

XVIII

The First Portrait Issue

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The declaration of the Kingdom of Egypt in 1922 quickly led to orders for a new series of stamps that would reflect the new status of the nation. Harrison & Sons, who held the contract for supplying postage stamps at the time, proceeded with preparations while the interim Crown Overprint stamps filled the immediate need. The orders obviously specified that the stamps were to bear the portrait of King Fuad; eventually it was required that the inscriptions be in Arabic only. In addition to those two innovations, a new printing method, photogravure, was introduced, and at least three printing firms were involved with the manufacture.

Comprehensive study of the resulting issue began with an article by McNeille¹, who studied the many plate flaws and retouches characterizing the issue; preliminary reports on the subject had been published by Séfi² and by Lowe³. Further insight, with more information on the essays and background, was given by Byam⁴, after which the subject was allowed to lie quiet for about thirty years. It was resumed by Chaftar⁵, who was able to study very large quantities of the stamps, and to consult the holdings of the Cairo Postal Museum. The technical side of the subject was subsequently investigated with skill and insight by Grimmer⁶. Many details have been reported by others, but most of what is presented in this chapter is a synthesis of the foregoing contributions.

Printing Methods

It may be helpful to review the basic features⁷ of photogravure and half-tone printing before considering the generation of this issue of stamps⁸, for more than one method was used for the essays, and the discussion will also be useful in connection with the Second Portrait Issue. In photogravure, the design is reproduced multiply onto a glass plate, usually (but not necessarily) with a step-and-repeat camera. This plate, termed the multipositive, is used to 'print' a 'carbon', a sheet of gelatin sensitized with dichromate and backed with paper. An image is not visible, but the areas more strongly exposed are proportionately hardened. The carbon is then applied to a metal (copper) printing

cylinder, and allowed to stand long enough to develop adhesion. The cylinder is washed with water, which not only removes the paper backing, but dissolves the unhardened parts of the gelatin as well. The cylinder is then etched with ferric chloride solution, which attacks the metal in proportion to the degree that it is not protected by hardened gelatin. Afterwards, when all of the gelatin is removed, a printing surface with the design in recess remains; it is usually given a light chromium plating before use.

The foregoing explanation leaves out one essential step: screening. Screening is necessary to break up the large solid and continuous-tone areas into small dots so that the printing surface will be able to hold ink in the proper places. There are two types of screening: grid or mesh, and granular ("corn grain"). In the former, the carbon is exposed to a plate bearing an image of a grid of fine lines to imprint the grid on the carbon before the multipositive is imprinted. The eventual result is that the metal cylinder is etched with a pattern of tiny pits, or cells, the depth of which is in proportion to the amount of light transmitted at each point. The light areas of the stamp design have shallow cells, which thus retain very little printing ink, and the dark areas have deeper cells. If the screen is fine the cells will be small and numerous and an appearance of continuous tone is conveyed in the printed image. A coarse screen can be seen easily with the naked eye; a very fine screen may be difficult to detect even with a magnifying glass. The dots that make up the image are always evenly spaced and of the same size, except insofar as they may tend to merge in the darker areas because of ink spread.

A corn-grain screen consists of irregularly scattered dots of irregular size and shape, and is produced by dusting a surface with a powder, usually resin or bitumen. This may be done on a glass plate, which can then be used in the same way as a grid screen, but the earlier procedure, as used with the First Portrait Issue, did not make use of an actual screen. Instead, the cylinder itself was dusted and the resin was then hardened into place by heating. The grains of resin thus protected parts of the cylinder from etching. The printing result is the same in each case: colored areas of the design have a mottled, granular appearance, which if it is fine gives a softness to the image. The stamps of the First Portrait Issue are a good example of the use of corn grain, and the Second Portrait Issue provides examples of grid screening.

The half-tone process also makes use of a screen to break up the image into a mass of dots. However, the screen is the reverse of the grid screen and consists of a pattern of square dots. Instead of cells, the printing surface consists of dots that are high (i.e., at surface level) in the case of half-tone relief printing, and essentially so in the case of lithography. The dots vary in size with the intensity of the light coming through the screen, dark areas of the stamp design having larger dots (which may even run together). The result in the printed stamp is a simulation of continuous tone, as with photogravure, but the nature of the dots is different, and the effect not so delicate, for the dots all receive the same amount of inking. Half-tone may be used in the preparation of plates for relief printing, lithography, and offset lithography. Half-tone techniques were used with some of the essays for this issue. Good examples can be seen in the 1926 Agricultural Exhibition stamps and in the vignettes of the bicolored Express stamps.

Essays and Proofs

All of the many essays for this issue have as the central feature a portrait of King Fuad, and one can assume that this was specified in the orders from Egypt. Depicting the ruler

was a departure from the strict tradition of Islam, although there had been precedent for it of several decades' standing in the stamps of Iran (from 1879), and later in the 200pi. denomination of the 1914 issue of Turkey.

When Harrison's first received the order they undoubtedly expected to produce the new stamps by typography, as before. They submitted a large group of essays, involving different designs and different printing methods. Putting them all in chronological sequence may not be possible, although all must be from 1922. Most of the essays are listed, in some cases with dates, in the 1972 edition of the Zeheri catalog, but the illustrations have serious shortcomings. The essays are inscribed either bilingually or in Arabic only, and it is possible that the bilingual ones are the earliest, being based on the outgoing pictorial series. For convenience, they will be taken up here primarily by design, and secondarily by printing method.

A typographed essay featuring a profile portrait and denominated 15m. is attributed by Zeheri to the Survey Department of Egypt, although there appears to be no documentation of this attribution (Fig. 1). The top inscription panel is in the form of a winged scarab; two versions were prepared, differing in the treatment of the side ornaments. They exist as single die proofs and se tenant accompanied by buffer bars and gutter pillars. The latter feature, typical of Harrison's work, suggests that the attribution to the Survey Department may not be correct.

Another group of essays consisted of two designs in two sizes printed in coarse half-tone and utilizing the same portrait in profile (Fig. 2). These were prepared in sheets having a pane of one design above a pane of the other, such that se tenant vertical pairs are possible. A similar design having a full-face portrait in military uniform was also prepared.



Fig. 1
Typographed essay
(Zeheri nos. 66, 67).



Fig. 2 Essays in half-tone
attributed to Harrison's
(Zeheri nos. 75, 76).

Surviving correspondence confirms that Harrison's contracted with Perkins, Bacon & Co. for the production of designs and the preparation of dies. The result was a pair of designs rendered in recess. One (Zeheri no. 80), denominated 5m., has a three-quarter portrait as used on the issued stamps, based on a studio photograph by Hanselmann, the Court Photographer, and inscriptions in Arabic and English. Another design (Zeheri no. 68), denominated 1m. or 5m., shows the King in military uniform and has inscriptions in French and Arabic (Fig. 3). They were printed as die proofs, the former in a variety of colors (some with annotations indicating that they were used for color trials), and the latter, which is much rarer, in green or orange. The details of the ornamentation of the 1m. are so close to the issued stamps, however, that it seems certain that these essays were the basis for the final design.



Fig. 3
Perkins-Bacon recess essay.

order printed by that process. This must have been disconcerting to Harrison's, for they had little experience with the method and lacked the facilities for fulfilling a major order in photogravure. Consequently, they sub-contracted the printing of the 5m., the 20m. to 200m., and £E1 to the Dutch firm, Nederlandsche Rotogravure Maatschappij, Leiden. There is consequent ambiguity as to which firm was responsible for subsequent essays and proofs, and accordingly, they are presented here without attribution.

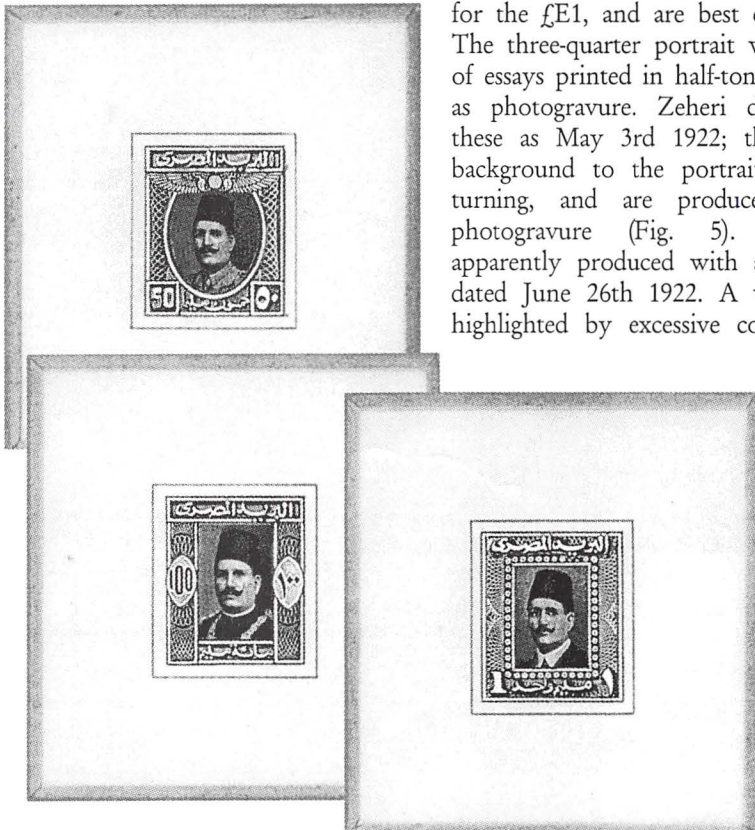


Fig. 4
Bradbury Wilkinson
recess essays.

Another set of recess-printed essays is attributed to Bradbury Wilkinson (Fig. 4) in three denominations, 1m. green, 50m. brown, and 100m. violet. No correspondence has come to light that might explain how this firm became involved, but the fact that the essays are inscribed in Arabic only suggests that there was some sort of official communication.

When the desired portrait had been decided upon, and the general nature of the design had become more or less settled, Harrison's submitted essays produced by photogravure. These were apparently not intended to solicit approval of this new, experimental printing method, but their appearance so pleased Egyptian authorities that it was forthwith decided to have the

The essays for the lower values differ from those for the £E1, and are best considered separately. The three-quarter portrait was used for a series of essays printed in half-tone lithography as well as photogravure. Zeheri dates the earliest of these as May 3rd 1922; they have a textured background to the portrait, resembling engine turning, and are produced by coarse-screen photogravure (Fig. 5). A similar essay apparently produced with a corn-grain screen is dated June 26th 1922. A version with the fez highlighted by excessive contrast, produced by



Fig. 5 Essays for the 5, 10, 15 and 50m. (Zeheri nos. 85, 79, 84, 78, 86, 92, 89, 94, 93).

half-tone lithography, is dated September 15th, and a version with a revision of the numerals is dated September 28th. Analogous essays for the 10 mills. were prepared using photogravure with either corn-grain or mesh screening (Zeheri no. 86), and versions with revised numerals and highlighted fez using half-tone lithography (Zeheri nos. 87, 88). The same design was used to prepare a 15m. with corn-grain screen (Zeheri no. 89), and a 50m. in small size (17x20.5mm) with mesh screen and uniform background, in larger size (18.5x21.7mm) with a very fine screen and shaded background, and with highlighted fez by half-tone lithography (Zeheri nos. 93, 94, 92). This group of essays occurs mostly on paper having the triple crescent and star watermark, but in some cases unwatermarked. They exist both perforated and imperforate (but not always both for each essay), and in several colors (most commonly, the issued color for the denomination). The 5, 10, and (probably) the 15m. were printed in multiples (sheet size unknown), whereas the 50m. is only known to have been printed in sheetlets of four.

Two other rejected designs are known for the 5m. One of them is narrow and has the inscriptions bunched at top and bottom instead of at the side (Fig. 6). The other has a larger medallion having the shape of a rectangle with recurved corners; it was prepared as a montage, using a cut-out frame from the commoner essay.



Fig. 6 Other Harrison essays for the 5m. (Zeheri nos. 80 (engraved die proof), 82, 81).

In a design similar to that of most of the essays for the low values, an essay for the £E1 was prepared in larger format using a more impressive portrait of King Fuad in military uniform (Fig. 7). Curiously, these essays have the Arabic inscriptions of value on the right inverted. The printing, in monocolour, in sheetlets of four, was by photogravure with a very fine screen. A variety of colors was used. From these, bicolored mock-ups were made in various combinations by cutting the medallions from the frames and reassembling. These essays are reasonably available, but their handsome appearance increases the demand for them.



Fig. 7
Essay for the £E1
(Zeheri no. 95).



Fig. 8
Essay with scarabs
(Zeheri no. 91).

The final design, one of classic simplicity and balance, was achieved by eliminating the English inscriptions and most of the ornamentation save for discrete lotus blossoms at the sides and a uraeus at the top. In one trial the upper corners were filled with two scarabs (Fig. 8); it is known only as individual specimens mounted on card. In the end, the simplest version prevailed. With the 15 and 20m. values, the first versions had the Arabic numerals in mismatched size (Fig. 9). These essays, which are imperforate on watermarked paper, are often mistaken for imperforate varieties of the issued stamp. They were printed in multiples, probably as large as a normal sheet of 100. All examples of this group of essays were produced by corn-grain photogravure.

The design adopted was used in small format for the values 1m. to 15m., and larger for the high values; the £E1 differed further in being bicolored and having a grander portrait of the King in military uniform. In addition, the 5m. differed in a subtle way from the other low values by having a slightly taller central oval at the expense of some of the space above it.

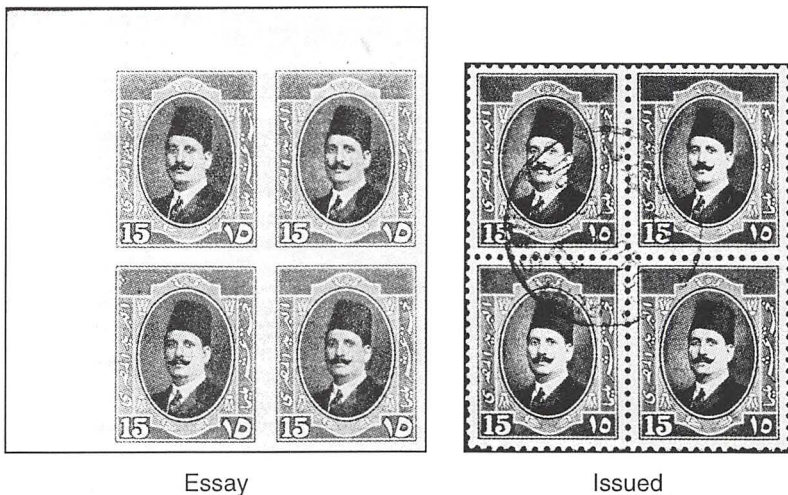


Fig. 9 Essays of the 15 and 20m. with Arabic numerals in mismatched sizes.

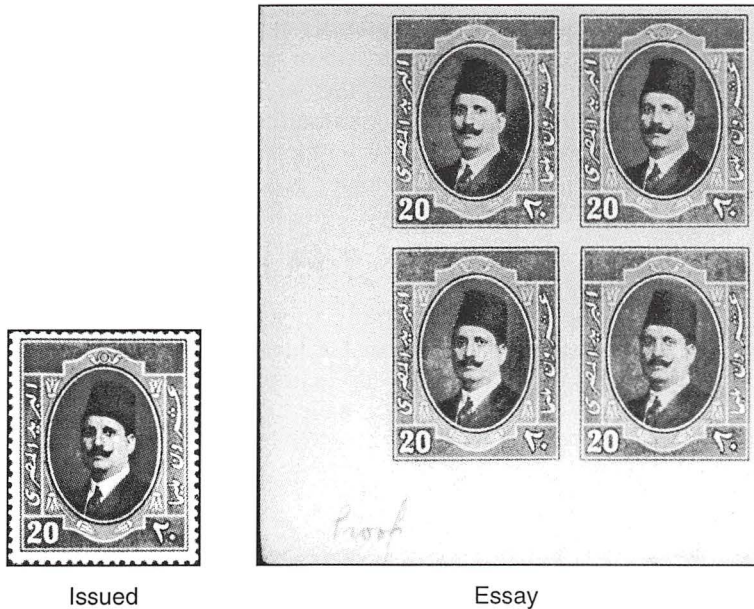


Fig. 9 contd.

Issued

Essay

The adopted design was also produced in a form suitable for typography, the tones of the photogravure version being simulated by lines (Fig. 10). Photographic essays in sepia for the 1, 2, and 10m. and die proofs on glazed paper on sunken card of the 1, 3, 4, and 10m. are the forms known of this version, which is not listed in Zeheri; they may be unique. The die proofs are dated 20 March 1924; they are therefore not essays for the 1923 issue. Since their originator is not specified, it is not unreasonable to presume that they were made by De La Rue for potential use on postal stationery, the contract for which De La Rue still held.

Proofs in the issued design were made of the 1m. (orange, dark brown), 2m. (grey-black, red-brown), 3m. (red-brown), 5m. (red-brown), 10m. (deep rose, brown), 15m. (blue, brown), and 20 m. (red-brown) on thick unwatermarked paper, without gum. The proofs of the other values were made on thinner paper, also unwatermarked: 4m. (red-brown), 50m. (blue-green), 100m. (purple, violet), 200m. (violet). The 5m. proofs are also found on this paper. Gummed paper with the issued watermark was used for proofs of the 10m. (rose), 20m. (green) and the £E1 (ultramarine and purple, ultramarine and violet; Zeheri records one in ultramarine and lilac, but I have not seen such). An example of the £E1 printed entirely in blue was offered in the auction of Harmers of London in December 1994. Proofs of the 5m. in the issued color, red-brown, were also made on gummed, watermarked paper, but they are distinguishable from imperforate stamps as issued by the fact that the watermark is upright or inverted rather than sideways. The



Fig. 10 Essay for a version suited to typography.

15m. is unusual in appearing additionally as proofs on paper watermarked "Harrisons" in script, in apple green and in black. All of these proofs are imperforate and were printed in complete sheets. Consequently, they are mostly readily available. The proofs of the £E1, however, are much scarcer because the sheet size was only 25 rather than 100; in fact, their scarcity might lead one to suspect that less than a full sheet of each reached the philatelic market. They are imperforate, watermarked as issued.

Specimens

Specimen copies of the 1 to 200m. exist with a black or red overprint CANCELLED in small, sans-serif letters (copper-plate Gothic)(Fig. 11). These were not made for the UPU, but were used by the printers as examples of their work; consequently, they are extremely scarce. Some were included in a booklet prepared by B.G. Harrison in about 1938. The 1 to 20m. also exist with an overprint SPECIMEN handstamped in black or red in small, smudgy type (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 CANCELLED and SPECIMEN overprints.

The Issued Stamps

Watermark and Perforation

The issued stamps were on paper with the same watermark, triple crescent and star, as used for the previous issue (Chapter XV). However, Houston⁹ reported observing two sizes of the watermark (not further described); he may have been misled by the fact that the width of the crescents varies from one position on the dandy-roll to another, in the range 5.3–6.0mm. The watermark on all was sideways, the heraldically correct orientation, with the crescents open to the right as seen from the front, but all but the £E1 are known with watermark reversed (distinctly scarcer). One used copy of the 2m. has been reported with upright watermark¹⁰. The perforation was 13.1x13.4 on the low values, and 13.9x13.8 for the 20m. to £E1, made by a comb machine which traveled from left to right (mostly). The comb did not precisely fit the larger denominations, with the result that at two corners on the same side there were slightly wider teeth, referred to as ears. The 3, 5, 10, 50, 100 and 200m., and £E1 are known imperforate, but it is doubtful that they were sold over the counter in that condition.

Date of Issue, Shades, Control Numbers

The stamps came into use piecemeal, presumably as the printers managed to deliver them, and the first to be issued was the 5m. on April 16th 1923 (the Journal Officiel of April 12th stated that it "will be shortly" on sale). The 1m. and 10m. followed on

October 10th, the 15m. on October 15th, and the 20m. on October 18th. The 3m. came out on November 21st, the 2m. and 4m. on December 6th and 20th respectively, and the 50m. and 100m. on December 15th. The two highest values did not appear until 1924: 200m., March 19th and £E1, January 5th.

For each value there is a range of shades, for the most part differing in depth rather than hue:

1m. orange-yellow to yellow-orange	20m. grey-green, deep grey-green
2m. grey-black to black	50m. deep bluish green, deep turquoise blue
3m. shades of sepia	100m. purple, dull purple (also pale reddish violet, possibly a color changeling)
4m. shades of green	200m. violet to slate-violet
5m. chestnut to red-brown, and rose-brown (scarce)	£E1 royal blue and indigo-violet
10m. deep rose, deep rose-red	
15m. royal blue, pale royal blue	

The situation with control numbers is peculiar, for all values exist without control number and no control numbers beginning with A are known. It has been suggested that the first printings, which normally would have control numbers lettered A, were the ones without control numbers. The recorded numbers are shown in the following table.

The control numbers are mostly very faint and many of them appear to be stippled. Grimmer⁶ suggested that they show the corn-grain screen, in which case they would have to have been inscribed on the multipositive, or on the cylinder, before the granular resin was applied. However, each control number exists in several versions (shape and position), each being peculiar to a specific pane. If the controls were inscribed on a single multipositive, they would have been identical on all panes made from it. An alternative possibility is that large multipositives, comprising two or four panes, might have been used. (Correspondence between Harrison's and the Netherlands indicates that the 1m. to 200m. values were printed in sheets of two panes, with the exception of the first printings of the 5m., and the probable exception of the 3m. and 4m. which appear to have been printed one pane to a cylinder.)

Control	1m.	2m.	3m.	4m.	5m.	10m.	15m.	20m.	50m.	100m.	200m.	£E1
none	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
B23	+											
C23		+	+	+	+	+	+					
B24	+				+							
C24		+	+	+		+	+					
B25					+			+		+		
C25	+	+	+	+		+	+					
C26		+					+					

Quantities

The Harrison records show that all values went through several printings, the first delivery being on April 23rd 1923 and the last (of nearly all values) between January 3rd and May 26th 1926. The combined delivery figures are as follows:

1m.	25,000,000	15m.	16,800,000
2m.	17,000,000	20m.	6,200,000
3m.	3,000,000	50m.	3,200,000
4m.	4,000,000	100m.	1,150,000
5m.	180,000,000	200m.	235,000
5m. booklets	13,460,000	£E1	140,000
10m.	14,000,000		

Presumably these quantities include those subsequently overprinted for Consular Service use, those surcharged 100 mills in 1932, and those overprinted for Official use.

Plate Flaws, etc.

Since photogravure was a new and largely experimental printing method with which the printers had little prior experience, it is not surprising that there are large numbers of plate flaws¹¹, both colored and white, to be found on this issue. Some of them were retouched, somewhat crudely, whereas some rather large ones were ignored (Fig. 12). Some flaws occurred on the multipositive and were therefore repeated on all panes made from it; other flaws originated on the printing cylinder and occur on one pane only. A



proof sheet of the 10m. exists with many flaws circled by pen, presumably for the purpose of indicating corrections to be made. However, the issued stamps from the same pane show all the flaws unretouched. A wide variety of these have been described and illustrated (see references 1 to 6).

The majority of the flaws have not been allocated to a plate position owing to the large number of plates (panes of 100) that were used for most values. The number of versions so far observed for a specific control number (e.g., 23 for C23 and 19 for B25 of the 5m., according to Sears¹²; see also G. Boulad, quoted by Chaftar⁵) implies that there were several cylinders, each having several panes (two panes per cylinder for the low values – probably one pane for the 3m. and 4m. and the first printings of the 5m. – and two per cylinder for the 20m. to 200m.). The £E1, however, was printed in panes of 25 (six panes per cylinder), and the absence of control numbers makes it difficult to identify the panes. Regardless of the number of panes per cylinder (and thus on a printer's sheet), all values were issued in post office sheets of one-pane size.

Grimmer⁶ has pointed out a way to distinguish one pane from another, even if control numbers are missing and if the same multipositive was used. The corn grain is randomly irregular, and was sifted onto the cylinders in such a way that the screening differs minutely from pane to pane. Under high magnification one can see the differences, which affect the entire pane. With painstaking effort, one can even use the features of the corn grain to establish plate (pane) positions of individual stamps, providing that a complete pane, or a reconstructed one, is available for comparison.

The closest thing to an error on this issue has the appearance of a double impression, the origin of which is still controversial. The second impression is always lightly inked and is displaced in one direction only. One explanation that has been offered is that it is the result of the cylinder rolling backwards when mechanical problems caused an interruption in the printing; another is that they resulted from the doctor blade pulling ink in the direction of travel. Grimmer⁶ called them dragged impressions, considering that they may have arisen from slippage. Whatever the cause, they can be fairly noticeable, and as such are not uncommon, but extremely prominent examples are scarce¹⁰. They are known on most values.

Booklets

A booklet exists for this issue, consisting of four panes of six of the 5m., with a pink cover. The existence of a 210-millieme booklet, consisting of two panes of the 5m., one of the 10m., and one of the 15m., with a blue cover, is precisely described by Boulad and Revell¹³, but I have not been able to confirm it, and the day-books of Harrison & Sons do not contain a reference to production of such a booklet. The 5m. booklet is moderately rare. Paucity of material prevents making firm conclusions about how they were manufactured, but information from the Harrison archives establishes that specially printed sheets of 180 in three panes of 60 were used. However, Chaftar⁵, who has discussed the problem at length, found that many of the printing flaws on booklet stamps are the same as seen on sheet stamps with control number C23; this suggests that the same multipositive was used.

Coil Stamps

The 5m. was the subject of an abortive attempt to provide the public with stamps in coil form from vending machines¹⁴. Coils were made up from sheet stamps by pasting strips



Fig. 13
Experimental
coil stamps.

together (mostly arranged vertically, but a roll of horizontal strips was also prepared). These were overprinted CANCELLED (Fig. 13). The experiment failed, and coil stamps were never put on sale. However, examples have survived and unutilized full coils in vertical format (three coils?) of perhaps 500 stamps reached the philatelic market. Examples that were actually used in trials of the vending machine are mostly cut off well into the design instead of in the gap between stamps, and may show damage from the gripping mechanism.

Covers and Multiples

Covers and multiples are not at all scarce, although some rate uses are difficult to find. Denominations above 20m., however, were rarely used on ordinary correspondence. The stamps of this issue may be found used (mostly on parcel cards) in combination with the previous issue (crown overprints) which did not become obsolete. The £E1 can be found in complete used sheets of 25, presumably arising from bank-to-bank shipments of money.

Fiscal Overprints

An overprint in Arabic for fiscal purposes¹⁵ was applied to the 10m. (black), 20m. (red or black), 50m. (red), 100m. (red or blue), 200m. (red or black), and the £E1 (red or black). In addition, the fiscal overprint was augmented by a surcharge, 39m. (red) on the 50m., and 386m. (red or black) on the £E1 (Fig. 14). The overprint reads *idarat al qonsuliyat* (consular administration), and these stamps were used mostly, if not entirely, on passports. A color trial of the overprint in gold is known (50m., £E1?). Overprinting for use as Official stamps is described in Chapter XXIII.



Fig. 14 Consular administration
overprint.

The days of the First Portrait Issue were numbered after the UPU Congress in Stockholm in 1924 adopted a regulation that the name of the country of origin should be indicated on all stamps in Latin characters "as soon as possible".

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Special Acknowledgement

I thank John Sears for most kindly providing information from the Harrison records, which would otherwise have been unavailable to me.

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