

The Egyptian No Value Stamp.

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Early in 1889 the Egyptian Postal Administration in Alexandria decided that it needed some form of postage stamp for the prepayment of 'official letters'; never having had one before.

On 5th February 1889 Sir Y. SABA Pasha, the then Director General of Posts, wrote to De La Rue in England stating his department's intention (De La Rue had had the contract to print postage stamps for Egypt since 1878) 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 duties at present in use, but in the centre instead of the Sphinx and Pyramid 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 having at that time postage stamps of the following values:- 1, 2 & 5 millieme; 1, 2, 5 & 10 piastres.

De La Rue replied to the above letter some 10 days later giving costing quotes together with designs for six duties (these appear not to have survived). They promised delivery in about five months.

On March 2nd 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".

On 14th March De La Rue sent three proposed designs to Egypt. Two of them were upright in design Fig 1, the third, design being 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 third design was accepted by Egypt. As an economical alternative De La Rue also suggested overprinting the ordinary stamps and submitted a sample, using the 2mills. stamp. A set of essays exist (one of each value) of the ordinary stamp with the centre removed and hand-painted in with SERVICE DE L'ETAT in French and Arabic. The Arabic word in the central vignette is actually an adjective of Turkish origin and allied to the word Amir meaning Prince. It is pronounced "Meer'y" Fig 2.



Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3

Further correspondence took place and a stamp Fig 3 in chestnut brown colour was finally produced. The stamp was produced in an identical manner by De La Rue to the then current Egyptian postage stamps. Printed by typography on paper watermarked with the 'star over a crescent' watermark. Examples are known with the watermark inverted (scarce). The stamps were produced in sheets of 240 made up of 4 panes of 60 (6 vert. x 10 horiz.) and perforated 14 horiz. x approx 13.75 vert. (Stanley Gibbons quote the stamp as SG01 perf. 14 all round). A perforation variety, misalignment, exists whereby the row of horizontal perforations in the last vertical row of stamps on the right is 1mm. lower than the line of the rest of the horizontal perforations in the pane. Sheet plate control numbers 1, 2 & 3 are known. On 8th July 1892 a supply of 2,654,400 stamps was invoiced. The stamps were issued to the public on 1st

January 1893. The usual die proofs in black on glazed card Fig 4 are known marked either BEFORE or AFTER HARDENING, and BEFORE or AFTER STRIKING, with the relevant date on which the die proof was made. Imperforate watermarked proofs of the issued stamp were also produced.



Fig 4

It had been decided by the Egyptian Authorities that from 1st January 1893 Government correspondence addressed to places in Egypt was to be franked with the new 'no value' stamp. One stamp would frank any single item of Government correspondence, irrespective of size or weight and whether registered (Fig 5) or otherwise (Fig 6). There were certain exceptions, e.g. - unregistered correspondence of Ministers, Councillors and Under-Secretaries of State needed no stamp provided 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 or 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; therefore the 'no value' could not be used on mail addressed to foreign countries. This stamp has been seen on a cover from The Sudan.

In 1906 (possibly for financial reasons?) the Egyptian Authorities requested De La Rue to overprint some of the current postage stamps (1 millieme, 2, 3, & 5milliemes and 1 & 5 piastres values) - O.H.H.S. - (On His Highness's Service) with the Arabic "Meer'y" beneath. These stamps were to be used on Government mail. An order was issued on 29th 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.

In consequence of the above, on 1st February 1907 the use of the 'no value' stamp ceased.

However on 1st January 1909 (approx. 2 years later), for no apparent reason, the 'no value' stamp was re-introduced by an order dated 17th. December 1908. The printing was now on chalk surfaced paper.

In 1914 new plates were prepared; the stamps being produced in sheets of 2 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. Control (plate) numbers 1 and 2 have been seen. The watermark can also be found reversed. The reason for the watermark appearing sideways is because the then current postage stamps (the 1914 issue - printed by De La Rue) were printed in vertical format whereas the 'no value' stamp is of horizontal format and the paper had to be inserted sideways. This also dictated the new size of the sheets. For the actual printing, plates of 200 were joined together so as to produce sheets of 600, the panes being



Fig 5.

Official registered letter from Minia 20/7/1895

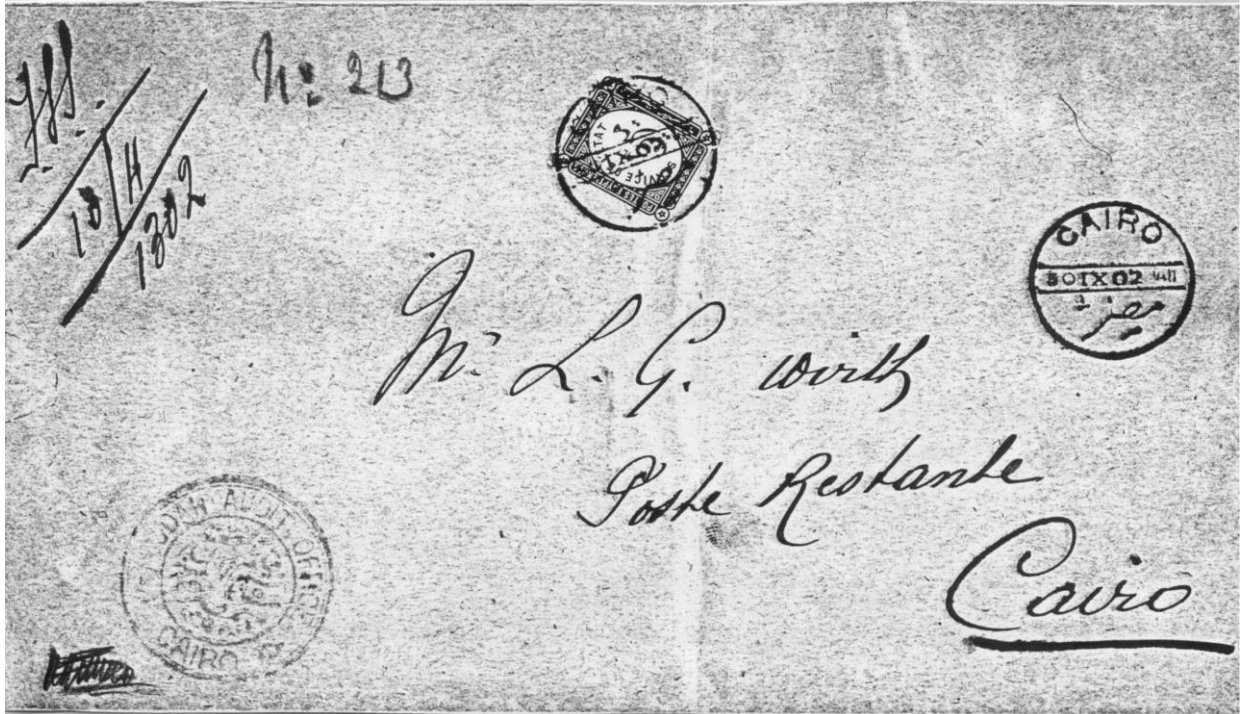


Fig 6.

30/9/1902 Cairo local letter from the Rodah Audit Office.

arranged 3 x 2. As with the 1893 issue, dated die proofs on black glazed card exist, marked BEFORE or AFTER STRIKING (Fig 7). Imperforate watermarked proofs in the issued colour were also printed. These proofs can be found with the watermark as issued, or reversed (star on the right of the crescent when viewed from the front).

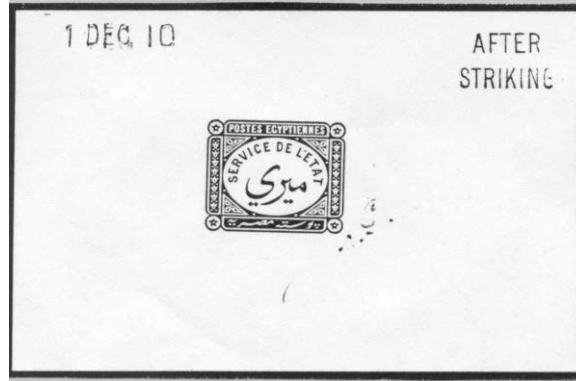


Fig 7

From 1st January 1909 the existing regulations were modified as follows:- one 'no value' stamp was required for each item of inland unregistered government correspondence Fig 8. Insured letters, and all parcels (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 Fig 9/10. Ordinary and registered correspondence addressed to places abroad were to be wholly franked with the official (O.H.H.S.) stamps.



Fig 8



Fig 9

Alexandria 4/6/1910 Registered Letter to Cairo.

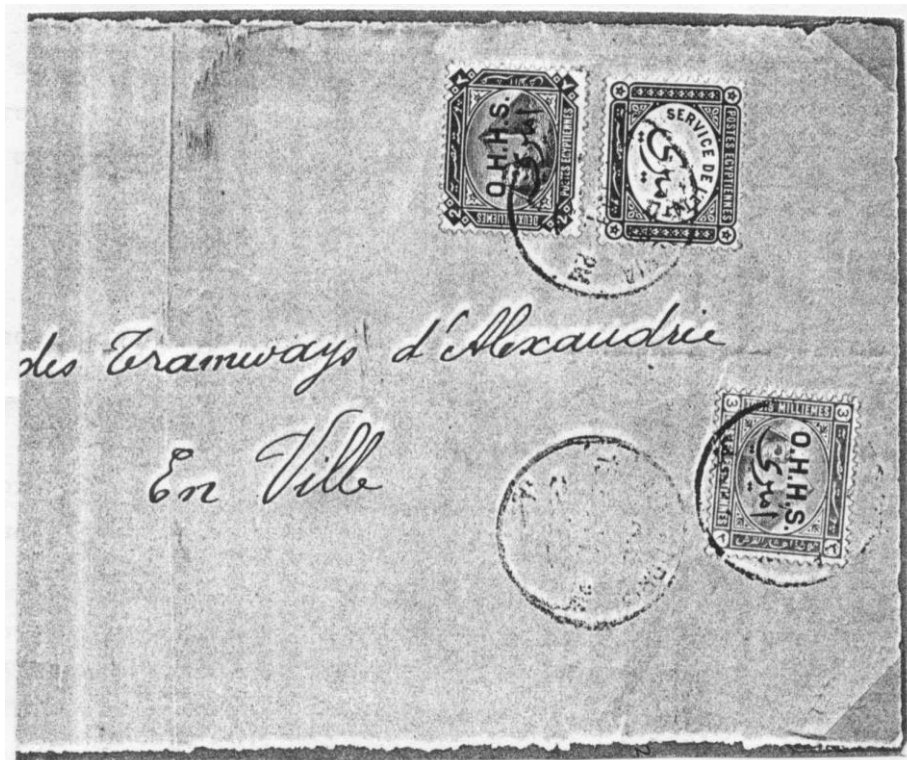


Fig 10.

Alexandria 15/1/1914. Part of a Large Official Registered Local Letter.

By a Post Office instruction dated 22nd 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 10th August 1914 their sale was stopped and stocks returned to Postal Headquarters.

The use of the 'no value' stamp was finally withdrawn from service on 2nd September 1914 when its use was replaced by using a steel stamp, indicating the relevant Government department, to frank the mail (however it has been seen on an official letter dated as late as 7th June 1916).

The remaining stock of 'no value' stamps were overprinted in Egypt with four values (see Fig 11) and used for revenue purposes. The size of the overprint setting is unknown, as are blocks of more than four stamps.



Fig 11.

One error has been noted with this 'revenue' issue - the incorrect use of the of the Arabic letter 'wau' on the 3 piastres overprint. A final 'wau' rather than an independent 'wau' in the middle of the Arabic overprint. The error occurs in one of the stamps in the bottom row of the setting. Figs 11/12 show examples of these stamps, the normal Government tax at that time being 3 piastres, used on documents. Prof. Peter Smith has reported one of these fiscally surcharged stamps used on a letter to pay the letter rate, notwithstanding the expressed face value.



Initial Final wau.

Acknowledgements: -

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|------------------|---|
| John Easton | - <i>The De La Rue History of British & Foreign Postage Stamps</i> , 1958 |
| Peter R. Feltus | - <i>Catalogue of Egyptian Revenue Stamps</i> , 1982 |
| Douglas McNeille | - <i>L'Orient Philatelique</i> , May 1939 No.41 Vol. III, Pages 483 et sec. |
| P.R. Bertram | - <i>The London Philatelist</i> Vol. 107 Number 1259 |
| P.A.S. Smith | - <i>Egypt, Stamps & Postal History - A Philatelic Treatise</i> . |

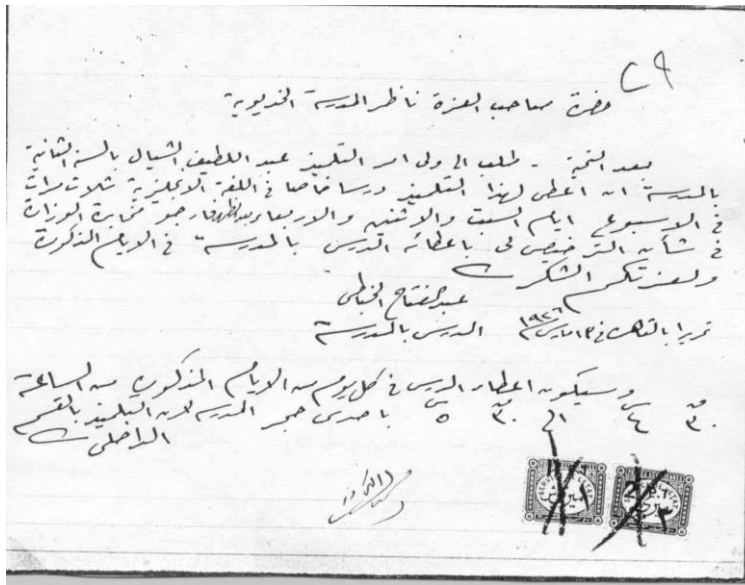


Fig 12

Cairo 1926. An application for permission to give English lessons to a pupil.

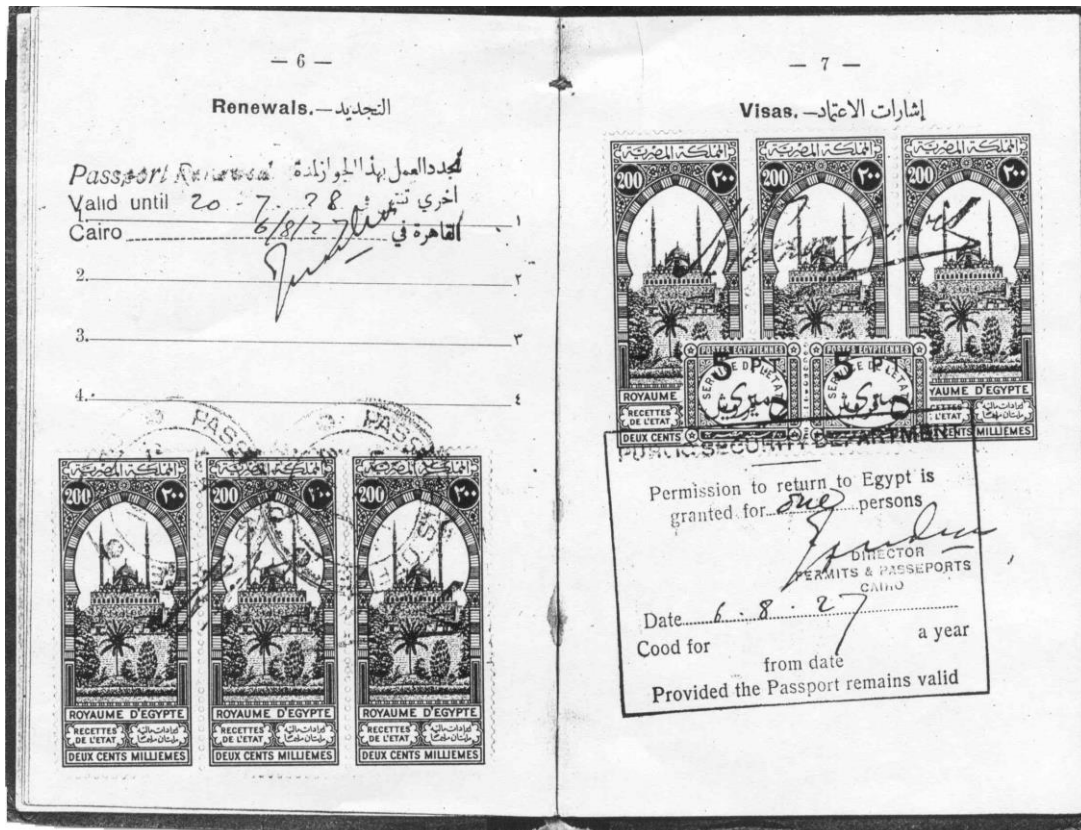


Fig 13.

A page from an Egyptian passport showing the use of official stamps overprinted 5 Piastres to pay the government tax on 6/8/1927