

EGYPT: THE 'NO-VALUE' OFFICIAL STAMP OF 1893

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This small, insignificant little stamp (Figure 1) can normally be found in used condition in many small collections of Egyptian stamps, but try and find one used on cover! It is a fascinating stamp to study, and it had a specific use and played its part in the philatelic history of Egypt.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 4

It all started early in 1889, with the Egyptian Postal Administration deciding that it needed some form of stamp for the prepayment of 'official letters', never having had one before. On 5 February 1889, Sir Y. Saba Pasha, the then Director-General of Posts in Egypt, wrote to De La Rue in England stating their intention (De La Rue had had the contract to print postage stamps for Egypt since 1879) to issue 'special stamps' for the prepayment of the postage of official letters. The letter went on –

'These stamps would 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 Sphinx and Pyramid (Figure 2) they would bear the inscription 'Service de l'Etat', in French and in Arabic according to the enclosed specimen. They would comprise the same duties as the stamps at present in use, except the 1 millieme, which is useless'.

Egypt had at that time postage stamps of the following values: 1 millieme; 2 & 5 milliemes; and 1, 2, 5 & 10 piastres.

De La Rue replied to the above letter some 10 days later giving quotations of costs, together with designs for six duties (essay for one of the values - the proposed 2 milliemes: see Figure 3). They promised delivery in about five months.



Figure 3

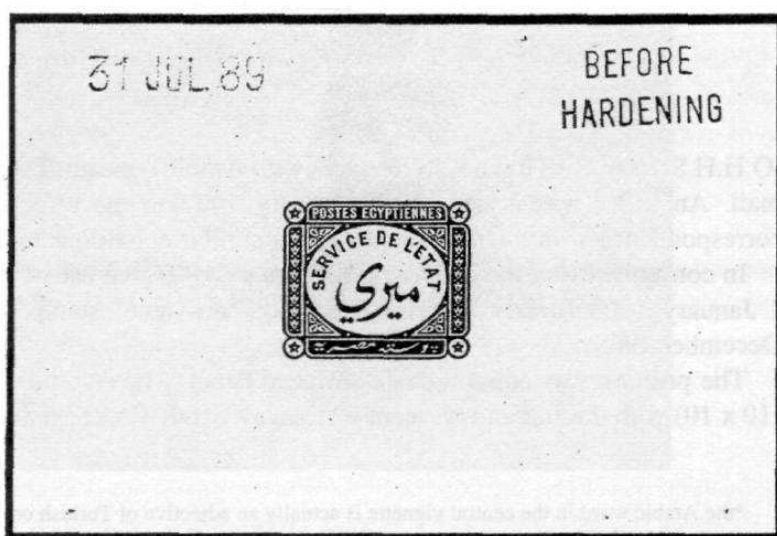


Figure 5: die proof

On 2 March 1889, the Egyptian Director of Posts wrote back saying that after receiving the designs they had considered the question and

'my office is disposed to adopt but one stamp without any duty and with the simple inscription 'POSTES EGYPTIENNES' and 'SERVICE DE L'ETAT' in French and Arabic. This stamp should be in a different colour from the stamps in use'.*

Further correspondence took place and a stamp (Figure 1) in chestnut-brown was finally produced. The stamp was prepared by De La Rue in an identical manner to that of the then current Egyptian postage stamps. It was printed by typography on paper watermarked with a 'star over a crescent' watermark (Figure 4). Examples are known with the watermark inverted. The stamps were produced in sheets of 240 made up of 4 panes of 60 (6 vertical x 10 horizontal) and perforated 14 horiz. x approx 13.5 vert. [Gibbons quotes the stamp as SG 01 perf 14 all round]. The usual die proofs in black on glazed card (Figure 5) are known marked either BEFORE or AFTER HARDENING, and BEFORE or AFTER STRIKING with the relevant date on which the die proof was made.

It had been decided by the Egyptian authorities that, from 1 January 1893, Government correspondence addressed to places in Egypt was to be franked with one 'no-value' stamp. One stamp franked any single item of Government correspondence, irrespective of size or weight and whether registered (Figure 7) or otherwise (Figure 8). There were certain exceptions: for example, unregistered correspondence of Ministers, Councillors and Under-Secretaries of State needed no stamp, provided that the sender's signature or office stamp appeared in the lower left corner of the envelope. Official journals and Government printed matter required neither stamp nor signature. Government correspondence addressed to places abroad required franking with ordinary postage stamps in exactly the same way as the correspondence dispatched by the general public.

In 1906, the Egyptian authorities requested De La Rue to overprint some of the current postage stamps 'O.H.H.S.' (On His Highness's Service) with Arabic beneath. These stamps were to be used on Government mail. An order was issued on 29 January 1907 to the effect that 'Administrations' must frank their correspondence with the new stamps under similar conditions to those in force for the public.



Figure 7: official mail from Minia

In consequence of the above, on 1 February 1907, the use of the 'no-value' stamp ceased. However, on 1 January 1909 (nearly 2 years later), the 'no-value' stamp was re-introduced by an order dated 17 December 1908.

The printing was now on chalk-surfaced paper. The stamps were produced in sheets of 6 panes of 100 (10 x 10) with the star and crescent watermark SIDEWAYS: the star to the left of the crescent when viewed from the front. The watermark can also be found reversed. As with the 1893 issue, dated die proofs in black on glazed card exist marked BEFORE or AFTER STRIKING (Figure 9). Imperforate, watermarked proofs in

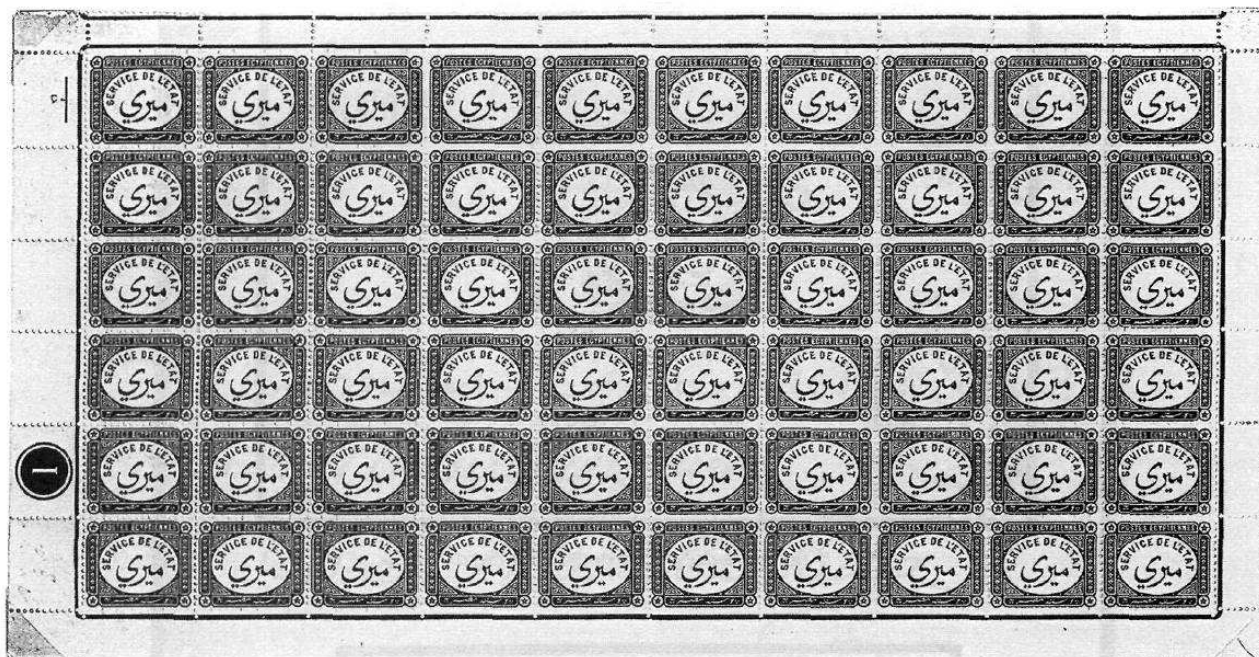


Figure 6: pane of 60 stamps

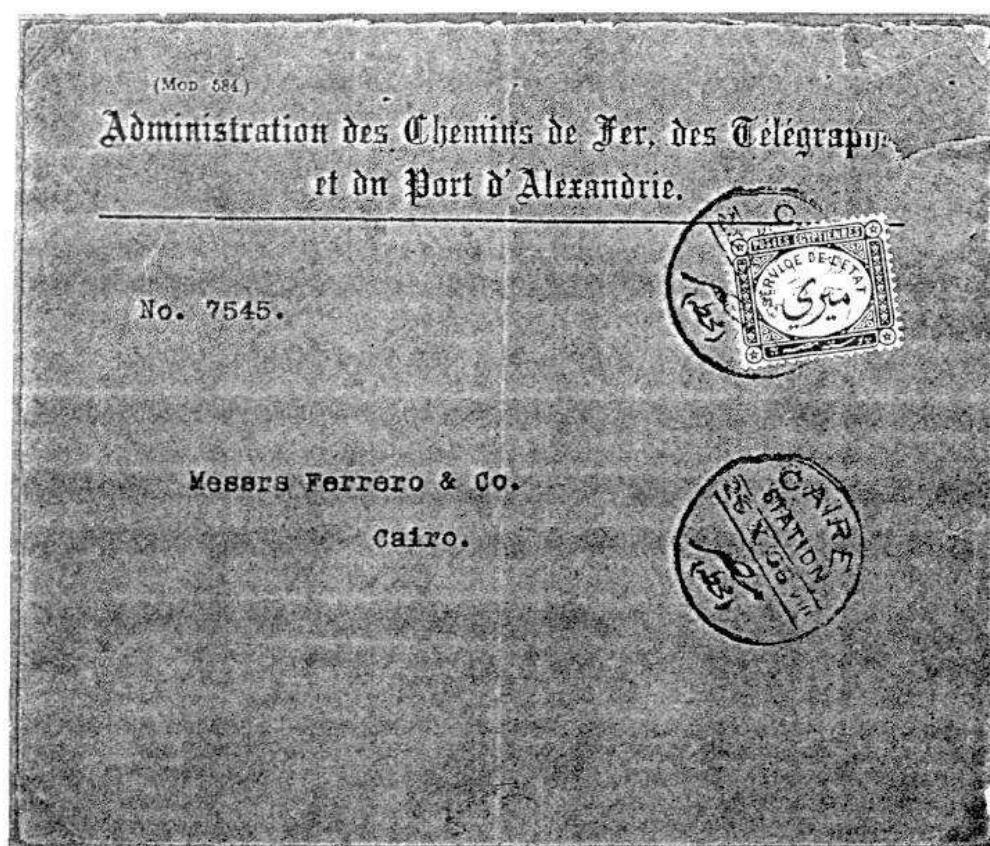


Figure 8: use at Cairo Station

the issued colour were also printed (Figure 10). These proofs can be found with the watermark upright as in the 1893 issue or reversed (star on the right of the crescent when viewed from the front).

From 1 January 1909, the existing regulations were modified as follows: one 'no-value' stamp was required for each item of inland unregistered Government correspondence (Figure 11). Insured letters and all parcels

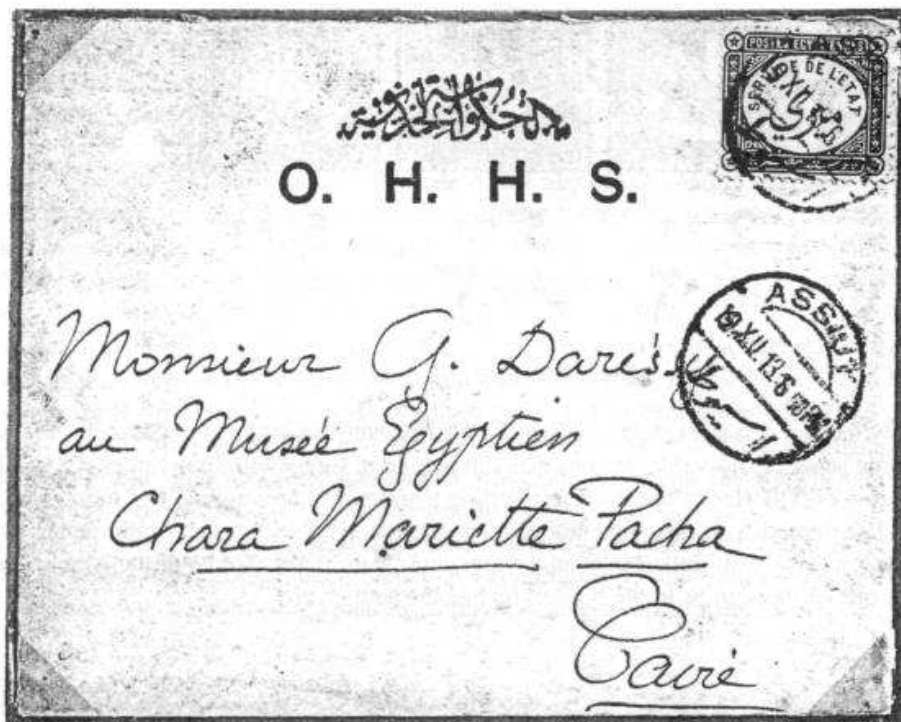


Figure 11: used at Assiut 19.12.1913

(previously paid for in cash) were to be franked with official (O.H.H.S.) stamps of the 1907 issue, to the amount of the charges. Inland registered letters each required one 'no-value' stamp for the postage, and official (O.H.H.S.) stamp/stamps in respect of the registration fee (Figure 12). Ordinary and registered correspondence addressed to places abroad were to be wholly franked with the official (O.H.H.S.) stamps.

By a Post Office instruction dated 22 February 1912, these stamps were made available to the public at Cairo and Alexandria post offices for 'collection purposes' at 1 piastre each. The same instruction provided for the cancellation of the stamps before their sale. On 10 August 1914, their sale was stopped and stocks returned to Postal Headquarters.

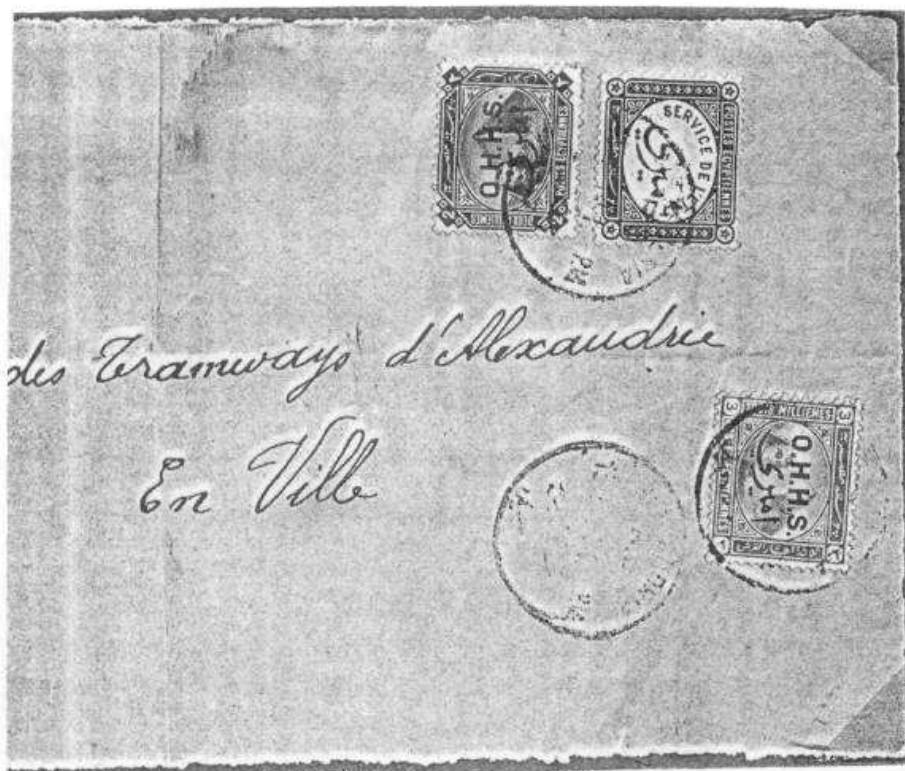


Figure 12: part of official registered cover (registration 5 mill)

The 'no-value' stamp was finally withdrawn from service on 2 September 1914, when its employment was replaced by the use of a steel stamp, indicating the relevant Government department, to frank the mail.



Figure 13: surcharged 'no-value' stamp

The remaining stock of 'no-value' stamps was surcharged in Egypt with four values (Figure 13) and used for revenue purposes. The size of the surcharge setting is unknown, as are blocks of more than four stamps. One error has been noted with this 'revenue' issue - the incorrect use of the Arabic letter 'wau' in the 3 pistras surcharge: a final 'wau' rather than an independent 'wau' in the middle of the Arabic surcharge. The error occurs in one of the stamps in the bottom row of the setting.

Acknowledgments:

John Easton - *The De La Rue History of British & Foreign Postage Stamps*, 1958.
 Peter R. Feltus - *Catalogue of Egyptian Revenue Stamps*, 1982.
 Douglas McNeille - *L'Orient Philatelique*, May 1939, N°41, Vol III, pp483 *et seq.*