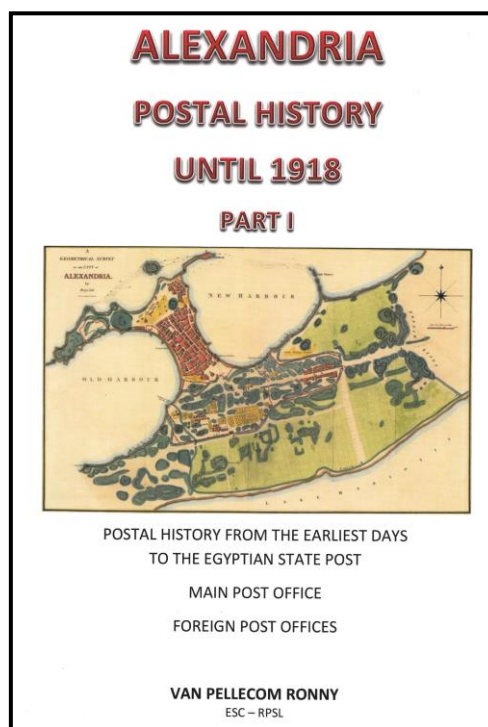


Book Review: ALEXANDRIA - Postal History until 1918 - Part 1, by Ronny Van Pellecom

Ronny Van Pellecom, with whom I had the pleasure of collaborating on the book *Ramleh-Alexandrie* (2010), has become renowned in philatelic circles for his thorough, keen and persistent research into postal history, spanning many countries to acquire information from various archives, libraries and organisations. Currently, with Alain Stragier, he is running a series of articles in the ESC *Quarterly Circular* on Egyptian *Railway Stations during 1879-1914*. His latest outstanding offering is this Postal History of Alexandria, a city which has always fascinated him and which he has frequently visited for his investigations.

In what is intended as a two-part study, this first volume deals with mail since ancient Roman times, through to 1914 in the city proper, as it evolved. The second volume, to come, will cover the districts of Alexandria (harbour, stations, Mariout), as well as the railway to Rosetta, and the impact of World War I on the area. This Part 1 relates the origins of correspondence to/from Alexandria since antiquity, through the Venetian Mail and letters forwarded by ship captains, on to Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign, 1798-1801, and its postal markings.



There follows the *Posta Europea*, and then the Foreign Consular Post Offices: Greek, French, Austrian, British, Russian and Italian. Each is dealt with in great detail, indicating its location, organisation and means of corresponding. There are no long dissertations; instead, in his own individual style, Ronny concentrates on illustrations of postmarks, letters, postcards, newspaper cuttings, biographical notes, official documents and maps to tell the stories. I am particularly gratified in that he has retained for the French P.O. the postmark numbering system which I introduced in my *French Post Offices in Egypt* (2012). For each Consular office there is an item to illustrate the use of virtually every postmark, and mixed frankings are included as well. All this makes for an extremely pleasurable visual experience. Minor factual or date inaccuracies which exist are dwarfed by the overall magnitude of the work. At the end of each chapter there is an extensive *Literature* list, acknowledging past researchers and listing their related works for reference and further reading.

The book itself is beautifully produced, its 296 all colour pages being very well printed on fine quality paper, between two sturdy illustrated hard covers. The Egypt Study Circle awarded Ronny a €650 grant towards the publication cost of this work, and it has been well repaid. Whether you are specifically interested in the subject matter or not, this is an attractive and informative book which will grace any philatelic library.

Nearly all the second half of this volume is dedicated to the Egyptian State Post and is really spectacular in its dealing with regular and auxiliary postmarks (registration, taxation, instructional markings), again with related fine covers or postcards. Contemporary events of various periods are included, such as the Egyptian National Exhibition, 1894, and the wreck of the steamship *Cairo*, 1905, on the approaches to the harbour. The Egyptian Postal Rates are fully displayed and various maps indicate the location of the Alexandria P.O. over time. Being the main topic, the latter is dealt with extensively, and there are pictures of buildings, mail box types, official notices, etc. One of my favourites is the *Catalogue des Meubles*, 1906, showing the schematic for the construction of standard Egyptian post office counters and furniture at the time; a good example of the depth of meticulous research Ronny has gone into. The book is a real tour-de-force, and the author should be warmly congratulated. Strongly recommended.

Pierre Louis Grech (ESC 266)

* *Alexandria – Postal History until 1918, Part 1*, is available immediately directly from the author (Groenstraat 50, B-2610 Wilrijk, Belgium; ronny.van.pellecom@telenet.be), who will bring copies to London 2020; or from the Secretary. The price is €70 (€60 to ESC members), postage is €17.