

XLIII

Stamps with Perforated Initials

Perforation of stamps with initials or a logo was one of several means introduced by major users in the 19th century to combat petty theft. Stamps having this treatment are called 'perfins' or 'spifs'. For a long time, they were regarded as little better than damaged stamps, not suitable for inclusion in a serious collection. Only in the last fifty years has much interest been shown in them, and now there are groups of collectors who collect them as a specialty, and dealers willing to seek them out for sale at very substantial premiums when on cover.

Egyptian perfins have been comprehensively researched by Dr. Winter¹, to whom the credit for most of the information in this chapter is due.

A machine for punching security perforations in stamps was invented by Joseph Sloper, who was licensed in England to put it into use in 1868. The practice spread to other countries, including France in 1876, and was authorized for use in Egypt on January 3rd 1895². Use was confined to internal mail until 1906, when the UPU Congress in Rome authorized use on international mail. After roughly 50 years, use began to decline, as more and more users switched to metered postage, and I do not know of any instance of use in the last decade.

Perforating of initials (or similar logos) was originally carried out with a punch that did one stamp at a time, a slow process that was commonly speeded up by punching several stamps at a time, either by folding a sheet accordion-fashion, or layering several sheets together. Some firms used a device capable of multiple punches at a stroke; double-size stamps (air mails) show two strikes, and multiples of small stamps in some cases have strikes in perfect alignment. The multiple-head punches appear to have consisted of one horizontal row. The punches were subject to deterioration from the hard use to which many were put, and pins sometimes became bent or broken, resulting in blind, missing or misplaced holes³. Variations such as this can be used to identify positions in the row of a multiple-head punch. Whatever the method, it was a general requirement that the punch (or its design) be approved by the postal authorities; in Egypt, the approving body was the General Post Office.

Dr. Winter has developed a precise protocol for describing perfin punches, and it will be used here. The details required are:

1. height of letters (millimeters)
2. number of holes making up the letter
3. existence of other holes, such as periods
4. additional data if necessary, such as the size of the holes or arrangement of letters.

Additional pertinent information begins with the full name of the firm using the initials, the place of use (presumed to be that of the cancellation), and the stamp used. Although most perfin punches have been identified, there remain a few mysterious ones. It will be necessary to find covers having return addresses to identify these.

Dr. Winter illustrated 24 perfin punches, and I am unable to add to his list. They are

classified according to the initial letter, in alphabetical order, and I see no reason to change his method. The stamps used were generally the low values most heavily used, but I have seen values as high as 50pi. Almost all stamps with perfins are definitive issues; the only exceptions I know of are the 1934 UPU Congress issue, 1953 5m. air mail, 1955 APU Conference, and the 1958 Human Rights commemorative. It would be tedious to record each stamp used by each firm, and such a list would certainly be incomplete. Dr. Winter recorded the inclusive range, using Zeheri numbers (Yvert numbers in the case of the French Offices), except for some of the least common examples, where an individual stamp was cited. However, since the Zeheri catalogue has been out of print for such a long time, descriptive phrases are used here. Dates of use would be interesting but are often difficult to determine from cancellations and a thorough study has not been published. However, examples have been recorded as early as 1896 (Thomas Cook & Co.) and as late as 1958 (Vacuum Oil Co.). Approximate date-spans can be deduced from the issues of stamps involved.

Only a rough and subjective guide to relative scarcity can be given. The commonest are indicated by (C), the less common by (U), and the scarcest (to rare?) by (S).

A-1 (U): Agricultural Bank of Egypt – Height 6mm: A 10 holes, B 13 holes, E 10 holes.

On Fourth Issue to Second Portrait Issue.

B-1 (S): Banca Commerciale Italiana – Height 4.5mm: B 14 holes, C 11 holes, I 5 holes, period after B and C.

B-2 (U): Banca Commerciale Italiana per l’Egitto – Height of B and E 5.5mm, of C 7.5mm, of I 9.5mm: B 12 holes, C 16 holes, I 13 holes, E 10 holes, I superimposed on C. On First and Second Portrait Issues, 1934 UPU Congress, and King Farouk definitives to 1947–49.

B-3 (C): Banca Italo-Egiziana – Height 8mm: B 16 holes, I 10 holes, E 14 holes. On Second Portrait Issue to 1955 APU Conference 10m.

Note: missing pins may make B resemble D.

B-4 (S): Banque Mosseri (?) – Height 8mm: B 14 holes, M 21 holes. On 1m. Fourth Issue and French Alexandria 1902 series.



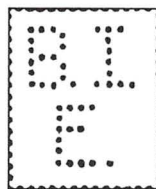
A-1



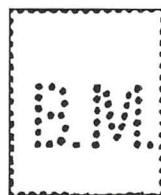
B-1



B-2



B-3



B-4

C-1 (C): Credit Lyonnais Alexandrie – Height 4.5mm: C 9 holes, L 7 holes, A 10 holes. On Fourth to Boy King Issues, and French Alexandria 1902–27 series.

C-2 (C): Credit Lyonnais le Caire – Height 4.5mm: C 9 holes, L 7 holes, C 9 holes. On Fourth to 1957–58 Issues.

C-3 (S): Comptoire National d’Escompte – Height 6.5mm: C 8 holes, N 13 holes. On 5m. Fourth Issue.

C-4 (S): Comptoire National d’Escompte – Height 8.5mm: C 13 holes, N 19 holes, period after each.

Note: missing pins may make C resemble a reversed ‘J’.

C-5 (U): Comptoire National d'Escompte – Height 8.5mm: C 13 holes, N 20 holes, C wider than C-4. On Second Portrait to bar overprints, and French Port Said 1925 2m./5c.

C-6 (S): Carver Brothers & Co. Ltd. (?) – Height 5.5mm: C 8 holes, & 14 holes, C 8 holes, O 4 holes, two holes below O. On Fourth Issue 2pi. brown.



C-1



C-2



C-3



C-4



C-5



C-6

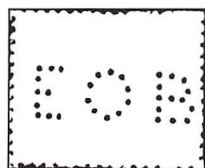
E-1 (S): Etablissements Orosdi-Back – Height 6.5mm: E 10 holes, O 10 holes, B 13 holes. On French Alexandria 1902 25c. blue.

F-1 (S): ? – Height 4.5mm: F 8 holes, M 15 holes, C 8 holes, period after F and M.

I-1 (S): Imperial Ottoman Bank – Height 7mm: I 5 holes, O 10 holes, B 13 holes.

I-2 (U): Imperial Ottoman Bank – Height 7.5mm: I 5 holes, O 10 holes, B 13 holes. On 1914 Pictorials to First Portrait Issue.

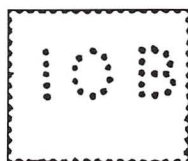
J-1 (S): ? – Height 7.5mm: J 9 holes, R 15 holes, C 10 holes, period after J.



E-1



F-1



I-1



I-2



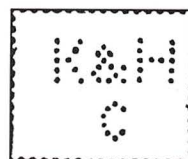
J-1

K-1 (S): ? – Height of K and H 5.5mm, of & and A 5mm: K 10 holes, & 12 holes, H 12 holes, A 10 holes. On Fourth Issue.

K-2 (S): K & H as K-1, C 8 holes.



K-1



K-2

L-1 (S): L. Savon & Co. Ltd. (Docks & Depots de Charbon de -) – Height 6mm:
L 7 holes, S 11 holes. On 1914 Pictorials.

O-1 (C): Ottoman Bank – Height 7mm: O 10 holes, B 13 holes. On Harrison Pictorials to First Republic Issue.

P-1 (S): Philips Gloielampen – Height 11mm: P 15 holes, o 5 holes. On fE1 2nd Fouad issue.

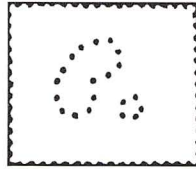
P-2 (U): ? – Height 6mm: P 11 holes, O 10 holes. On Boy King Issue.



L-1



O-1



P-1



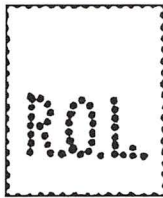
P-2

R-1 (S): Revue l'Orient Litteraire (?) – Height 7.5mm: R 15 holes, O 14 holes, L 10 holes, period after each letter. On Fourth Issue 4m.

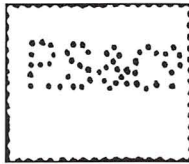
R-2 (S): ? – Height 6mm: R 11 holes (one missing), S 11 holes, & 13 holes, C 8 holes, O 6 holes, period after R and C. On Fourth Issue 5m.

R-3 (C): Reinhart & Co. Height R and & 6mm, C 6.5mm, o 3.5mm. On 1914 Pictorial to Boy King Issues.

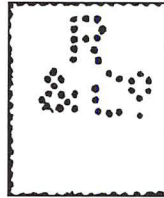
R-4 (S): Reinhart & Co. Ltd. (?) – Height 5.5mm: R 12 holes, & 9 holes, C 8 holes, o 6 holes, L 7 holes, t 5 holes, d 6 holes, one hole below o, two holes below td.



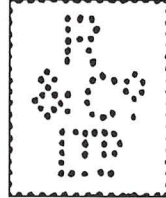
R-1



R-2



R-3

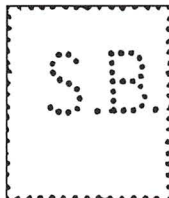


R-4

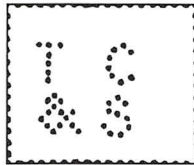
S-1 (C): Société Anonyme du Beheira – Height 8mm: S 13 holes, B 19 holes, period after each. On Fourth to First Republic Issues.

T-1 (U): Thomas Cook & Son – Height 6.5mm: T 7 holes, C 8 holes, & 14 holes, S 10 holes. On Fourth to UPU Congress Issues.

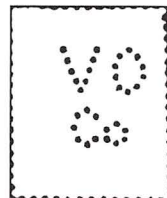
V-1 (S): Vacuum Oil Co – Height 6mm: V 9 holes, O 10 holes, C 7 holes, o 6 holes. On 1914 5m. to 1958 Human Rights 10m., with face values to 50P.T. and including 5m. Airmail with bars and K. of E. & S. Overprint.



S-1



T-1



V-1

References

1. A. Winter, *QC VIII* (1), 5–8 (whole no. 85, Mar. 1973). See also H.G. Tilles, *ET 7* (6), 114–18 (Dec. 1975).
2. anon., *L'OP* No. 33, 102 (July 1937).
3. R.E. Harris, *QC IX* (1/3), 8 (whole no. 97/99, Mar./Sep. 1976).