

XXXIV

Interpostal Seals

<i>Status</i>	689	<i>References</i>	695
<i>Types</i>	690		

Status

Interpostal seals are labels printed on gummed, unwatermarked paper and die-cut so as to be circular. They are inscribed Viceroyal Egyptian Post, Khedivial Egyptian Post, or Egyptian Posts in Italian or French, and Arabic, and bear the name of a post office or, in a few cases, a Post Office administrative department.

They have had an unusual amount of attention in philatelic literature, beginning as early¹ as 1867, and sometimes characterized more by heated opinion than unbiased fact. In the nineteenth century they were sometimes included in general catalogs as well as in Collin and Calman's *A Catalogue for Advanced Collectors* of 1891. A preliminary list and classification was published as a pamphlet by Koch². A more comprehensive treatment of them was published by May³, who, after illustrating the several types, organized them by office in alphabetical order. Colors, errors, and varieties were described, but no attempt was made at pricing. Kehr wrote in detail on interpostal seals in *Weekly Philatelic Gossip* in 1942 and the content was subsequently published as a booklet⁴. In 1950 a somewhat similar booklet was written by Chapier in French⁵. In both of these the listing was organized first by type. Only the Kehr booklet gave values; it was revised in 1962 and again by Cockrill in 1984, with additions and new pricing⁶.

The status of the interpostal seals has been beset with controversy. However, Chaftar⁷ wrote a dispassionate and meticulously documented examination of the subject, which firmly established the conclusion that they "were used for the closing of letters or administrative parcels emanating from the Main Postal Administration to the various post offices or exchanged between the post offices themselves, or, in some very rare cases, between a post office and an individual". In support of this conclusion, official notices were quoted, many covers were illustrated and analyzed, contemporary reports, such as that of Moens⁸, were examined, and analogous seals of other countries (Germany, Luxembourg, Russia, Sweden, Austria, Italy, Greece, Ceylon) were compared. In several of the cases interpostal seals were used to close letters that had been opened for censorship or to determine the sender of an undeliverable letter. Several of the covers bore conventional stamps for actual franking.

It has been asserted on several occasions that interpostal seals were the equivalent of Official stamps, the writers having been misled by the fact that the first Official stamp of Egypt was issued in 1893 and the last type of interpostal seal was issued in 1891. Two essential points were overlooked: interpostal seals continued in use in quantity well into the twentieth century (copies with dated postmarks), and a substantial number of official

covers are known (Chapter XXIII) from the period 1866–92, none of which is franked with an interpostal seal⁹.

More on the status and use has been written by G. Boulad¹⁰, Clarke¹¹, Eid¹², and Schmidt¹.

Types

The list of interpostal seals in the Kehr-Cockrill catalog is fairly complete, although the account of their use has some misconceptions. However, new discoveries continue to be made and a substantial number of additions, as well as corrections, to this catalog have been made¹³. Because the lists are long and would consume too much space, they are not included here. The Types are illustrated with the designations originated by May slightly modified by Kehr (the odd mix of upper case and lower case letters after the numerals has been retained because to change them would be likely to cause more confusion). Types IV and V each have several sub-types originating in the dies. Type I, which properly belongs under the *Posta Europea*, is included for convenience.

Type I, a *Posta Europea* issue, is printed in black, on paper of a different color for each office. This type is thought not to have been postmarked, but one example handstamped "Franca" has been reported.

Type II, like Type I, is printed in black on colored paper. Postmarked copies of this and most of the following Types are scarce but not exceptional.



Types III, IIIA, and IIIB are of identical design, and differ only in the color of the paper: Type III is printed in different colors on white paper; Type IIIA is on azure paper, and Type IIIB is on rose paper. There are, however, two sub-types or dies

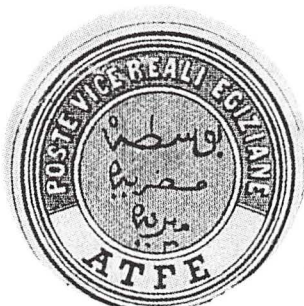


distinguished by the shape of the left end of the bottom line of Arabic. Cairo exists in Die A, Alexandria in Die B, and all other offices in both dies. These have been illustrated for each office¹⁴. Types IIIb and IIIc (so designated in this curious fashion by Kehr) were made from the master stone for Type III by erasing the Arabic inscriptions and adding DIREZIONE GENERALE in their place. These were printed in red on white, azure, or rose paper.

Types IV and IVA were also printed in black on colored papers. An interesting variety of orthography, appearing as an error, occurs in the Arabic; the middle word, *misrieh*, at first had a strong dot above the loop, converting the word to *madbrieh*¹⁵. Many of the offices show the variety prominently. The same variety occurs on Type III, but not so pronounced. Kehr proposed that the dot was later erased on the stone, along with part of the surrounding vertical shading, and after a quantity was printed in this state an attempt to repair the shading was made by retouching the empty area. However, Clarke¹⁶ has demonstrated that the variety was caused by the point of a compass used to draw the guide lines for entering the names of the offices on the stone (the offending dot occurs at the exact center of the printed image). The compass-point variety can be seen on seals right up to Type VIII, but it is not so obvious on the later Types because it falls on the inked part of the Arabic word *khedewiyah*. Clarke has also described the effects of erasure from a lithographer's viewpoint.



IV (Jan. 1868)
narrow O, clear G



IVA round O, G like a C



IVb



IVc

The several versions of Type V were all printed in black on colored papers, except for a group of 17 offices in Type VB, which were instead printed in scarlet on white paper (one, Mellai, is also reported in scarlet on azure paper). Type VE, a totally different design, and prepared only for Alexandria, occurs only in gold on white paper.

Notes on Type V

V: the white letters are thin; the Arabic lettering is heavy; the *kha'* (right end of middle line) is nearly triangular.

Va: the white letters are thick, especially O and D; the lowest dot in the Arabic is below the level of the tip of *ra'*; the *ta' marbuta* is sharply angular at its top.

Vb: the S is grotesque, with thick curves at top and bottom; the D is narrow; the lowest dot is at the level of the tip of the *ra'*.

Vc: the S is slender and somewhat angular; the *kha'* (middle line, right end) is large and almost closed.

Vd: The *ta' marbuta* (left end of bottom line) is almost round; the bottom dot is at the level of the tip of the *ra'*, which has a joint or knee left of the loop of the *sad*.

Some office names are in serified letters, and some are sans serif.



V (Jan. 1871)



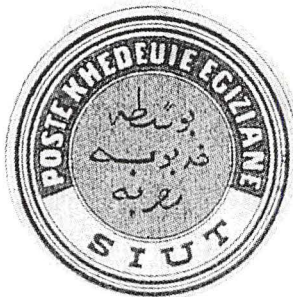
Va (1872-4)



Vb (1874-6)



Vc (1874-8)



Vd (1878-9)



Ve (1877)

The Type VI seals were embossed and thus have raised lettering. They were printed in dark colors on white or tinted paper and exist only for Alexandria. There were two dies, which differ in the sharpness of the lettering and in the form of the Arabic letter below HE of KHEDEUIE; in one, the letter is closed, resembling a Q, and in the other, it is open at the right, resembling a script *e*. Types VIA and VIB were embossed on white paper only; they were also printed from two dies, one with sharper lettering than the other.



VI (1878)



VIA



VIB

Type VII and VIIA seals were all printed in scarlet on white paper. There were two dies (perhaps used in separate printings?). In Die A, the O is round and the dots in the Arabic are square; in Die B, the O is roughly rectangular, all the white letters are thicker, and the Arabic dots are round. Of the 13 offices for which Type VIIA is known, 11 are in the Sudan.



VIIA



VII - Die I



VII - Die II

The two die types of Type VII

Type VIII and VIIIA seals were printed in vermilion on white paper. There is some variation in shade and the ink is susceptible to darkening, presumably due to lead content.

Notes on Type VIII

VIII: The bottom line of Arabic is the name, and is therefore different for each office. The Latin letters of the name are 3.5mm high.

VIIIA: The names of the offices are written in a different typeface, and the Latin names are only 3mm high. The diameter of the paper is smaller than Type VIII, owing to use of a smaller cutting die.

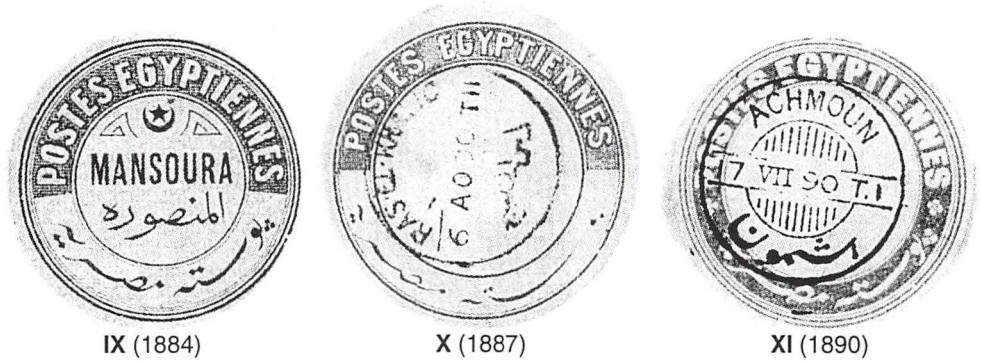


VIII (1880)



VIIIA (1882)

Types IX, X, and XI were printed in blue (light to dark) on white paper. Types X and XI are relatively plentiful in postmarked condition.



IX (1884)

X (1887)

XI (1890)

As to value, the prices given in the Kehr-Cockrill catalog, with a minimum of £3, are perhaps two to four times current retail, with exceptions. However, condition is especially important with interpostals because the paper is very susceptible to thinning and is brittle. Thins, creases, and edge faults are common, and naturally lower the value. Postmarked copies are generally worth a modest premium (ca. +50–200%), but clearly postmarked copies from the Consular and Territorial Offices are worth considerably more. Lack of gum does not seem to detract from value, perhaps because seals that have been used, but not postmarked, are without gum, or have envelope paper on their back.

Except for the embossed seals (Type VI), the interpostal seals were lithographed¹⁶. A master stone ("die") was drawn without a name of an office. In some instances a second master stone was made from it, with consequent small differences, which are the reason for two dies of Type III, for example. Transfers from the master stone(s) were made to a patching sheet. With the earlier Types, the images were aligned in vertical and horizontal rows to make up the printing stone, but in later Types, the horizontal rows were staggered (like brick masonry) so as to make more efficient use of the paper. Two concentric arcs (guide lines referred to in connection with the *madbriyeh* variety, above) were drawn in the lower part to facilitate accurate transfer of the name of the office. In most cases, these guide lines were largely erased, but substantial traces of them usually remain. With Type VIII and later, erasure was quite complete.

Sheet size is not known in all cases since multiples do not exist except for proofs, which are not known for all Types. However, the sheet size can in principle, and often in practice, be deduced from plating studies. Some examples of plating studies have been published by Cockrill⁶ and by Thompson¹⁷. The flaws arising from the lithographic transfer procedure are quite easy to recognize and, if a good quantity of a specific seal is available, the number of positions in the sheet can be determined with reasonable statistical validity. For Type III, the sheet size is 30, and for Type IV, 60. Type IVC, however, had a sheet size of only 6. An approach to determining the actual sheet position of an identifiable subject can be made by looking for copies sufficiently off center to show part of a neighboring subject.

Somewhat surprisingly, some interpostal seals have been forged. Some Type VIII seals (and not the most valuable ones) have been forged quite recently; the shade and paper are not right and the forgeries appear to have been made by means of

photo-technology. A forgery of the seal of Jaffa (Type IVA) has been reported¹⁸; although this seal is not especially scarce, the relatively high demand for it has given it a market value out of proportion. Curiously, the most expensive (and truly scarce) seal, Gedda in Type VB in red, does not yet appear to have been forged. Forged postmarks have also been noted¹⁶.

The subject of interpostal seals should not be left without some comment on spelling. The printers must have had great difficulty, and many idiosyncratic spellings exist. In some cases, these were eventually corrected, but the milder cases persisted. Amazing mis-spellings are particularly common in Type III: JSMILIA for ISMAILIA; JBAFI-EL-DAUAR for KAFR EL-DAUAR; JOOK for TOOK; SAMANUA for SAMANUD; BIRHET-EL-SAAT for BIRKET-EL-SAB. Even when there is no error, the spellings chosen, more often than not, differ from those found in postmarks.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that although nearly all seals bear the name of a public post office, some are inscribed ECONOMAT. This was the Post Office bursary.

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