.)		(25c./50g)	(1.25fr.)
over 20g	(75c./20g)					
1 AU 26	(1.50fr./20g)		(+1.50fr.)		(30c./50g)	(1.50fr.)

v. Mars = via Marseilles; v. Brindisi = by train from Brindisi via Mont Cenis tunnel.

Au = via Austrian ship. \* France or Britain. ♦ to Tunis and Tangier. ★ British packet via Brindisi. \* French packet.

Rates in parentheses are those from France to Egypt.

The rates in effect from Egypt from 1921 were 15 mills./20g. for letters, plus 10 mills. per add.

Registration was 15 mills., and postcards were 10 mills.

## Collectible Items and their Scarcity

Items from the French offices are in general the most easily obtained of the various foreign offices in Egypt. Suez, the scarcest of the French offices, is still commoner than the Russian office in Alexandria, and much more easily obtained than either the Austrian or Russian offices in Port Said. Most mail from the French offices is addressed to France, and some to north-western Italy. Letters to other countries, such as Great Britain or USA, are unusual.

Mixed franking was required on mail from interior Egypt until 1876. Before the creation of the *Posta Europea* such mail would have been carried privately to Alexandria; afterwards, letters carried a *Posta Europea* frank as well as French franking, until the Egyptian Government took over the *Posta Europea*. From April 1865 to the end of that year mixed franking involved the date-stamps of the Viceroyal Post; examples are much scarcer than those with the *Posta Europea* franks. From January 1st 1866 mixed franking with Egyptian stamps was the rule for mail from places where there was not a French post office. Covers of this type are scarce and valuable, but are nevertheless the commonest of the several possible mixed frankings with Egyptian stamps, for France did not conclude a postal treaty with Egypt, as did Austria, Great Britain, and Italy. Egyptian stamps of the First, Second, and Third Issues were used in this way. Mixed franking also occurred with British stamps on letters sent from the British post office in Beirut via the French post office in Alexandria.

Several types of postal paper from the French offices exist, including acknowledgment of reception forms, registration receipts, etc. They are quite scarce, but have only a small following.

Stamps of Port Said were used in Ethiopia during shortages of French Djibouti or Levant stamps; examples are quite rare.

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