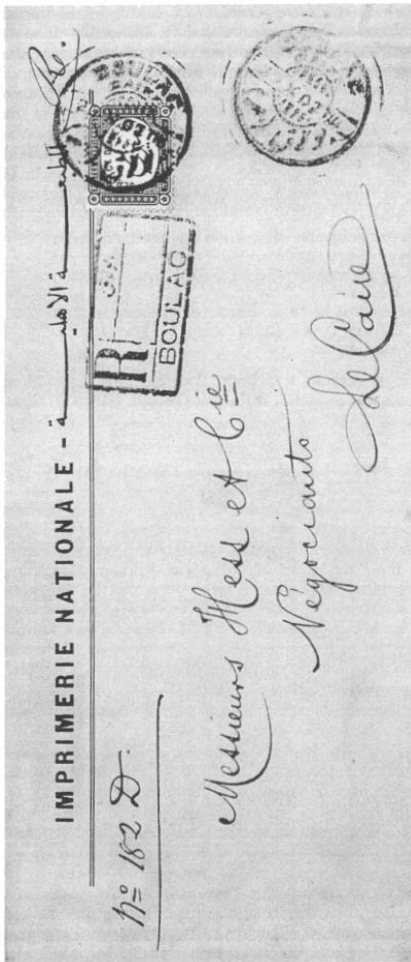


## Introduction of Official Stamps: 1893-1914



*Fig. 5 The miri stamp as sole franking on a registerec internal letter in 1902.*

Meanwhile, a change in the method of franking internal official mail was put into effect on January 1st 1893 with the issue of Egypt's first stamp for official mail. This stamp had no expressed face value and had the word "miri" in Arabic as the most prominent feature of the design. Initially, just one "miri", or "no-value", stamp was sufficient to frank any piece of internal official mail regardless of weight or whether registered (Fig. 5). As an exception, Ministers and Under-Secretaries of State were allowed to send mail without the miri stamp, franked only with their signatures. In 1894, Financial and Judicial Advisers to the Ministers were added to the authorization. Collectors were allowed to buy the miri stamp for 1pi. Curiously, this privilege was effectively revoked in 1912 when it was ordered that the stamps were to be cancelled before sale.

Regulations issued in August 1893 noted that each item of official correspondence was to be endorsed with the name of the Department or official sending it.

The miri stamp was withdrawn for a short period when a series of denominated official stamps was introduced on February 1st 1907. With this event, official correspondence became subject to the same charges as public correspondence (Fig. 6); that is, postage was to be prepaid according to weight, and registration required a separate fee. However, the exception for Ministers, etc., remained in force. The new Official stamps were also required to be used on correspondence to foreign countries.

From March 8th 1908 official stamps also functioned as official postage due stamps. In such use they were to be affixed to the claim form for insufficiently prepaid mail and immediately cancelled. Unfortunately, I have never seen an item showing such use and can only suppose that the forms were retained, either by the Post Office or the receiving agency, and eventually destroyed. However, the postal service of the Sudan followed almost exactly the same regulations as Egypt and a few such claim forms, liberally embellished with O.S.G.S. or Army Service stamps, have survived. In general, one form covered the cumulative postage due on all items of mail in a particular delivery.

The no-value miri stamp was re-introduced on January 1st 1909. This time it was to be used to frank each item of unregistered internal official correspondence and denominated official stamps were to be used to pay any registration or insurance fees and parcel post (Fig. 7). The miri stamp continued to be used in this way until perhaps 1915; on August 10th 1918 all stocks were returned to Postal Headquarters and sales to collectors ceased.

The intention had been to replace the miri stamp with a franking handstamp (made of steel) to be issued to each government department, inscribed with its name, in September 1914 (Fig. 8). However, delivery of the handstamps was not made to all offices in time and a dispensation was allowed for offices to continue using the miri stamp until franking devices were available. Stamps were still required on foreign mail (Fig. 9).

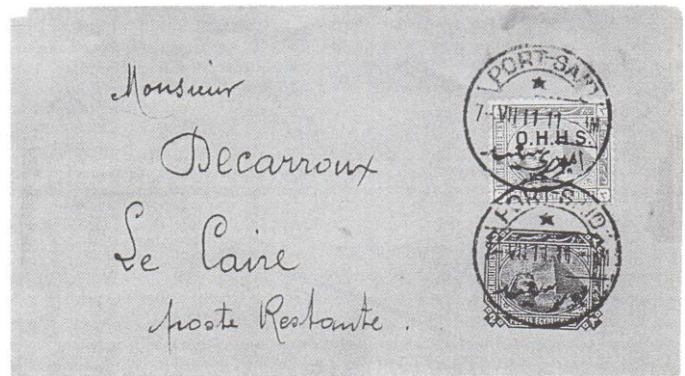
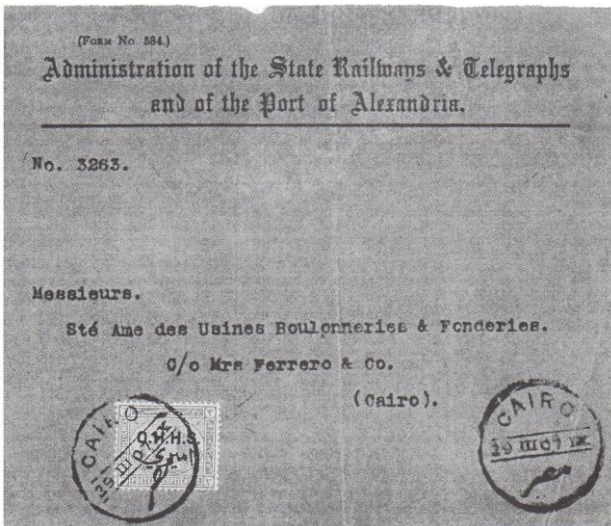


Fig.6 A cover franked at the local rate in 1907 with the 3m. Official stamp and one used on a wrapper

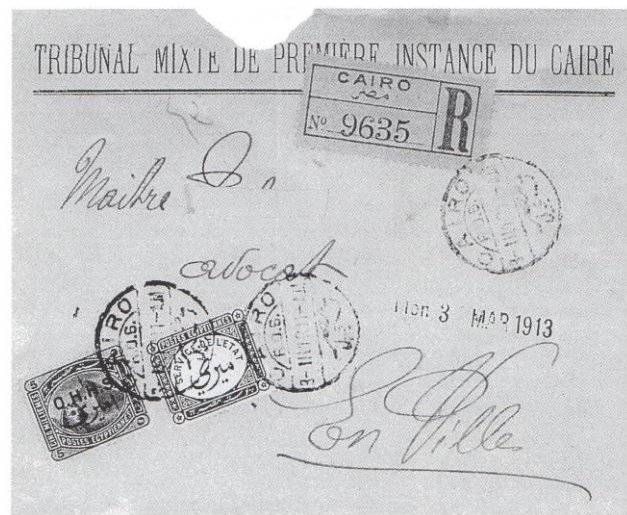


Fig.7 A cover franked with the miri stamp plus a 5m. Official stamp to pay the registration fee in 1909

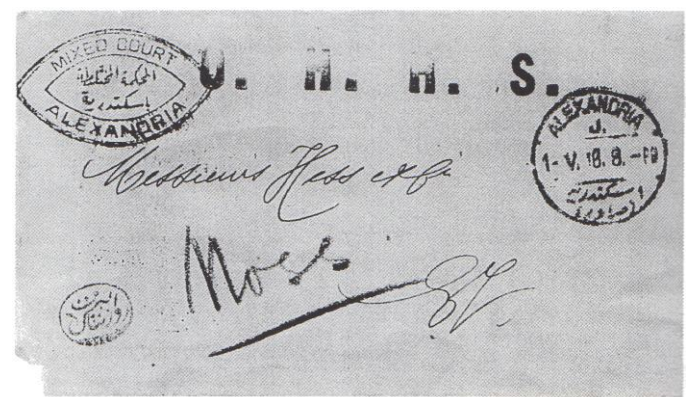


Fig.8 An example of the oval metal franking handsamps

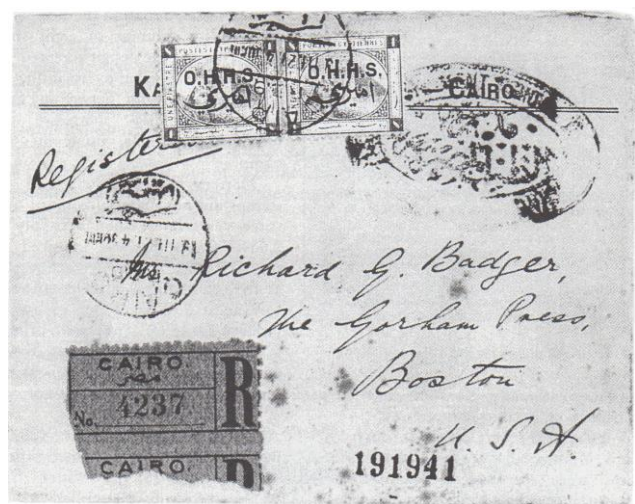


Fig. 9 Use of Official stamps with an oval handstamped frank on a registered letter to USA in 1921.

Occasional shortages of denominated official stamps, especially the 2, 3, and 5m. values, were met by authorizing ordinary stamps to be used. On one such occasion, November 1909, even the ordinary stamps became unavailable at Gezira and the 3-mill. rate was made up by using a diagonally bisected 4m. stamp plus a 1m. accompanied by a miri stamp. The reason for this use is unclear, for official stamps other than the miri stamp should not have been necessary for local unregistered letters.

## Official Stamps Issued 1893-1952

### The “miri” (no-value) Stamp

Negotiation with Thomas De La Rue & Co. about preparation of official stamps was initiated by a letter<sup>7</sup> from Egypt, dated February 5th 1889, that carried a proposal to issue a full set of values, omitting only the 1m. They were to “be of the same colour and would have the same border as the postage stamps of the same values at present in use, but in the centre instead of the Sphynx and Pyramid, they would bear the inscription ‘Service de l’Etat’, in French and in Arabic . . .” However, less than a month later, the Egyptian authorities changed their mind and asked for a single stamp only, without expressed value.



*Fig. 10 An essay for the 1893 miri stamp.*

Meanwhile, De La Rue had sent six designs (one for each value) to Egypt; these appear not to have survived. The firm responded with admirable promptness to the revised request and on March 14th sent three proposed designs to Egypt. Two of them were upright and included the sphinx and pyramid as the central motif (Fig. 10). These

were hand-painted on bull, semi-translucent paper. The third design was a mock-up made from the ordinary 5pi. stamp then in use, with the centre replaced by Arabic and French inscriptions and the side panels replaced by columns of eight small stars. This was the design accepted. De La Rue also suggested overprinting the ordinary stamps with “Service de l’Etat” as an economical alternative and submitted a sample, using the 2m. stamp.

Matters moved slowly and the stamps did not materialize until over three years later when a supply of 2,654,400 stamps was invoiced on July 8th 1892 (Easton<sup>7</sup> gives the year as 1893, but that is surely a mistake, for the stamps were put in use on January 1st 1893).

They were printed in sheets of 240 (four panes of 60), just like the

ordinary stamps, with the same watermark and perforation. Inverted watermarks exist and are scarce, but not rare. The paper was, of course, unsurfaced.

For the next several years, through 1905-06, the annual orders were for 2,400,000 stamps. None at all were ordered for 1906-07, the year when the overprinted official stamps were introduced, but orders resumed for 1910-11, by which time chalk-surfaced paper had been introduced. The inventory lists supplied to the Egyptian authorities from time to time included “1 die and 1 plate of 240 set” until 1914, when a ledger entry refers to the destruction of “2 plates, 240 set each, Nos 1 and 2”.

The reason for destroying the plates was the change to sheets of 200 (two panes of 100) for the 1914 pictorial definitive stamps, which necessitated a different format for the watermarked paper. Accordingly, new plates for the miri stamp were prepared having panes of 100. The 1914 and 1915 inventories<sup>8</sup> of devices on hand included

“1 working die and 3 plates of 200 set”. For the actual printing, these three plates were joined together so as to produce sheets of 600, the panes being arranged 3x2. The gutters were filled with ‘pillars’, just like the ordinary stamps. These unwieldy sheets were evidently cut into sheets of 200 before shipment to Egypt, but some uncut sheets (or large parts of them) eventually came on the market when the De La Rue archives were liquidated. Although three control (plate) numbers should exist, I have seen only 1 and 2.

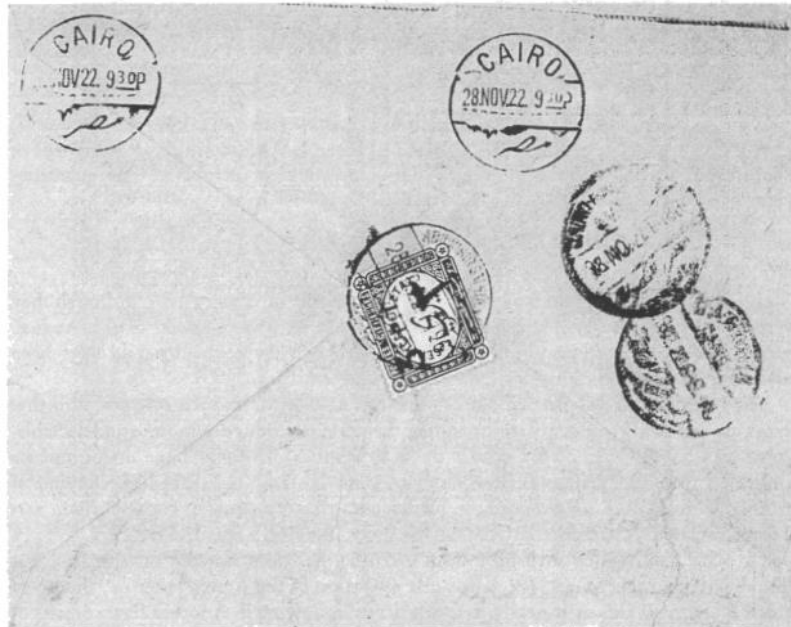
Since the watermarked paper was designed to fit the ordinary stamps of 1914, which had an upright format, the watermark necessarily appeared sideways on the 1914 printing of the miri stamp. It may be found facing either right or left. Since such stamps were issued only in the last year of use of the miri stamp, they are fairly scarce.

### **Proofs**

Press-run perforated proofs bearing manuscript initials or names of the press men but otherwise indistinguishable from the issued stamps, are known from the De La Rue archives. The later proofs, however, were left imperforate and are therefore quite distinct. They exist from both the 240-subject sheets with upright watermark and the 200-subject sheets with sideways watermark (both directions). Die proofs in black on glazed card also exist.

### **Fiscal Overprints**

The 1914 sideways-watermark stamp was overprinted at an unknown date, perhaps as early as 1915, with specific denominations: 1 P.T., 2 P.T., 3 P.T., and 5 P.T., each with Arabic-equivalent (Fig. 11). The overprint was typographed in bold, black characters presumably the purpose was to make use of the stock remaining after the miri stamp was taken out of use. Some of the surcharged stamps were used postally on official covers (seen from 1919 to 1922), but most of them were used fiscally on documents. On covers they seem to have been used to pay the simple letter rate of 5 mills., notwithstanding the expressed face value.



*Fig. 11 Fiscal surcharge on the miri stamp*