



EGYPT'S FIRST STAMPS

A Summary

By L. N. & M. WILLIAMS



Although a State post for governmental mail carrying was established in Egypt about 1821, some twenty years later a postal service was organised for the handling of ordinary correspondence. This was a private service run by Carlo Meratti, an Italian, and it operated between Alexandria and Cairo. The mail was impressed with a Bandstamp inscribed in Italian.

About 1843 Meratti's service became known as the "Posta Europea" because its main function was the collection of European mail handled by the consular postoffices in Egypt, set up under the "Capitulations" rights. After Meratti's death in 1847, the "Posta Europea" was conducted jointly by his nephew, Tito Chini, and Giacomo Muzzi. Handstamped marks with Italian inscriptions continued in use.

In the middle fifties the scope of the post was extended, and by 1857 the "Posta Europea" had opened fifteen offices in addition to those at Alexandria and Cairo. On 5th March, 1862, Chini and Muzzi were granted a ten years' postal monopoly, and they set about the task of reorganising the postal system in Lower Egypt.

They considered the possibility of issuing adhesive stamps for use on the mail, and in its issue dated 15th December, 1863, the *Stamp-Collector's Review and Monthly Advertiser* contained this paragraph :

Special postage stamps are about to be issued, we hear, in Egypt, for franking letters in the interior of the country. They are to be manufactured in England, by a firm which supplies such articles to many of the States of Europe.

The information in this paragraph was probably extracted from a similar paragraph appearing in the *Presse*, which was subsequently copied in other philatelic journals. The Mackenzie Low collection at present contains essays of adhesive stamps in a circular design intended for the "Posta Europea." The essays consist of four values, 5, 10 and 20 paras and 1 piastre, and are similar in design to the circular franks used by the service. The figure of value appears in the centre and above is "Bon per;" the town name "Mansura" is beneath. The essays are lithographed in black on tinted paper mounted on card, the colours being cream, buff, azure and pink.

Mr. Mackenzie Low obtained the essays about 30 years ago in Cairo. They came out of an old collection belonging to a retired postal official of the Egyptian Government, and only one set is known to exist. Mr. Low writes : "I am sure these essays were not ;manufactured in England,' but most likely by an Italian firm of printers."

In 1864 Chini died, and the service passed under the sole control of Muzzi. On 2nd January, 1865 less than three years after the ten years' postal monopoly was granted the Government purchased the "Posta Europea," and itself took over control of the Egyptian posts preparatory to reorganising them further. Owing to his considerable experience of, and ability in, postal affairs, Muzzi was appointed Egypt's first Director General of Posts.

As part of the postal reforms it was decided to issue adhesive stamps. Suggested designs were produced by several artists, notably M. Prevost and M. Riester, both of Paris, and Messrs. Charles Skipper & East, of London; but, perhaps not surprisingly, the order to print the stamps was given to an Italian firm, Fratelli Pellas of Genoa, who, a short time before had submitted to the Italian Government a good looking but rejected design for the first Italian issue. This Italian essay is interesting because its framework seems to have been largely reproduced in the 5 piastres value of the Egyptian series. It is thought also that the paper of the 1 piastre stamps, which differs considerably from that of the other values, was a stock which the printers had acquired in anticipation of obtaining the contract to print the Italian stamps; as the Italian contract was placed elsewhere, Fratelli Pellas used up the balance of the paper for the 1 piastre.

On 21st December, 1865, a decree setting published. It was worded in Italian (as were, all other postal documents at this period.), and contained 79 clauses besides the following notice relating to the impending issue of stamps :

General Instructions

The bust offices alone are authorized to sell postage stamps. The postage stamps are of seven different kinds which are distinctive by reason of their colour and value, that is to say;

10 and 20 paras....

1, 2, 5 and 10 piastres....

Correspondence for foreign countries must not be thrown into the [letter] box, but taken to the dispatch window. . . . Payment of the postage on letters sent to foreign countries must be effected by means of Egyptian stamps for the internal journey to Alexandria; foreign postage must be paid in the stamps of the country that is charged with the forwarding . . .

Cairo, 21st December, 1865. By order of H.H. the Viceroy, Minister of Finances

(Signed) HAFIZ P PASHA

The Director General of Posts V.R. Egypt

(Signed) MUZZI BEY

Before the stamps were issued, it would seem that series of proofs were circulated to various philatelic journals on the Continent. At all events, *Le Timbrophile*, in its issue dated 15th November, 1865 (Vol. 11, page 102), contained the following paragraph :

Egypt. We have already spoken, in an earlier number of the Egyptian postal reforms and the new issue which they will introduce. Today there has been submitted to us a series of essays consisting of seven different types. They bear, on the whole, a great similarity to the Turkish stamps; but they are printed by lithography, in two printings, imperf. The second printing in black is an inscription which time has not permitted us to have translated; it is the same in the seven types; only the bases vary

5 paras	grey-green
10 -----	bistre
20 -----	pale blue
1 piastre	lilac
2 -----	yellow
5 -----	rose
10 -----	blue

When chronicling the stamps themselves in a later number (Vol. 11, page 118), *Le Timbrophile*, referred to the proofs, as did *Le Collectionneur de Timbres-Poste* (Vol. II, page 146), which stated that the proofs had been carefully executed but that the stamps lacked the sharpness of the proofs.

Postal Rates

The postal rates in operation at the time have been worked out by philatelists from studies of entires and covers. The 5 paras has been found on newspaper: 10 paras franked letters, not exceeding 10 grammes in weight, for delivery in the town of origin; 20 paras was apparently the printed matter rate between the various towns in Egypt and 1 piastre franked correspondence not exceeding 10 grammes in weight for similar deliyery. The higher values were used for prepayment of registered and heavier letters. It seems that not only did the stamps frank correspondence within the confines of Egypt, but that they were used also at the Egyptian post offices in the Turkish Empire for prepaying postage into Egypt.

Issue

The stamps made their appearance on 1st: January, 1866. The colours were substantially those previously reported in *Le Timbrophile*. There are variations in the shades of many of these, the most important being those of the 20 paras, which is found ranging from pale blue to greenish blue, and the 2 piastres. pale yellow to orange-yellow, while the 10 paras is brown rather than bistre.

The designs vary in each value, but all are of an arabesque type. Each impression was overprinted in black with a five part inscription in Turkish: reading from left to right *Masriji Busta Tamgai* (Egyptian postage stamp) ; the word *Masr* (Egypt) appears in the centre; and the value in paras or grouch (piastres) at the foot.

With the exception of that of the 1 piastre, the majority of the paper used is rather thin greyish wove, watermarked with a pyramid surmounted by a star, arranged so that each stamp bears one compound device. The paper used for the 1 piastre is thicker, whiter and unwatermarked, and has a glazed surface.

Gum and Perforation.

It has been suggested that the printers sent the stamps to Egypt in imperforate and ungummed sheets, and that they were perforated and gummed after their arrival there. A sheet of the 1 piastre and some perforated proofs were found at the Genoese printing works, and this seems to show that at least some perforation was done there; possibly Fratelli Pellas perforated a few sheets of the stamps, as well as some proofs, to test the line machine. Evidence as to the gummings being carried out after the perforation is provided by the fact that in mint specimens of perforated stamps the gum has penetrated the perforations of the new postal arrangements was publication holes. This is particularly apparent in a block of the 10 paras brown, in the collection of Dr. W. Byam.

On the whole the perforation was poorly done, and most specimens are off centre; indeed, well centred specimens are very difficult to find, while perforated pairs and larger multiples are of considerable rarity. The commonest perforation gauges $12\frac{1}{2}$, but specimens exist also perforated $12\frac{1}{2} \times 13$, 13 , and $12\frac{1}{2} \times 15$. The last gauge corresponds with that of the second issue, and it is thought that a new perforating machine was brought into use a short time before the first issue became obsolete. This, also, is further tendentious evidence of the fact that the perforation was effected in Egypt.

It is considered likely that the other variations in gauge were caused, not by the use of different machines, but owing to wear of the pins and bed of the one machine. The *Kohl Briefmarken Handbuch* records the existence of a proof of the 10 paras perforated $12\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$, and others are known perforated $11\frac{1}{2}$.

The 1 and 2 piastres have been found with double perforation, and all values exist in pairs imperforate between, either vertically or horizontally. Also all values are known imperforate all round and these stamps can be distinguished from proofs because the paper of the proofs is smoother and unwatermarked. According to Kohl, most of the imperforate specimens came from sheets of remainders which had not been perforated for use and were found after the series was withdrawn, but the imperforate specimens which have been found used are from a few sheets which had escaped perforation and were issued during the period of the stamps' use.

Production

All the stamps were lithographed except the 1 piastre which was produced by typography. The black characters were typographed on the 1 and 2 piastres, but lithographed on the other values. There were 200 stamps in each sheet, arranged in ten rows of twenty, but the 1 piastre consisted of two panes of 100. The sheet margins were inscribed, at the top "Vice Reali Poste Egiziane," at the foot "Ministero del Lavori Pubblici," and at the right and left "Francobolli" and the respective value.

The manner in which the matrix and printing stones of the lithographed stamps were built up has been described by Dr. Byam in a paper published in the *London Philatelist*, Vol. XL. The matrix stone of each value contained ten repetitions of the design, transferred from the "die" of that value, and each printing stone contained twenty vertical strips of transfers taken from the matrix stone.

Of each of these stamps there were, therefore, ten transfer types, but in the case of the 10 piastres only nine have been identified; the reason is that, on the matrix stone of this value, the end impression was damaged, and substituted transfers were used to replace it in every one of the twenty positions on the printing stone.

It is not known definitely by what method the designs of the lithographed values were originally produced, but the comparatively coarse appearance of the finished stamps suggests that the original designs were not engraved on steel or copper; possibly they were lithographic drawings, or engravings on stone.

The upper and lower halves of each design were, probably, intended to be identical, but minute differences occurred. These differences are as follows :

5 paras : A--The upper right hand ray of the star in the N.E. corner points to the left of the tablet containing "Para."

B.--The upper right hand ray of the star points towards the tablet.



10 paras : A--The right hand portion of the Greek border in the upper frame begins with a horizontal stroke.

B--The right hand portion of the Greek border begins with a vertical stroke.

20 paras : A--The ends of the crescent shaped ornament above the centre of the stamp are apart.

B--The end; of the ornament are close together.



1 piastre : A--The inner ends of the heart shaped ornaments in the inner oval touch.

B the inner ends do not touch.

2 piastres : A--There are ten sections in the rope like ornamentation beneath "P.E." in the upper left hand corner.

B--There are eleven section: in the rope like



5 piastres : A--The loops of the inner ornamentation touch the circular frame round the "5" in the upper right hand corner.

B--The loops do not touch the circular frame.



10 piastres : A--In the upper lefthand corner the upper part of the "1,;" of "P.E." is shaved off diagonally towards the right.

B--The "E" is well formed.

These variations are so slight that they were disregarded by the craftsmen who effected the transferring from the "dies" and matrix stones. It is, therefore, immediately obvious that there is nothing remarkable in the fact that numerous *tête-bêche* pairs of the basic designs are to be found in all values.

Dr. Byam has pointed out that, in the cases of some values, inversion of the design occurred not only on the matrix stone but also on the printing stone. Thus, a design may have been inverted when it was transferred to the matrix stone, and the strip of transfers from the matrix stone may have been inverted when it was transferred to the printing stone; the effect of this double inversion would be that the original design was reproduced the correct way up on the printed sheet of stamps.

Actually it is impossible to state with any certainty that either half of a basic stamp is the top, as there is no evidence to support one half in preference to the other. The descriptions given above (except those of the 1, 2 rind 5 piastres), are in the order ;adopted by Dr. Byam, who has taken as being the correct way up the transfer in the top left hand corner of the sheet impression on the stone ; this transfer corresponds with stamp number 20 on the sheet.

Watermarks

Although the so called "overprints" and watermarks are to be found inverted in relation to the basic designs of the stamps, these, varieties have very little if any philatelic importance. The reason is that there was no true top or bottom to any sheet of stamps until it had received the second printing in black; therefore, the watermark should be examined with reference to its relation to the black characters and not in relation to the basic design. They are the correct way up when the loop of the central character is at the top.

An outstandingly rare variety of watermark occurs on the 5 paras, and stamps hearing it have been classed among the great rarities of Egypt. This consists of the watermark in the upright position. Almost every specimen of the 5 paras bears an inverted watermark.

"Overprint" or "Surcharge ?"

Strictly speaking neither "overprint" nor "surcharge" can be correctly used when referring to the second printings on the first Egyptian issue. The black characters form an integral part of the stamp itself and none was ever issued without them, nor, indeed, was the stamp complete before they were applied.

The definition of "overprint" in the *Glossary of Philatelic Terms* is "Something printed . . . upon a stamp after the stamp was completed . . ."; the objection to the word's use in respect of the Egyptian issue is that the stamps were not completed until they had received the second printing.

The difficulty with regard to the use of "surcharge" is that it should be employed only to denote an overprinting which alters or confirms the face value of the stamp "as originally issued"; and the Egyptian stamps were never issued without the second printing.

There appears to be less objection to "surcharge" and that term is employed in Gibbons' catalogue, but Dr. Byam, while acknowledging its unsuitability, uses "overprint."

Three transferring operations were effected in the building up of the stamps used for printing the lithographed surcharges. Firstly, five separate transfers were taken from the "die," and these were laid down on a matrix stone in a vertical strip. Two transfers of this strip were then laid down on another stone, one above the other, thus forming a vertical column of ten. Twenty transfers from this column were laid down on the printing stone, to make up the sheet of 200. The five primary types and the ten secondary types occur regularly throughout the sheet.

Error of Surcharge

An error has been found on the 5 piastres, which exists with the 10 piastres surcharge. Apparently more than one sheet of this error existed, because specimens are known perforated 12½, 13 x 12½, 12½, x 15, and also imperforate.

Some very dangerous forgeries exist on watermarked paper; they are recognisable mainly by the lack of contrast between the light and dark parts of the design.

The 10 piastres with the surcharge of the 5 piastres is bogus, as also are pairs of the 10 piastres with the surcharges *tête-bêche*. Several values are known printed on both sides. but their status is doubtful.

The Bisects

In July, 1867, the post office at Alexandria ran short of the 1 piastre value. Article 52 of the postal decree of 21st December, 1865, specifically prohibited the use of stamps cut in two, and so, on 13th July, Muzzi Bey issued the following notice at Alexandria :

In consequence of the shortage of 1 piastre stamps, now current, permission is given to the post-office at Alexandria to use 2 piastres stamps, divided diagonally into equal parts, for the prepayment of letters, the two halves respectively representing the value of 1 piastre as from the 16th to the 31st July this year. The cutting of the stamps is to be from the left upper corner to the lower right, as in the specimen affixed in the margin.

The Director General

MUZZI BEY.

Both perforated and imperforate stamps were used for the provisional. The bisects were used at Cairo as well as at Alexandria, and are more difficult to find with the Alexandria postmark. Dangerous forgeries exist, but these can be detected by inaccuracies in the cancellations: details of the postal obliterations on the first issue of Egypt are to be found in Dr. Byam's article in the *Philatelic Journal of Great Britain*, Vol. XL, page 118.

Other values of this series are known to have been bisected and used for half their original value (a bisected 1 piastre used as 20 paras was exhibited at the R.P.S.L. Exhibition in June, 1922), but such use had no official sanction, and they passed through the post owing to laxity.

Withdrawal and Demonetization

Egypt's first issue remained in use for just 20 months, when it was replaced, as the following decree shows :

H.H. the Viceroy has approved of a new issue of stamps of 5, 10 and 20 paras, and of 1, 2 and 5 piastres, which will be for sale on 1st August next.

During the same month the present stamps, as well as the new ones, can be used indifferently for the franking of letters, patterns, and printed matter. On 1st September next the present stamps cease to frank correspondence, but can be exchanged for new ones. Letters, etc., franked with them will be considered as not franked.

The stamps at present in use can be exchanged at all post-offices until 31st October of this year, after which date they will not be of any value....

The Director General

MUZZI BEY

Alexandria, 11th July, 1867.