

### Egypt's new Booklet

**Mike Murphy (ESC 240)**

Egypt's last officially produced stamp-booklet was put on sale in 1954, containing four panes of six of the 10m sepia Defense soldier stamp (SG SB19, Balian 513, Nile Post SB18). Now, after a wait of half a century, there is another – perhaps. Amid some controversy, I hope that this article might clarify its status.

Early this year *Gibbons Stamp Monthly* published a news item and details in its New Issues section of a new and spectacular pictorial booklet that had just been issued, presumably having been sent for publication by the Philatelic Bureau of the National Postal Organization in Cairo.

When Robin Bertram and I visited Egypt in April we sought out the new booklet and found it freely on sale in post offices and via the Philatelic Sales Office in the main Post Office in Ataba Square. But from postal clerks and from the Philatelic Bureau we were assured that at £E80 (though the face value of the stamps is £ £51.95), this was a “souvenir issue” intended for tourists, and that the stamps had no postal validity. Nevertheless we bought some copies of the booklet.

The booklet is a beautiful thing, quickly described: titled “Discover the Treasures of Egypt in Stamps”, it is 150x110mm, cloth-bound at left, colourfully printed throughout with thin card covers, the front of which is pierced to reveal one of three vertical-format stamps on the first sheet – the high value of the set, an embossed 22 carat gold impression of the famous mask of Tutankhamun, with a face value of £E10. Like all other stamps in the booklet, this is inscribed “Egypt” in English and Arabic. The word “postage” does not appear, though the front cover of the booklet carries the wording “Contains 30 postage stamps”. Every stamp bears the imprint “Cartor” (*see below*).

As well as the £E10 value, the first pane of stamps, headed “Symbols of a Civilisation”, includes two £E5 values showing the Sphinx and Nefertiti's head from the Berlin Museum. Both are lightly embossed.

The second sheetlet carries three rows of three horizontal-format embossed stamps on a sand-coloured hieroglyphic-design ground, all valued at £E2 and showing various pharaonic designs; the third sheetlet again has 3x3 stamps, not embossed, valued at 125PT (overseas air mail rate) and bearing designs of Egypt's religions, Islam and Coptic Christian; and the fourth, again not embossed, has 3x3 stamps with designs of modern-day Egypt, valued at 30PT (local postage rate). None of the stamps is watermarked, and the perforation appears to be 13 ½ throughout. The sheets are interleaved with colourful photographs and explanations of Egypt's historical and tourist attractions.

The covers of the booklet carry a good deal of printing and design information. It would seem that the issue was indeed a production of the National Postal Organization in conjunction with Cultnat ([www.cultnat.org](http://www.cultnat.org)), the Egyptian Center for Documentation and Cultural Heritage based at the new Biblioteca Alexandrina, and sponsored by the Commercial International Bank. The concept and layout are credited to Armen Bodoyan and the Acacio Santos Studio (of Lisbon); with printing by Cartor Security Printing (a French company well known in the stamp printing world).

Apart from a rumour that, after printing in France, 20,000 of the booklets were reserved for sale there and 20,000 dispatched to Egypt, Robin and I were able to learn little more in Cairo. Since our return, however, the indefatigable Leon Balian (ESC 251) has been researching on our behalf and on his own account, to decide whether he should list the stamps in the forthcoming update to his catalogue *Stamps of Egypt*.

He reports the following: 1, the booklets can be bought (in any number) from the Philatelic Sales counter in the main post office; 2, the Philatelic Bureau did not have any at first, but later received a stock which however they did not send to subscribers because of the high face value; 3, there is now a First Day cancel available (the issue date is given as January 22) and FDCs are awaited; 4, the stamps may be used on mail (“if one is crazy enough to do so” - a comment by the Post Office staff about deliberate over franking).

In light of all the foregoing, and of the fact that one lucky member has received a letter from his sister in Egypt franked with a blocked of four of the “modern Egypt” 30p booklet pane (congratulations, Mustafa!), Leon considers the stamps a new definitive issue and will be listing them as such in his new publication.

But the clincher is yet to come.... while researching for this article, I happened upon a Swiss-based website I had not seen before, jointly conceived by the UPU and the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP) to develop the WADP Numbering System (WNS), that is, to create a database of all stamps issued by member authorities since the organisation's launch on January 1, 2002.

“The goal is,” it says, “for the WNS to become the central point of reference against which stamp issues can be verified, supporting the legal philatelic market by endorsing those stamps that are genuine.”

And crucially, “only those postage stamps that ... have undergone the process of verification of authenticity and registration (by the UPU) will be attributed a WNS number and added to the WNS website.”

So, is Egypt's booklet issue there on the website, authenticated as comprising genuine stamps officially issued? Yes it is. If you go to <http://www.wnsstamps.ch/en/> you will find there 13 pages of recent Egyptian stamps, starting with the Post Day issues of January 2003 (WNS numbers EG001.03 to EG 003.03) and including for January 22 2004 the full set of 30 stamps included in the booklet, numbered EG028.04 through to EG058.04. A gremlin has slipped into the numbering, however, for the next stamp listed is EG007.04, indicating that the booklet may have been viewed as a single item (though the stamps have been given individual numbers).

The database illustrates each stamp with astonishing clarity and gives details of each one, revealing that the perforation is in fact 13.4, and that - the only jarring note - the booklet was said to be printed by The Printing-House of the National Postal Organization - AR of Egypt. The website is remarkably up to date - the latest stamp registered (EG062.04) was issued on August 24 to mark a popular arts festival in Ismailia.

Given UPU authentication, I don't think there can any longer be any doubt about the fact that this is an official issue, and so the booklet should be listed with its illustrious predecessors. Members seeking copies should contact the Director of the Philatelic Bureau, National Organization of Posts, Ataba Square, 11599 Cairo, Egypt (and remember that it is cash with order; and hard currency at that!).



