

# The Quarterly Circular of THE EGYPT STUDY CIRCLE



September Quarter 2020 – Vol XXIV No 3 – Whole Series No 274 – Pages 49-72

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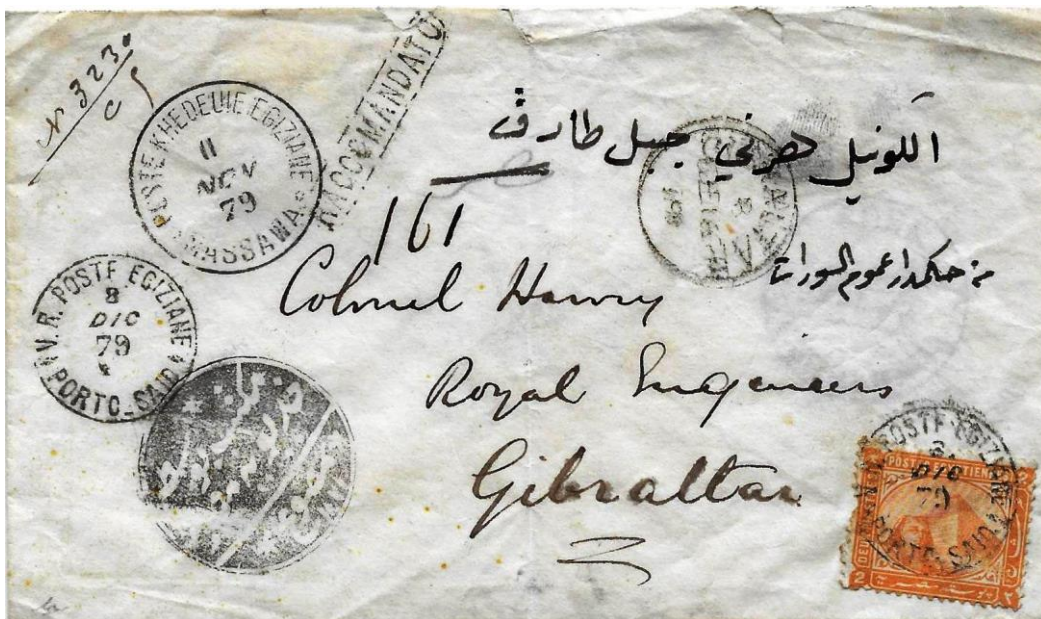
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*Massawa, November 11, 1879: Cover, written in the hand of General Charles 'Chinese' Gordon, docketed at top 'No. 323, C.G.' in manuscript addressed to Colonel Harvey of the Royal Engineers, Gibraltar. Massawa 'Maktab Bosta Khedewiya Masriya' negative seal handstamp in black (Egyptian Khedevial Post Office) and 'Poste Khedevie Egiziane / Massawa' datestamps at left. Suez transit (Nov 25) and cover awaited forwarding and mailed with 1879 2pi. orange cancelled at Port Said (Dec 8). Rare.*



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## Draft Meetings Programme

*Please bear in mind that the following programme is provisional only, dependant on government pandemic regulation*

Nov 14, 11-5	Victory Services Club	Auction 61 and Maritime	Pierre Louis Grech
Feb 20 2021, 2-4	Stampex	Sinai	All members
Spring 2021	Date, venue TBA	Postal Auction 62	All members
April 2021	Morley Hayes Hotel, Derby	Joint meeting with Sudan group	All members
Jul 3 2021, 2-5	Victory Services Club	Letters A-B-C-D and ten sheets	All members
Oct 2 2021, 2-4	Stampex	Room and postal Auction 63	All members
Nov 13 2021, 2-5	Victory Services Club	Conflict: wars, invasions etc	Speaker needed

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**Lockdown issues released at last**

**Vahe Varjabedian (ESC 390) and Mike Murphy (ESC 240)**

After what seems an enormously long delay, New Issues of Egypt have at last been released despite the problems of the coronavirus epidemic. Its effects are still being felt, however, and no-one has the vaguest idea of how long it might continue.

With fewer aircraft in our skies there are fewer opportunities for national postal organisations to carry their mails, and the cost of flying air mails is increasing. At the end of July Egypt Post started sending mail bags to European countries including Denmark, Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Germany and Italy, as well as Canada and Ethiopia, and other destinations were expected by the end of August.



Royal Mail in UK, however, after putting up all postal rates in March, has now invented a special category for mail to the United States, with hikes – admittedly only a few pennies, but it all counts – on all rates. A normal letter of 21-100 gm now costs £2.50 minimum – that’s an annual extra £16 just in postage to send US members the *QC*.

The much better news is that after a slow start Egypt is again producing new stamps for collectors, all so far printed at the local internal first step rate of £E5. The first two issues of the year – the traditional Post Day on January 2 followed by another single stamp marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pan-African Postal Union on January 18 – appeared as normal. Since then there has been a complete hiatus.

Now, however, three of the issues planned for March have all become available at once – 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Francophonie group, which Egypt joined in 1983; 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Arab League; and the economic census of 2018 by Egypt’s government agency for mobilisation and statistics. All have appeared finally in August, though their first-day cover dates appear as March 20, March 22 and March 31 respectively. Another new issue, for the centenary of Bank Misr, is said still to be awaiting its first-day handstamp!

*\* The Circle is very grateful to Vahe Varjabedian in Cairo for producing these covers and information.*

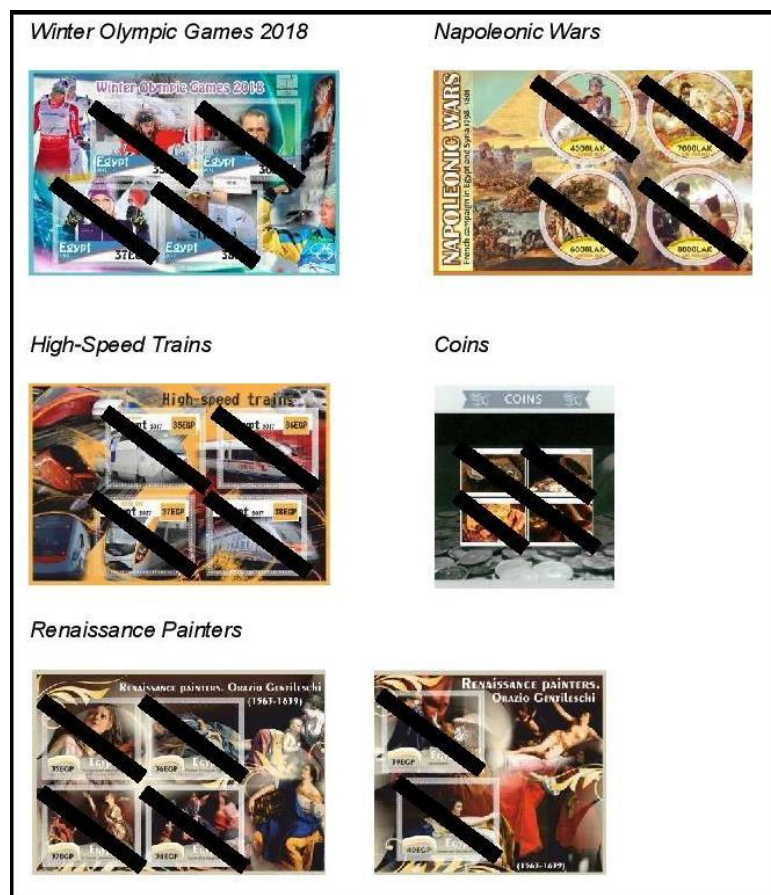


## UPU discloses Egyptian forgeries

Mike Murphy (ESC 240)

The Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Association for the Development of Philately (WADP) have combined to produce a very nice website that deserves more publicity ([wnsstamps.post](http://wnsstamps.post)). And what is more, it announced just last month that it is to be updated to make it even more useful. Essentially, the site's raison d'être is to list and illustrate all authenticated stamps issued by its member nations, which of course includes Egypt.

Access is easy, the search – for nation, for topic, or for period – is easy, and the results are immediate, with brief descriptions of ten stamps appearing per page. The site was set up in 2002, so Egypt's listing starts with the Post Day issue of 2003, and runs to 56 pages of illustrations complete with basic size, printing and perforation information. Clicking on an illustration allows access to a high-resolution version.



At the moment of writing the site lists all of Egypt's issues up to the end of 2019, but none yet for this year, reporting “the 2020 issuing programme is not available” (see previous page!). The site is quick to catch up with new issues, however, and as each stamp illustrated costs Egypt Post 50 Swiss francs, it is clear that Cairo feels its listing is important enough to continue.

What I had not realised, however, is that the site also carries a listing of UPU information circulars, something I had not previously bothered with. But when I clicked on the list I was amazed: it includes an official UPU notice warning against forged issues of Egyptian stamps, apparently produced to defraud the public, or at least the collectors.

The notice, headed “No 157/2017 – Egypt – Illegal Issues”, was issued on December 4 2017 and is signed by Jean-Alexandre Ducrest, UPU Director of Logistics. He says that Egypt Post has asked him to inform other member countries that the following series – all surely very tempting to the thematic or topical collector - “are being sold and distributed as stamps produced by Egypt”:

Winter Olympic Games 2018 (four issues on a miniature sheet); Napoleonic Wars (four issues on a miniature sheet); High-Speed Trains (four issues on a miniature sheet); Coins (four issues on a miniature sheet); Renaissance Painters (six issues on two miniature sheets). Unfortunately there is no detail on the fakers or their nationality.

The circular illustrates all the forged stamps obliterated by black diagonal strokes, and says that Egypt Post “confirms that these are illegal issues and are not valid as evidence of payment of postage....[it] strongly denounces and condemns such illegal issues.... as a flagrant violation of national legislation on postage stamp production.”

Obviously the site is doing a good job; and a notice on its front page promises even better with a new site “designed to adapt to the evolution of the philatelic market and to new technologies. It is intended to be more attractive, with enhanced search functionalities and allowing various activities to promote the philatelic products of all designated operators.”

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**Honour for Mahmoud:** The Circle is delighted to announce that our very good friend Mahmoud Ramadan (ESC 358, [m.ramadan@medmark.eg](mailto:m.ramadan@medmark.eg)), a senior member of the Philatelic Society of Egypt and author of a recent ground-breaking volume on the Mohamed Ali Post, has been appointed Egypt's representative for the Royal Philatelic Society of London.

## William Byam: founder of the Egypt Study Circle

**Richard Wheatley (ESC 168)**

The Egypt Study Circle was formed in 1935, the world's first "specialist" philatelic society. This remarkable event was due to the vision and determination of one man, William Byam.

William Byam (1882-1963) was a doctor who joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1904. After four years he was attached to the Egyptian Army and saw active service in Sudan. In 1912 he was with the Red Cross in Bulgaria during the Balkans War. When the First World War erupted in 1914 he was attached to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. In recognition of his service in all these campaigns he received several honours, including a particularly magnificent "gong" from Egypt clearly seen in the formal photograph (right). This award was announced in the *Journal of the Royal Medical Corps*, June 1913:



*The King has been pleased to give and grant unto Captain William Byam, RAMC, His Majesty's Licence and authority to accept and wear the Imperial Ottoman Order of the Medjidieh, Fourth Class, which has been conferred upon him by His Highness the Khedive of Egypt, authorised by His Imperial Majesty the Sultan of Turkey, in recognition of valuable services rendered by him.*



The award, instituted in 1851 for outstanding services to the state by foreign nationals, was last awarded in 1917. It is a striking medal, with the Royal cypher in gold in the centre, mounted on red enamel and surrounded by a seven-pointed star. Ten thousand were awarded, in five classes, the Fifth made of silver. Another recipient with connections to Egypt was Major General Charles George Gordon (of Khartoum).

After the war Byam retired with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. In the army he had researched how to treat trench fever, a louse-borne disease, and shortly after set up a practice in Harley Street, London, as a consultant in tropical diseases. In 1923 he took up philately to relieve the stress of the consultancy and chose to collect the stamps of Egypt, which he took to the highest level. The next year he joined the Royal Philatelic Society, to whom he gave two displays: *Postage Dues of Egypt* and *Egypt 1872-5 issue*, and won nine gold medals at international exhibitions.

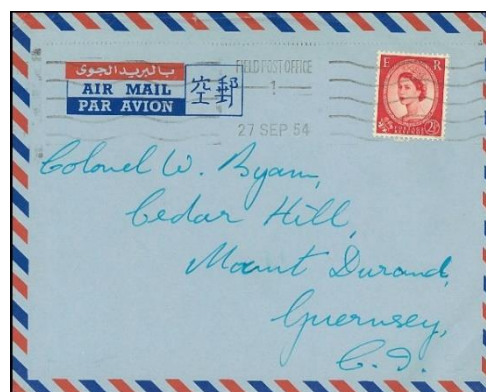
In 1932 he bought land in Guernsey and built an Art Deco house in 1937. It was requisitioned for German officers during the occupation of the Channel Islands, perhaps because of its proximity to the German underground hospital!

Here are two covers addressed to William Byam reflecting the two sides of his remarkable working life:



**1950 (Sept 25) to Les Divettes, from fellow Egyptian philatelist Jean Boulad (Ismailia)**

**1954 (Sept 27) to Cedar Hill, from UTM Thomas, BMEO, (British Middle East Office), MELF 10**



BMEO: A Foreign Office initiative to "co-ordinate measures for economic and social development of British Territories in the area" with headquarters in Cairo, up to March 1952. Middle East Land Force 10 was at Fayed in the Canal Zone, on the western shore of the Great Bitter Lake, 23km south of Ismailia.

## An Egyptian Syndicate – power, politics and a sculpture

Dr David Jones (ESC 716)

Rising nationalistic sentiment in Egypt after the 1919 revolution was the inspiration for the most famous sculpture of the artist Mahmoud Mukhtar (1891-1934), *Egypt Awakened*, also known as *Egypt's Renaissance* or *Nahdat el Masr*. In 1928 the Aswan granite statue (*below left*) was installed outside Cairo's main railway station. Later, in 1955, it was moved to Cairo University in Giza where it stands today (*below right*). This colossal modernist piece of public art stands 3m high and stretches 4m long. It depicts a peasant woman (*fallāḥa*) who with her left hand lifts her headdress (*tarhah*) in a gesture of unveiling symbolic of liberation. She rests her right hand on the headdress of the impressive rising Sphinx, representational of Egypt's ancient glorious history. The peasant woman is a symbol of a modern Egypt, a nation connected to its past.



**Mahmoud Moukhtar supervising work on Nahdat el Masr**



**Nahdat el Masr  
Cairo University: Giza**

What does this poignant national symbol, one that evokes the past as a vision for the future, have to do with any revenue stamps of Egypt? It begins with an unrecorded and seemingly unconnected single revenue stamp that appeared very briefly sometime in 1923. Successive years will see its design evolve as well as changes in the name of the professional syndicate that issued it. In each case these can be seen as a reflection of both royal and political developments in Egypt and the external influence of the British Empire.

### **An Early Professional Syndicate**

This small sheet, 5.5cm x 8cm (*right*), was once part of a document of identification and membership that would have been carried by all professional employees of the royal court of King Fouad, such as personal secretaries, royal cabinet ministers, royal officers and the like. Affixed to this page is what looks more like a label than a revenue stamp (*enlarged image far right*) and though it appears to have no monetary value, it does have something to say. The crude images of the Pyramid and the Sphinx each side of shaking hands have some significance and a link to *Nahdat el Masr*. Clearly, the Sphinx is an obvious pictorial one but collectively all three have a message that can be understood by appreciating what is written beneath.



**Page from a document of identification and membership for the Syndicate of Royal Affairs: May 1923**



**Enlarged image of the membership stamp:  
May 1923**

The first line of the text translates as “Syndicate of Royal Affairs Employees”. In Egypt a “syndicate” is a legal entity that organizes and defends the rights and interests of the workers who form its membership. The oldest syndicate, established in 1912, is the Lawyers Syndicate, which became the model for all the other professional syndicates that followed.

The Medicine, Teaching, Engineering and Journalist Syndicates were each formed in the 1940s and 1950s. The date on the stamp is 1923, so the formation of this Syndicate of Royal Affairs Employees predates them all. On March 16 1922 the Sultan of Egypt, Fouad I, became King. Under royal instruction, his personal secretary, Ahmed Bel Ehsan, formally organized any retained staff from the sultanate household and newly appointed professionals to the royal court along the lines of the Lawyers Syndicate. Consequently, the Syndicate of Royal Affairs Employees was created. The significance of the images on the stamp can perhaps be interpreted but not really known. In my opinion, viewing the Pyramid as symbolic of pharaonic power and the Sphinx of Egypt’s ancient grandeur and strength, it appears that the syndicate is acknowledging the past and is working in union for the betterment of the future of the new monarchy. A little too prosaic perhaps, but this sense of nationalism crudely presented on this syndicate stamp has some resonance with the nationalist sentiments that inspired *Nahdat el Masr*.

The second line of text on the stamp reads “Stamp of May 1923 Subscription” so the employee who owned the ID containing this page did pay a monthly fee to belong to the syndicate; in the ID the subscription fee is stated as being 50 millièmes a month. As the enlarged image (*above far right*) shows, the stamp has also been cancelled with the unreadable signature in blue ink of the general secretary of the syndicate. The page is empty for further monthly subscriptions; this is because of what happened later in the year.

### A New Name and a New Design – Part One

A slightly larger page (6cm x 8.7cm - *below left*) has a single stamp, now crudely perforated, affixed. The design differences are obvious but what should be noted is the date in the stamp’s left border: ١٩٢٣ (1923). This is significant because the text in the top margin reads: “Syndicate of Royal Government Employees”.



**Page from a document of identification and membership of the Syndicate of Royal Government Employees 1923**



**Enlarged image of the membership stamp: 1923**

I mentioned that the issue of the stamp for the Syndicate of Royal Affairs Employees was brief. It now appears that it was used only for a matter of months. Professional employees in government posts had apparently expressed a view that they should also be syndicate members, one assumes to gain the benefits provided.

Agreement was reached and as a result the syndicate was renamed and its membership revenue stamp redesigned. The crude design elements of the earlier stamp have now been replaced with more textual information and an image of *Nahdat el Masr*. Looking closely at the unrecorded stamp (*enlarged image above right*), it has again been cancelled, this time in red ink, by the same unreadable signature of the general secretary of the syndicate as on the earlier May stamp of 1923.



I say earlier because printed in the right margin is the month of November. In the bottom margin is something new, a membership number, 8555. Again there is no indication of any monthly membership cost as the stamp carries no value. Elsewhere in the ID, however, the subscription fee is stated as being 60 millièmes. The most significant change is the central image of *Nahdat el Masr* - but the public unveiling of the statue occurred only in 1928: how could there be an image of it on this stamp? It appears that Mukhtar had first exhibited a much smaller version or model in Paris in 1920 (*below left*) when Egyptian members of the nationalist Wafdist movement saw it. A campaign to finance a large-scale commission of the piece by private funding followed, but a large sum of Egyptian public money was eventually needed to see the project to completion.



**Model of Nahdet el Masr,  
Paris: 1920**

In 1921 the Egyptian government gave the green light to the erection of the sculpture, but over the next three years there was some delay as a result of political infighting between the Wafd movement, which supported the sculpture, and a palace-friendly government that opposed anything the Wafdists backed. The Wafd organized itself as a political party in September 1922 and gained power in the election of 1923-24. This shift in national politics mirrors closely the changes made in 1923 to the name of the syndicate and the design of its membership stamp. Further developments were yet to occur, however, while the project to erect *Nahdet el Masr* regained momentum.

### A New Name and a New Design – Part Two

Below are pages from more syndicate identification and membership documents, but not now for the Syndicate of Royal Government Employees as the text in the top margin of the unrecorded stamps reads “Syndicate of Government Employees”. Once more the syndicate has been renamed and the design of its membership stamps refined.



**Pages from documents of identification and membership for the  
Syndicate of Government Employees: 1926 - 1927**

The dates on the stamps affixed to the two pages (*above left*) are printed in the left margin and the month on the right. Those on the right-hand page are July to December 1926 and on the left January to April 1927. The stamps on the single page (*above right*) are dated July to December 1927. The hand-stamped cancellation on each stamp is hard to discern but on close examination it is possible to make out the image of Pyramids (*below right*). This image is very similar to that on the top margin of the very first stamp of the syndicate.

Enlargement of the syndicate membership stamp for October 1927 (*below left*) shows how the image of *Nahdat el Masr* is of finer quality and a good likeness of the actual monument yet to be unveiled in 1928.



**Enlarged image of the syndicate membership stamp: 1927**



**Pyramid cancellation**

For the first time the syndicate now states the monthly membership cost on its stamp: “Monthly Subscription 60 millièmes” in the bottom margin. Why “Royal” has been removed from the name may perhaps have to do with the political climate in Egypt at the time. During the 1920s and 1930s political infighting between pro-palace and opposition groups was common. Given this, the success of the anti-palace nationalist Wafd party in winning the 1925 election could well have played a part in the removal of “Royal” from the syndicate’s name.

### **A New Name and New Design – Part Three**

Below (*left*) are pages from documents of identification and membership of the syndicate from the 1930s with an enlargement of a membership stamp (*below right*).



**Pages from documents of identification and membership for the Syndicate for Government Employees: 1934 – 1935**



**Enlarged image of the syndicate membership stamp: 1934 - 1935**

The design elements of the 1934-35 unrecorded stamps (*above left and enlarged right*) are distinctively different. First, the pages of the booklet are smaller, as are the stamps, and the image of *Nahdat el Masr* is crudely rendered. Secondly, the information has been rearranged. The month in text and date in numerals is now very prominent in the top border (*1934 right page, 1935 left page*). The bottom border contains the text “Syndicate of Government Employees”. The monthly subscription is now printed fully in the left border “sixty millièmes” and in numerals in the right border. Each stamp bears a hand-stamped cancellation of the unreadable signature of the general secretary of the syndicate.



**Pages from documents of identification and membership for the Syndicate for Government Employees 1935 - 1936**



**Enlarged image of the syndicate membership stamp 1935 - 1936**

The dates of these unrecorded stamps (*above left and enlarged right*) are 1935 on the right and 1936 on the left page. The design is very similar to examples from the 1920s. Why those dated 1935 are in various colours, like those from 1925, is unknown. Text in the bottom margin reads “value of monthly subscription 60 millièmes”. The left margin has the month in text and year in numerals and the right margin text for “month” is followed by the name of the month. All bear the “pyramid” cancellation. The most notable change is the text in the top margin: “Syndicate of Egypt Government Employees”. Why include “Egypt” in the name?

I suggest it again reflects political change. Though the British had abolished the protectorate over Egypt in 1922, complete independence had been elusive. The British had insisted on retaining responsibility for the security of British Empire communications, defence and the protection of foreign interests in Egypt and Sudan. The Wafd movement expressed outcry but Sultan Fouad accepted the conditions and became King of a so-called independent Egypt. It was not until 1936, when the Wafd party negotiated the Treaty of Alliance with the British, that Egypt finally became a truly independent nation. A further event in 1936 could also be seen to have further influence on the syndicate: the accession to the throne of King Fouad’s son, Farouk.

#### **A New Name and New Design – Part Four**

Below (*left*) a small (5.5cm x 7cm) hard-backed dark blue booklet opens out to reveal the final examples of the syndicate’s unrecorded membership revenue stamps. Their design is very different from all that have been seen so far. The text on the page (*far left*) reads: “Personal Beneficial Identification” and “Permit to its bearer to enjoy the financial and free benefits” and is signed “The Financial Secretary”. Within the outer design of the stamps is printed, above, “The Syndicate of Government Employees” and below “Under the blessing of his Majesty the King” (*enlarged images below right*).



**Identification document and membership for the Syndicate of Government Employees 1951 - 1952**



**Enlarged images of the Syndicate Membership stamp 1951 – 1952 Overprinted in red - 10 piastres (left)**

The year is printed numerically at bottom left and the month in text bottom right. Between, at the far bottom of the stamp, is the monthly subscription. The two stamps dated 1951 are printed 60 millièmes; this has been surcharged in red (*above right*) by a new value of 10 piastres. The six stamps on the centre page, all dated 1952, have a monthly subscription cost of 100 millièmes. These have a hand-stamped cancellation containing three elements, the text “The Union” and the “month” and the abbreviated year: 52. The two stamps of 1951 have been cancelled with the hand-stamp signature of the general secretary of the union. What is undoubtedly most notable is the radical change in design of the syndicate’s membership stamps. In the centre of the new design is a bundle of rods and a broken axe: what is its meaning?

King Farouk began his reign as *malik al mahbub* – The Beloved King. His accession changed Egyptian politics from a popular nationalist Wafd party and an unpopular King Fouad to a popular Wafd party and an even more popular King Farouk. The central image of a broken axe and a bundle of rods is a clear anti-nationalist statement. The *fasces*, a set of rods bound in a bundle containing a projecting axe, was the symbol used by the Italian National Fascist Party (*right*).

Rooted in ancient Rome, it embodied strength in unity. Separated, the rods and axe could be broken; bound together, they were unbreakable. It seems the Syndicate of Government Employees at some time during King Farouk’s reign replaced the nationalistic symbolism of *Nahdat el Masr* with a strong message. The imagery on the syndicate’s stamps of the broken *fasces* surrounded by the dominance of the monarchy in the form of the Crowned Order of Muhammad Ali was clearly meant to show that the King controlled the Egyptian Government and not vice versa. Unfortunately, events were to prove otherwise.



**‘Fasces’  
Bound rods  
containing an axe**

The top right membership revenue stamp, dated July 1952 on the middle page of the identification and membership document for the Syndicate of Government Employees 1951-52, is particularly poignant. Wide condemnation of King Farouk’s corrupt and ineffectual governance, continued British occupation and the outcomes of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 contributed to a military coup on the evening of July 25 1952. The next day Farouk was forced to abdicate. It would be almost a year before the revolutionary government formally abolished the monarchy, and this could well be why there are membership stamps present for the rest of the year.



There is no evidence of further revenue issues for post-revolution membership of the Syndicate of Government Employees so one can reliably assume it ceased to exist. However, not all was swept aside as *Nahdat el Masr* standing in Giza would again make its presence known through its use on a future revenue issue of Egypt (*left*).

**Left: Nahdat el Masr Consular Issue 1986 - 2011**

I am indebted to Dr Sherif Taera for his invaluable philatelic expertise in this field, his knowledge regarding the syndicates of Egypt and his support regarding translations of the Arabic text.

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### Photographs/Images

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## Princess Nofret staring at a fly

Vincent Centonze (ESC 571)

If you ask Egypt collectors what stamp enticed them to collect the country, many will respond that it was a pyramid issue. However, the 1958 3-millièmes large definitive Princess Nofret stamp (*right*) was the one that attracted me. Admittedly, it's neither colourful nor a particularly artistic rendering, so I can't quite explain why it piqued my interest. It must have been the sheer repetitive sorting of the issue from the many packets and mixtures I eagerly purchased in the 1960s. After encountering this stamp over and over, I finally asked myself, "who *is* that lady?" So, imagine my delight after all these years as an Egypt collector when I identified what I believe to be an unreported constant plate flaw on one of my favourite issues.



The stamp was printed in photogravure by the Survey Department in Cairo in red-brown in sheets of 100 (10x10). It was watermarked with Eagles and Egypt; and is known with watermark inverted. The stamp is comb perforated gauge 13x13.5 and imperforate copies exist. All sheets carry Control number A/58 in roman letters in the right margin adjacent to stamp 100, and in Arabic in the lower margin beneath stamp 100. Sheets with bilingual PALESTINE overprints in green were prepared at about the same time.

Position 1 contains a constant plate flaw in the shape of a small square of some 0.5mm with a dot in the middle (*left*). Its top is level with the lower edge of the headband on Nofret's wig and 6.5mm to the right of the headband. The flaw is obvious on well-centred copies but is easily obscured by the perforations if they are shifted even slightly to the left. This probably accounts for the difficulty identifying the flaw. I have seen it in no other position.



This makes sense because the flaw was most likely due to a bubble in the plate emulsion or a speck of debris on that cliché during the plate's creation. I believe such varieties can be confirmed only from at least three identical position pieces because only two examples of undetermined position leave open the remote possibility of separate pieces of debris on two unconnected passes through the press. These I would consider printing freaks rather than bona fide plate varieties.

I have therefore identified the flaw on four items clearly attesting to the stamp's position: two upper left multiples of 12 with upright watermark, a full sheet with inverted watermark, and in an upper left multiple of 12 with overprint. I have not found it on an imperforate stamp, though now I hope someone will confirm that before too long. Because it appears as if Nofret is staring at a fly, I've dubbed the stamp the "Staring at Fly" variety, at least until a better name comes along.

As a side note, on my first visit to the Egyptian Museum during my trip to the Philatelic Society of Egypt's 90th anniversary celebrations in September 2019, I was thrilled to see the full statue of Princess Nofret with her husband, Prince Rahotep, Middle Kingdom high priest of Amun. The stamp design was taken from this statue (*top right*). It goes without saying that it does little justice to the statue, which is far more beautiful than I had imagined. I've known her since I was eight years old, but it was nice to finally introduce myself.

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**Colin Narbeth RIP:** The Circle is sad to have learned of the death on May 2 of Colin Narbeth FRPSL (ESC 615), a dedicated philatelist and collector of coins and banknotes. He was 90. His main love was Sudan and South Sudan but since joining the Circle in 2007 he had been a friend and mentor to many.

## Book Review: **The Simon Arzt Story**, by **Richard Wheatley (ESC 168)**

Most Egypt Study Circle members will be familiar with the name Simon Arzt from postmarks, postcards, cachets, decorative stationery and Cigarette Tax adhesives, but how many of us are aware of the full story behind a company that is as integral to the history of the city of Port Said as it is to Egypt over the past 150 years.

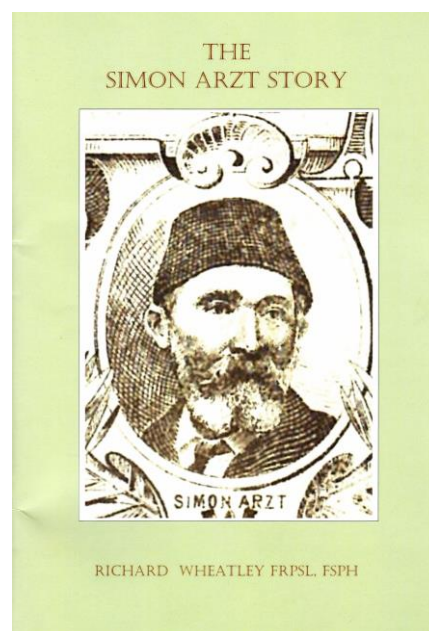
Situated on the Mediterranean, Port Said owes its existence to the Suez Canal and it is here that Simon Arzt, a Jewish immigrant, set up his first store in 1869 manufacturing and selling cigarettes. It was no coincidence that this was the same year that the Canal was opened. Crews and passengers stretched their legs wandering the streets near the waterfront whilst their ships using the new canal were being refuelled and re-provisioned. Hotels, travel firms and other businesses grew to satisfy their every requirement.

Covering a period of around 100 years within its 42 pages, this monograph is crammed with detail, profusely illustrated and brings together all that is currently known about Simon Arzt and his company from its beginnings as a cigarette manufacturer to a department store that looked after the needs and wants of travellers, in particular those from the shipping passing north and south through the Suez Canal.

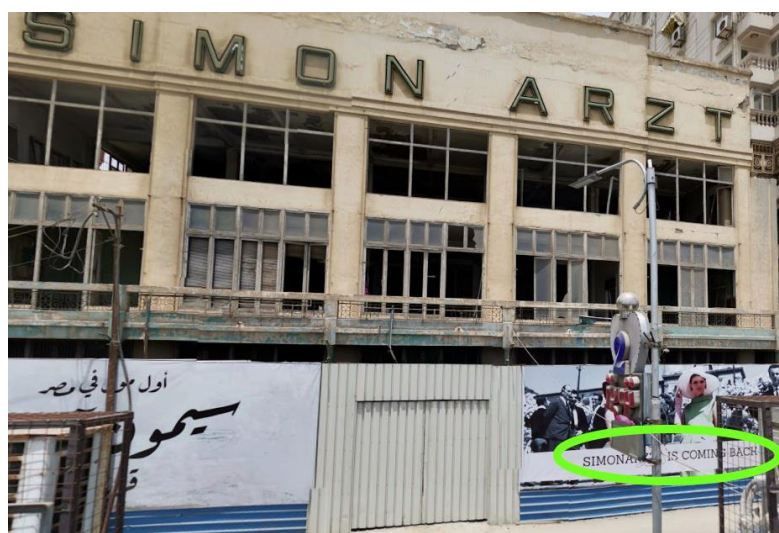
The booklet is split into sections covering what is known about the man and his family, the history of the company and its stores, advertising stationery, Egyptian cigarettes, promotional cachets and handstamps and, of course, the in-house Post Office and its postmarks. It is clear that the company had a certain flair for self-promotion and advertising, and this is shown through its stationery, cards, cachets, cigarette tins, etc.

An informative read, this booklet is highly recommended to members and should appeal to all, whether or not we collect anything related to Simon Arzt, as it paints a vibrant picture of life in Egypt and the businesses providing all manner of goods and services to visitors during the heyday of the Suez Canal. – **Andy Gould (ESC 383)**

*\* Richard's book, full of colour illustrations in card covers, is available from the author at 7 Manor Croft, Leeds, LS15 98W, UK or arewhyuu@outlook.com. Special price for members: UK £8.65, overseas £12.00*



As an aside, the iconic late 1920s Art Deco building that housed the Simon Arzt store from 1932 until its closure in the 1960s is, as Richard's book mentions, a protected building on the Port Said waterfront. Mike Murphy photographed it in 2001 as part of the Au Salon Vert haberdashery chain, but this 2019 illustration from Google Maps shows a large bilingual advertisement on its protective hoarding declaring: "Simon Arzt is coming back". – **Andy Gould**



## Ismailia - Timsah

Pierre Louis Grech (ESC 266)

*(This article is dedicated to the memory of Jean Boulad d'Humières, former President of the Philatelic Society of Egypt, and ESC 16, who worked for the Suez Canal Company at Ismailia for 20 years. A long time ago he kindly gave me some jottings about the Canal, which are incorporated in what follows).*

Situated in the desert of the Isthmus of Suez, mid-way between Port-Saïd and Suez, the town of **Timsah** was founded after work began on excavating the Suez Canal in 1859. "Timsah" means "crocodile" in Arabic, and it was so named because of the shape of a nearby depression in which a future lake was to be created by the arrival of the Canal waters. This depression had vaguely the form of a crocodile, and on the western shore of that lake the new town would eventually stand. The first encampment dated from 23 November 1859, but officially the "first stone" was laid on 27 April 1862. Although a wall-plaque at the corner of Rue Sala and Rue el-Gueish commemorated laying the "first stone" in 1861!

Timsah had been destined to be the capital of the Isthmus due to its location, equidistant (about 75km) from Suez and Port-Saïd, and was to be the main port of the Suez Canal. However "fate" decreed otherwise, to the advantage of Port-Saïd, which in time developed and grew to take over that mantle instead. But Timsah, with broad avenues decorated by numerous flower beds and gardens, "remained the tidiest, most coquettish and greenest of all the agglomerations created in the region", which until then had been a barren uninhabited desert in the eastern part of Egypt (*see Figures 17 and 19*). It remained so until modern times.

Excavation of the Canal began on a Mediterranean beach on 25 April 1859, at the emplacement of the future city of Port-Saïd, named after Saïd Pacha. It would be ten years before the Canal was finally inaugurated, and the detailed story of de Lesseps's incredible undertaking has been related before. Briefly put, the initial work was executed manually by up to 20,000 Egyptian labourers under the *corvée*. This manpower was abolished in 1864, halting further progress. There was also a huge cholera epidemic throughout the country in 1865. When work resumed in 1866 it was with powerful steam-driven excavating machines from France. Three quarters of the total cubic feet of earth involved in digging the Canal was removed by the company of Borel and Lavalley, while the smaller enterprise of Mr Couvreux dealt with the most difficult part of the route, the crossing of the "seuil d'El-Guisr". (the El-Guisr ridge), about four miles north of Timsah.

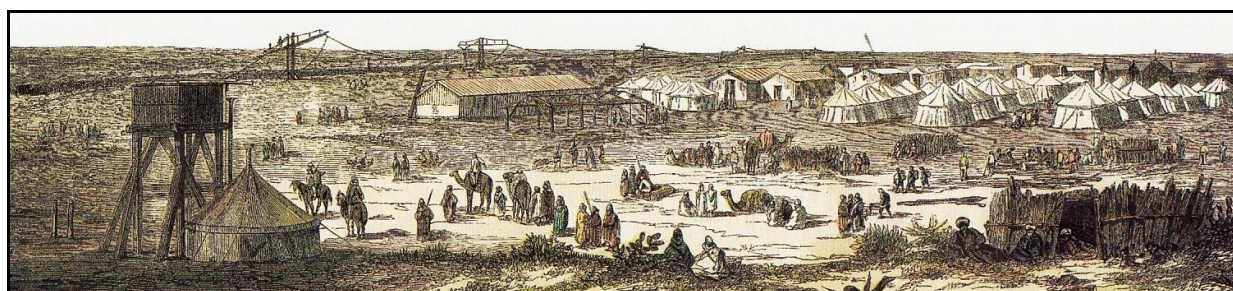


Figure 1 - The central establishment of the work-station at the "Seuil d'El Guisr", c. 1866.

Along the route of the Canal there were three formidable obstacles, consisting of tall ridges of rock and sand. The highest (20m) was El-Guisr, north of Timsah; the second, Serapeum, between Timsah and the Great Bitter Lake; the third, Chalouf (where explosives were used), was between the Little Bitter Lake and Suez.

Early on, a small service channel (*Rigole de Service*), 24m wide and 2.5m deep, was dug up alongside the projected route, from Port-Saïd to Timsah, to enable supplies and equipment (and mail) to be delivered to the various work-sites (*chantiers*). This had to be dug by hand in the mud of Lake Menzaleh, until a channel was made stable enough to allow the dredgers to come into action. The *rigole* reached the dry Lake Timsah bed on 18 November 1862, and began filling it up with water from the Mediterranean (which took five months). The administration of the Canal (*Siège Central de la Direction des Travaux*) was at first installed at Damietta, the nearest town (60km) from the site of Port-Saïd. Everything for the work-sites along the Canal, materials and supplies, had to be transported by boat across Lake Menzaleh or by ship from Alexandria.

At the same time as work began on the maritime canal, another canal was begun from Zagazig to Timsah, in order to supply fresh water from the Nile to the personnel labouring in the isthmus. In French it was referred to as *Canal d'Eau Douce*, which has been literally translated as the Sweet Water Canal. On 2 February 1862 it reached Timsah, and was then continued south towards Suez, being completed on 29 December 1863. The name of the Sweet Water Canal was later changed to Canal Ismaïlieh.

**Timsah was renamed Ismaïlia** on 6 March 1863, by order of Ferdinand de Lesseps, in honour of Ismaïl Pacha (later Khedive Ismaïl); he had succeeded Saïd Pacha, who passed away on 18 January of that year. Ismaïlia's population in 1869 was 5,000 people (which reduced considerably after the Canal was completed). In 1930 it was 30,000; in 1956: 68,350; in 2012: 366,669 inhabitants. On 20 March 1863 Damietta was abandoned as the headquarters of the Suez Canal Company (hereafter referred to as "the Company") when it transferred its offices and personnel to Ismaïlia.

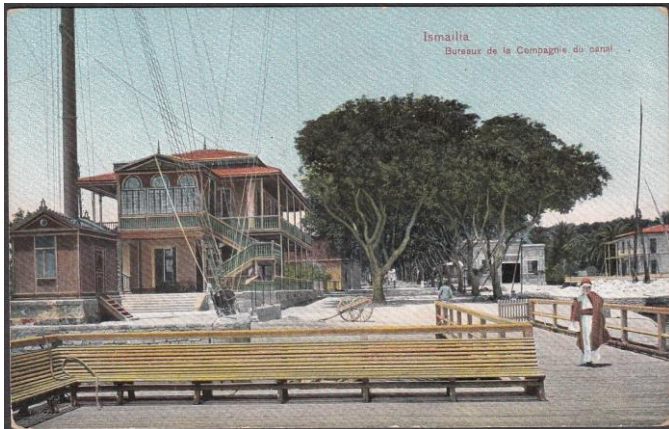


Fig. 2 - Offices of the Suez Canal Company at Ismaïlia.

Initially, mail within the Canal area was transported on camels to the work-sites, after arriving at Port-Saïd from Damietta by boats on Lake Menzaleh. Riding dromedaries, the couriers engaged from the Jordan valley provided rapid communication for the mail. The small quantity of private correspondence was handled free of charge by the Company. Outbound mail was carried to Zagazig, the nearest Posta Europea office, or taken down to the British or French P.O.s at Suez. In 1860 the Canal Co. signed a deal with the Posta Europea for the carriage of its mail within Egypt, and on to Alexandria (for Europe).

Further to the opening of the Sweet Water Canal between Zagazig and Timsah, in August 1862 the Company organised a service of barges carrying supplies and mail, pulled along the bank by two camels. They were drawn by mules from 1 January 1865 and later by a small steamboat; but the cost was disproportionate and the Company ceased this service on 15 April 1868. It was immediately taken over by a private contractor, Messrs. A. d'Aubonne and Rougières. The initial trench cut through the El-Guisr ridge by November 1862 allowed barges to be towed on the *rigole* between Timsah and Port-Saïd; and from 1863 they could circulate between Timsah and Suez on the Sweet Water Canal. Along these two routes also the Company established a regular service of mule-drawn dahabiehs from 1 January 1865.

**Meanwhile, in 1865 the Khedive Ismaïl acquired the whole of the Posta Europea organisation for the Egyptian State.** Giacomo Muzzi Bey, the new Postmaster, made a survey of the isthmus and decided against opening any post offices there as this would be uneconomic (the Posta Europea office at Suez had been in existence for some time to service the Overland Mail). Finally from 15 August 1865 it became possible to travel without trans-shipment the full length of the Canal: Port-Saïd to Ismaïlia along the *rigole*, then through double-sluices at Ismaïlia onto the Sweet Water Canal down to Suez. With the inauguration on 1 July 1868 of the railway from Zagazig to Ismaïlia, and which was later extended from Ismaïlia to Suez, the dahabiehs were discontinued on these two particular stretches.

As work on the Canal progressed, steam-launches (called *canots*), operating from Chantier VI near Ismaïlia, were introduced from 1 September 1866 to replace the mules that towed the dahabiehs between Port-Saïd and Ismaïlia. In 1868 mail between these two towns now travelled directly by *canots* on the first opened stretch of the Maritime Canal, covering the distance in ten hours.



Fig. 3 - A Postal canot.



After the withdrawal of the Egyptian labour force, in 1866 de Lesseps turned to European engineering expertise. Work on the Canal was then divided into four parts:

- The first, to the Dussaud Brothers, was for the construction of the two long jetties at Port-Saïd.
- The second, to Mr Aïton, excavator from the Clyde in Glasgow, was to complete the first 60 northern kilometres, removing 22 million cubic metres of sand and mud.
- The third, to M. Alphonse Couvreux, was to deepen and widen the trench at El-Guisr over 13km.
- Finally Messrs Paul Borel and Alexandre Lavalley (headquartered at Serapeum) took up the task of completing all the Canal from Lake Timsah to the Red Sea. This last part was the most considerable and became even greater subsequently when they took over Mr Aïton's contract which had been rescinded. Borel and Lavalley invested a fortune in large steam-powered machinery, which consumed 10,000 tons of coal a month but which removed two million cubic metres of earth in that time. Their undertaking employed 22,000 men, with workers from France, Piedmont, Calabria, Tuscany, Dalmatia, Greek islands, Syria and Palestine.



Borel and Lavalley also controlled the waters coming from the Nile, and via diversions from the Sweet Water Canal, they used it to fill the Bitter Lakes in six months. They completed the maritime canal three months before schedule and at the contracted cost! Sadly, Paul Borel died a month before the inauguration of the Canal.

Fig. 4 - The Canal's main architects.



In 1868 the Canal Co. made an ill-fated attempt at issuing its own postage stamps and charging for what had so far been a free service. It caused an uproar, the stamps were withdrawn and Muzzi reluctantly stepped in and acquired all the Canal's mail facilities for the Egyptian Post, effective 16 August. Besides the towns of Port-Saïd, Kantara, Ismaïlia and Suez, it also took over the temporary postal facilities at the various work-stations and chantiers, which were later gradually closed as work on the Canal was progressively completed.

Fig. 5 - The Ismaïlia post office. In the distance, along Rue Negrelli, is the new railway station.

Prior to these events an **Egyptian post office was opened at Ismaïlia on 1 July 1868**, in Place Champollion (today Place el-Goumhouriah), as a result of the Egyptian State Railway reaching Ismaïlia from Zagazig that same day. This was later extended to Suez, replacing the old Cairo-Suez desert railway line of 1858.

Fig. 6 - The finest of only three recorded covers from Ismaïlia, bearing Suez Canal stamps.

Franked **20c Suez Canal stamp** (cancelled by the blue rectangle of 48 dots specific to Ismaïlia) for the journey to Suez. Handed to the French P.O. for conveyance to France; paid by 40c Napoleon stamp, cancelled GC 5105, and Suez CDS 6 August 1868. At Marseilles, 26 August, it was redirected to the island of Réunion. The original stamps, being no longer valid, were crossed out and the letter taxed 6 décimes on arrival. See *L'OP* No. 98, Oct.1957 for JBH's analysis. David Feldman, Zurich sale, 1/12/1982.



Fig. 7 - 9 December 1868 - Combination cover from the recently opened Egyptian Post Office at Ismailia. Double weight postage to France with a pair of one piastre Second Issue and a pair of 40c Napoleon Laureated stamps, available at Ismailia, but cancelled GC 5080 at the French P.O. in Alexandria, on 12 Dec. Sailed by British steamer, arriving Marseille, 19 Dec. The current owner of this cover is unknown.



The service of dahabiehs between Ismailia and Suez having been discontinued due to the opening of the railway line between these two towns, the Canal Company notified its employees that from 10 September 1868 they would no longer enjoy free franchise for their mail along that route.

### Water

At first water was brought to the isthmus by boat, then carried in barrels by camels and donkeys to the work-sites. De Lesseps also had two sea-water distillation plants built at Port-Saïd. The Sweet Water Canal brought water to the isthmus but it was not extended from Ismailia to Port-Saïd. Instead an *Usine des Eaux* was built at Ismailia, and from 10 April 1864 this pumped water up to the top of the El-Guisr plateau from where an 80km large-diameter pipeline delivered water by gravity to Port-Saïd and to the work-sites in between (supplying 500,000 litres a day). Originally water for the Sweet Water Canal was taken from a small branch of the Nile near Zagazig, but as this could sometimes run dry the Egyptian Government, as part of an agreed contribution, funded a new canal (Canal Abbassiah) from the main Nile at Cairo, which joined the Sweet Water Canal at Ras-el-Wadi. This also enabled supplies to be transported directly from Cairo.

The canal's water, however, was anything but "sweet". As it was open to the air, the water was brackish and with a high level of salinity, caused by salty dust carried by the wind from Lake Menzaleh and picked up along the way. Consequently vegetation was rapidly planted along the banks to obstruct the wind and reduce this contamination. In 1877 the Company purchased for 255,000 Francs (about £10,000) the "Usine de distribution d'eau" at Suez, thus acquiring complete control of the fresh water supply all along the Canal. In 1885 digging of the Sweet Water Canal from Ismailia to Port-Saïd began, at the Company's expense. It had been obstructed by Egypt (see "The Alexandria effect" below) but was constructed by the Company, which considered it indispensable to replace the piped water supply. It eventually reached Port-Saïd in 1893.

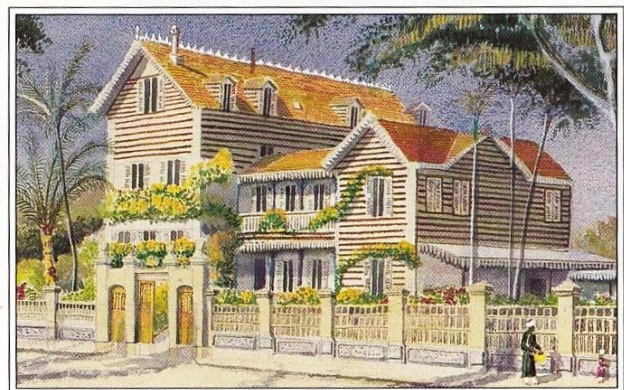


Fig. 8 - Left: Card from Ismailia to the (Canal's) Superior Agency in Cairo. Franked 3 x 1 mill De La Rue, internal postcard rate, postmarked 15 May 1902. Cairo arrival the same day. The card depicts Port-Ibrahim.  
 Fig. 9 - Right: The residence of Ferdinand de Lesseps on Quai Mohamed Ali at Ismailia. The chalet still stands today.

This water supply encouraged the movement of caravans and flocks of livestock to/from Syria via Kantara and led to the expansion of that town (and the famous "Buffet de Kantara<sup>1</sup>"). Crossing the Canal was by a pontoon established by the Company. In WWI a swing-bridge across the Canal was constructed there by the British Army to access the railway to Palestine. But that bridge was taken down after the armistice.

De Lesseps found goodwill with the Bedouin tribes of the isthmus, who put their resources at his disposal, providing caravans of thousands of camels for the regular supplies of food and water to the various work-sites. Early on, instead of letting Nile water from the Sweet Water Canal disperse itself into Lake Maxamah<sup>2</sup> (which was along its route), the Company rapidly accelerated the digging of that canal, channelling the water as far as Timsah and then down to Suez. The 1856 firman granted the Company the ownership of all barren lands which would be irrigated and made "cultivable" by its offices. De Lesseps leased out tracts to the Bedouins, who were pleased to work them. It led to the fertilisation of the isthmus by a nomad population willing to work under the protection of the Company. Jules Guichard, "Directeur de l'Exploitation Agricole dans le Domaine de l'Ouadi" in 1865, was loved and respected by the Arabs.

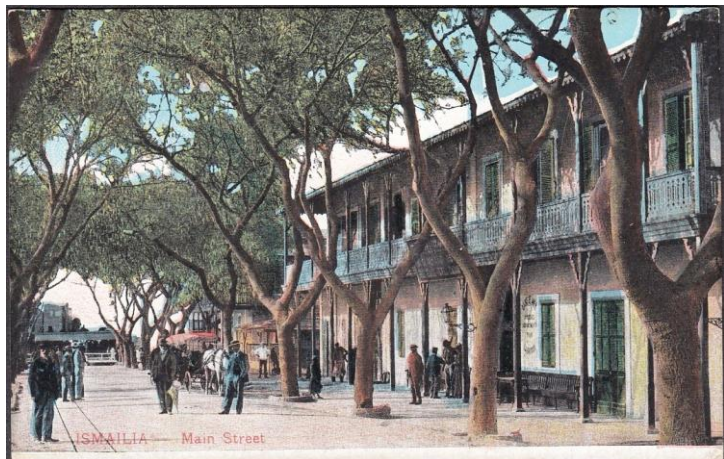


Fig. 10 - Avenue Jules Guichard, c. 1900, with the landing stage for boats from Port-Saïd visible in the background, on Lake Timsah. This was the southern extension of Avenue de l'Impératrice (see Fig. 19), the street name changing after the road crossed the lock across the Ismaïlieh Canal. At lower left can be seen the tracks for the tramway which ran from the railway station down to the dock ("L'Appontement").

the digging of the Canal, including a fine sphinx, displayed in the Garden of the Stelae (still there).

At Ismaïlia, on Rue Negrelli were located the more important shops and cafés. Next to its offices, the Company built a small museum to house Egyptian artefacts excavated during

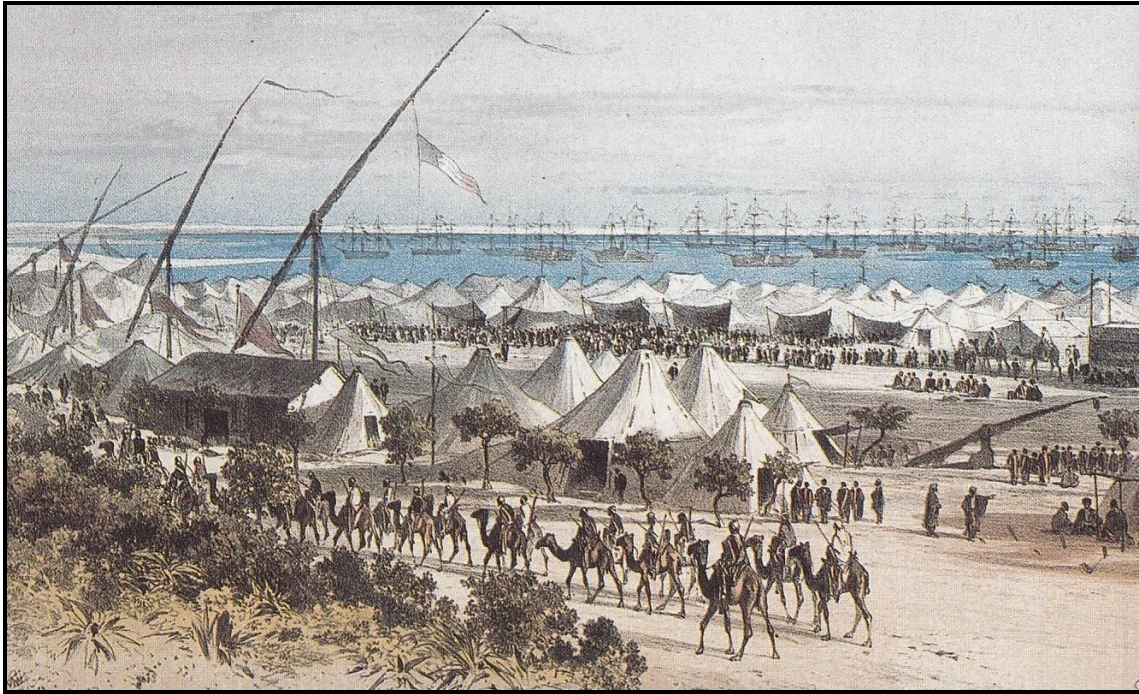
### The Alexandria Effect

Alexandria in the 1860s was a hotbed of opposition to the Suez Canal. Most of the representatives of the big trading companies, including French ones, were treating the undertaking as sheer madness. The fear of one day seeing Port-Saïd overtake Alexandria and drain away part of its commerce was the real reason for this hostility, which persisted into the 20th century. This was demonstrated by the continuous efforts made by Alexandria's influential major traders in pressuring the Egyptian Government into isolating Port-Saïd from the rest of Egypt, and to stop it from growing by depriving it of a proper State railway line and obstructing the extension of the Sweet Water Canal from Ismaïlia to Port-Saïd. Although the greater part of the old Overland Transit trade with India was now diverted through the new Suez Canal, the steady development in the general commerce of the country maintained Alexandria as Egypt's principal port.

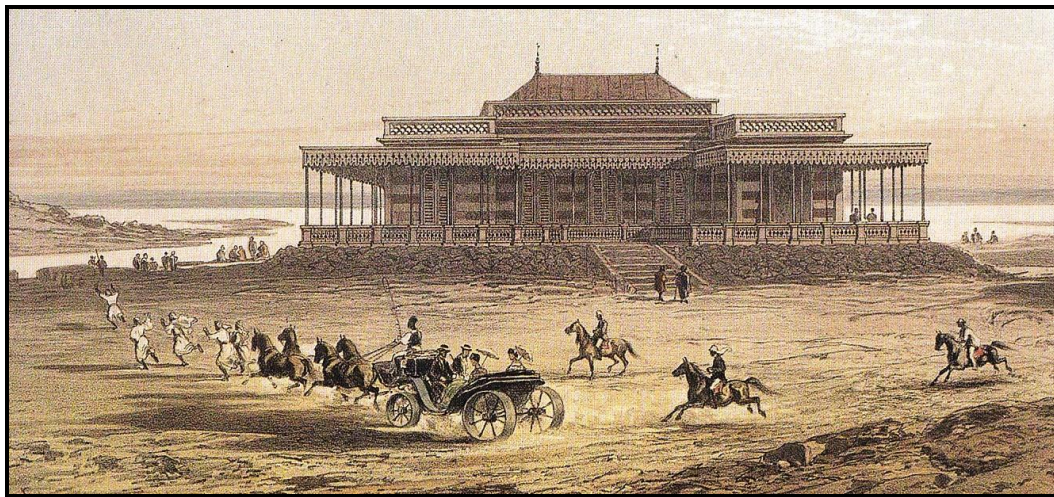
According to J. C. McCoan, *Egypt*, 1877, "Ismaïlia is the prettiest and most attractive town in Egypt, with luxuriant gardens filled with flowers and fruit-trees. The town itself is well built, chiefly of stone from the Carrière des Hyènes on the other side of the lake, with broad macadamised streets and handsome squares. In a well-equipped *établissement des bains* you may bathe in the salt water of Lake Timsah, and on coming out have a douche in fresh water from the Nile..."

Yet in 1901 J. Charles-Roux (one of the Canal's directors) was writing: " I fear that Ismaïlia, on which there had been such hopes, is rather destined to shrink than to grow. There is no commerce here and the maritime movement consists of only a few boats on the Canal Ismaïlieh. The Company's administrative offices are still there, but even the repair workshops will gradually disappear to be concentrated at Port-Saïd. There is a mosque in the Arab Village, which is next to the Canal Ismaïlieh and serves as a permanent market. There the boats from Zagazig or from Suez sell their eggs, water-melons, oranges, salads, bananas, etc. As for its inhabitants, they are of many races. Some hire out donkeys, others keep shops, while others still fish in Lake Menzaleh. It is a place full of local colour. Ismaïlia is a charming oasis in the desert, but it exudes a kind of sadness. No more machines here, only offices, and all the activity is intellectual".

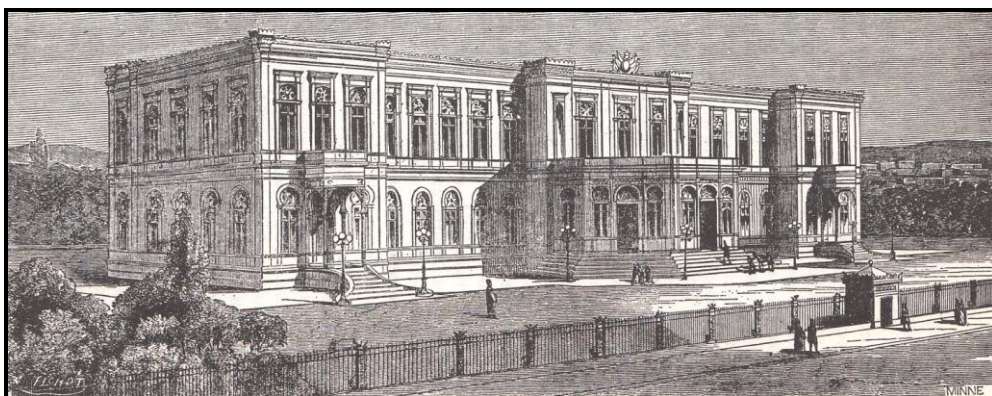
*For other information and a fine iconography, see "Railway Stations during 1879-1914", Part 5 (The Canal) in QC 271 and Part 7 (Port-Saïd - Ismaïlia) in QC 272; by Ronny Van Pellecom and Alain Stragier.*



*Fig. 11 - Ismailia, 18 November 1869, with a forest of tents for the visitors attending the Canal's inauguration. In the distance the convoy of 68 ships anchored overnight in Lake Timsah.*



*Fig. 12 - Ismailia, the Khedive's Chalet. Built in 1862 between the town and El-Guisr. Later, it was taken over by the Canal Company and converted into a recovery sanatorium when the Hospital Saint-Vincent-de-Paul was erected near by on the site of the old Chantier VI. Seen here at the Canal's inauguration festivities (November 1869).*



*Fig. 13 - Khedive Ismail's Palace in east Ismailia, built in less than six months by forced labour, and in which he entertained his royal guests at the inauguration festivities during the official transit of the Canal. The palace later became the property of the Canal Company, and was eventually demolished in the 1890s.*

### The Celebrations for the Canal's Inauguration

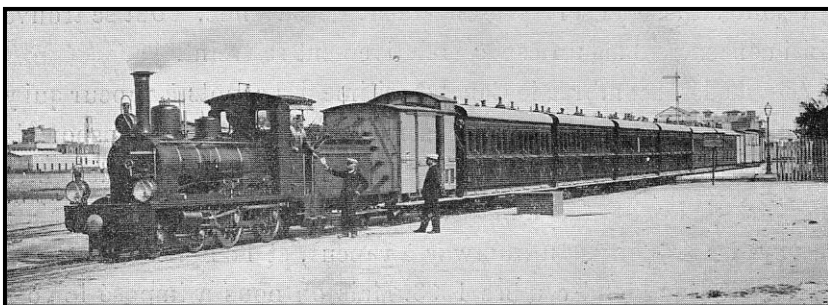
The greatest highlight in the history of Ismaïlia, even to this modern day, was the festivities for the opening of the Suez Canal in November 1869. The guest of honour was the Empress Eugénie of France, cousin of Ferdinand de Lesseps and wife of Emperor Napoleon III. At difficult times during the construction of the Canal in the 1860s she had greatly interceded with her husband on behalf of de Lesseps's undertaking. At Port-Saïd on 17 November 1869 (after religious services and speeches the day before), the assembled royal guests having rejoined their ships, the inaugural convoy of 68 vessels, led by the French Imperial yacht *Aigle*, set off into the Canal at 8 a.m. By six in the evening they had reached Ismaïlia and dropped anchor in Lake Timsah. Not all the convoy arrived on the 17th, several in the lower order reached Ismaïlia only on the 18th. Each ship had been issued with a number to indicate its place in the procession.

That evening and all the next day were spent at Ismaïlia. Eugénie stepped ashore on the 18th, rode a camel, and then went for a picnic lunch with de Lesseps and her suite to view the Canal from the Chalet at El-Guisr (*Fig. 12*). Later there was horse racing and at night fireworks, as well as jugglers and dancers in the streets. In the evening nearly 5,000 people witnessed the Khedive's ball after dinner. In the grounds of the palace stood enormous pavilions in which 1,000 guests were entertained to dinner. The "Royals", together with Ferdinand de Lesseps, dined in a smaller and more secluded enclosure, decorated with flowers and shrubs. A thousand valets from Europe served the guests, and in the kitchens 500 European cooks prepared delicate dishes under the supervision of Voisin Bey (who was Administrator and Chief Engineer of the Canal, based at Ismaïlia). There was open house everywhere and there were soup kitchens for the poor. Here, Khedive Ismaïl entertained everyone at (Egypt's) great expense. He had also invited members of various tribes of his kingdom, Bedouins, fellahs, sheikhs, who arrived with their women, horses and camels (*see Fig. 11*). Most Arabs and Europeans slept in tents which were separated by the Sweet Water Canal, forming a natural border between them and their individual customs. After spending the 18th at Ismaïlia, the convoy continued its leisurely route down to Suez on the 19th. Most ships then stopped overnight in the Little Bitter Lake, before arriving at Suez on the 20th. After the revellers left, Ismaïlia returned to its sleepy isolation.

In admiration and respect for Lieutenant **Thomas Waghorn**, pioneer of the Overland Route, the Canal Company erected a statue in his honour at Port-Tewfik. It stood at the end of Avenue Hélène, at the corner with Rue Waghorn, on the bank of the Canal. A little known fact is that this Waghorn monument was unveiled by Empress Eugénie on 22 November 1869, after the inauguration of the Canal and before she set off home to France on 24 November. The next day, de Lesseps (aged 64) married his second bride, a French girl born in Mauritius, Louise-Hélène de Bragard (aged 20). The quiet wedding was held in the chapel at Ismaïlia and they were eventually to be blessed with 12 children!

### The Railway

In 1860 the Egyptian Railway spur Benha-Zagazig was opened to traffic. Later on, in 1868, the line was extended from Zagazig to Ismaïlia, being inaugurated on 1 July. The stretch of railway from Ismaïlia to Suez was completed and inaugurated on 15 August 1868. This replaced the earlier Cairo to Suez line across the desert, which was abandoned since there were no centres of habitation along its track (it had originally been intended primarily for the Overland Route), and which was eventually dismantled and the materials re-used. An innovation in the 1890s was the installation at each station of small elementary schools directed by the wives of the Canal agents for a small remuneration. They also acted as nurses, especially for eye problems.



*Fig. 14 - The Ismaïlia to Port-Saïd narrow-gauge steam tramway.*

On 5 February 1891, the Egyptian Government granted permission to the Canal Company to construct a **Steam Tramway** between Port-Saïd and Ismaïlia, but imposing on it a narrow gauge railway of 75cm. The

agreement also mentioned that "in the interest of the Postal Service of His Highness's Government", the Company agreed to transport on that railway the mailbags from Port-Saïd to Ismaïlia and vice-versa.

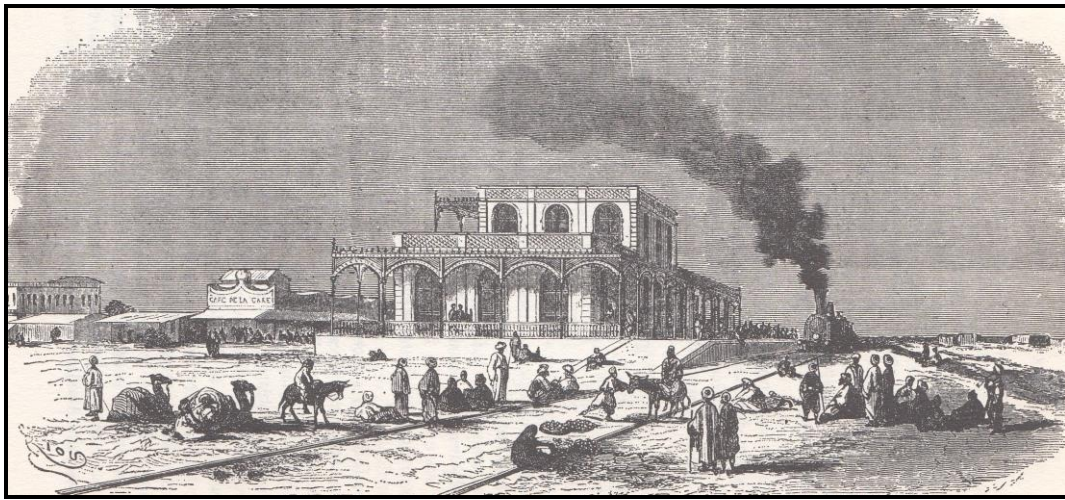


Fig. 15 - The first railway station at Ismailia, 1868, with a train from Cairo approaching the platform. The line connected west to Cairo or Alexandria, via Zagazig and Benha; and later south down to Suez. In the square to the left is the "Café de la Gare", with passengers awaiting the next departure.



Fig. 16 - The new railway station at Ismailia, erected after 1902, when the steam tramway from Port-Saïd and the State Railway from Benha merged. See maps in Figure 21. It was situated at the north end of Avenue de l'Impératrice.



Fig. 17 - Fine view of Ismailia gardens on a postcard to Paris from an employee of the Bureau Technique of the Canal. "Egypt is a charming country" but he misses the Parisian girls! Franked 4 mills UPU postcard rate (3 mills De La Rue and 1 mill 1914 pictorial), cancelled by **Ismailia Station** postmark, dated 1 March 1914 (9.50am). Backstamps: Cairo-Port-Saïd T.P.O., Port-Saïd transit same day at 12.30; Paris arrival 6 March.

Additionally for the steam tramway it was stipulated that: “Postal despatches and parcels will be transported, together with the accompanying agent, in a special carriage assigned for that purpose attached to every train. In case of delay in the arrival of a postal ship, the Postal Administration will be able to request that the Company lays on a special train, and this up to 12 extra trains per annum at no extra charge”.

For the Company, this railway was to free the maritime canal of the steam launches, mail boats, etc. which provided communication and supplied the stations along its banks. The steam tramway began operating on 3 December 1893. Egypt’s *Journal Officiel* announced: “The steamer service between Port-Saïd and Ismaïlia was closed on December 3, due to the opening of a steam tramway service by the Suez Canal Co, between those cities”. In 1898 there were two trains a day, making the journey in about 2h 40 to 3h. Passengers from Port-Saïd switched over to the State Railway at Ismaïlia. No merchandise could be carried on that tramway.

Fig. 18 - Incoming mail to Ismaïlia. Postcard from Montpellier, France, franked 5 centimes Type Sage, postmarked 4 June 1900. It reached Port-Saïd, 12 June (Egyptian Post’s arrival CDS) and was immediately forwarded by the Canal Company’s steam tramway to Ismaïlia, arriving later that day. Fine example of the 5c printed matter rate for postcards, with CARTE POSTALE crossed out and IMPRIMÉ cachet. It has only the sender’s name & address on the obverse.



As mentioned earlier, the trading houses of Alexandria, fearful that their predominance would suffer, continued to lobby the government against the Canal, and objected to the construction of a railway line to Port-Saïd. However the growth of that city was making a proper rail service imperative. By a Convention dated 1 February 1902 the Canal Company agreed to upgrade its steam tramway line to a full standard 1.45m gauge, and to lease it to the Egyptian Government which would operate it (that railway line was inside the Canal’s firman concession). At the same time a tax-free zone was established around Port-Saïd.

### The later years

Occupied originally by office employees of the Suez Canal Company, and a few European and local traders, Ismaïlia lingered for some time until the British occupation of 1882 which saw military camps set up nearby. In August 1882, during the Arabi rebellion, the British under Sir Garnet Wolseley took over Port-Saïd, and closed the Canal to general traffic for five days, while his men sailed down to Ismaïlia. From there they went on to defeat Arabi at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, leading to 72 years of British occupation of Egypt. Ismaïlia itself regained importance as a result of large military garrisons established near the town (*see map, Fig. 21*).

During World War I Britain was opposed to the Ottoman Empire and in 1915 the Canal was attacked on three occasions by Turkish forces, which were repulsed. The Turks managed to fire at British and French warships in the lakes and a few mines were dropped into the Canal, but with no great damage. In 1930 a monument celebrating the defence of the Canal was erected at Gebel Maryam, south of Lake Timsah. Comprising two 40m pylons with sculptures, it was the work of two Frenchmen: the architect Roux-Spitz and the sculptor R. Delamarre. It was inaugurated on 3 February 1930 on the western shore. In the Second World War the Canal was prepared for all emergencies, but the German advance was halted at El-Alamein. During that conflict Suez became the main supply port for Egypt. In 1948 Britain consolidated its forces into the Canal Zone, inside the military bases around Ismaïlia, and evacuated its troops from the rest of Egypt.

Built inside the concession zone, Ismaïlia belonged to the Canal Company, which dealt with its general administration since its origin. But on 7 March 1949 an agreement was signed between the Suez Canal Company and the Egyptian Government which related to changes in directorship and an increase in Egyptian staff, as well as shared revenues and also a new by-pass canal, etc. Of particular relevance to this study are:

- Clause 7: "In Ismaïlia the Egyptian Government will establish a municipality which will henceforth be responsible for all development and maintenance expenses in this town."
- Clause 8: "The Company will hand over to the Egyptian Government the Ismaïlia-Port-Saïd fresh water canal, the Government assuming responsibility for its upkeep and for providing the Canal Company's waterworks in Port-Saïd with the water necessary for the requirements of the town and shipping generally."

Fig. 19 – The main street in Ismaïlia (Avenue de l'Impératrice) with its gardens. Seen from the front of the railway station, c.1935. Today it is Avenue Orabi.



Ismaïlia was at the forefront of events leading to the Egyptian Revolution. In 1952 there were continuous skirmishes between the British Army and Egyptian guerrillas seeking its departure. On 25 January the British decided to expel from the Canal Zone the Egyptian Auxiliary Police, suspected of supporting the guerrillas. British troops and tanks surrounded the Ismaïlia police station and fighting erupted. By the end of the day 41 Egyptians and three British soldiers had been killed. The next day the country exploded; it was Black Saturday, when rioters set fire to numerous Cairo establishments (hotels, department stores, clubs, cinemas), killing several Europeans. A few months later, in July 1952, the Egyptian Revolution deposed King Farouk.

By the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of October 1954, all British troops had to leave Egyptian territory by 19 June 1956. This they did, but they were back in October of that year with guns blazing in the Suez Crisis. After nationalisation by President Nasser on 26 July 1956, and the consequent Suez War, the Canal was blocked to traffic for several months, reopening only in March 1957. At the end of the Six-Day War, in June 1967, Israeli troops advanced to the edge of the eastern bank of the Canal. It was blocked again, this time for several years, and the cities along its shores, including Ismaïlia, were exposed to frequent shelling until peace returned, with many refugees having fled to Cairo. Fourteen ships were trapped in the Great Bitter Lake and remained there for the duration. Israeli troops withdrew following the 1973 Yom-Kippur war, which replaced both banks of the Canal in Egyptian hands and reconstruction work began on the cities along the Canal. But it was only in 1975 that President Anwar Sadat officially reopened the Canal. These events had however led oil producers to switch to giant oil tankers, sailing around the Cape of Good Hope, as well as triggering the onset of container shipping. Although functional again, and now mostly doubled-up by a parallel channel, the Canal never again regained the importance in world affairs it had held for nearly a century.

### Postmarks

Over the years, Ismaïlia utilised most of the standard types of postmarks of the Egyptian Post Office, of which some examples have been shown in this article. However, in the 20th century the quality of postmark strikes applied became generally poor (faint, smudged, illegible), rendering a study of varieties quite difficult. Clear strikes like those shown below are uncommon. Note that after the 1952 Revolution the name on the postmark in Latin script became El Ismailia.

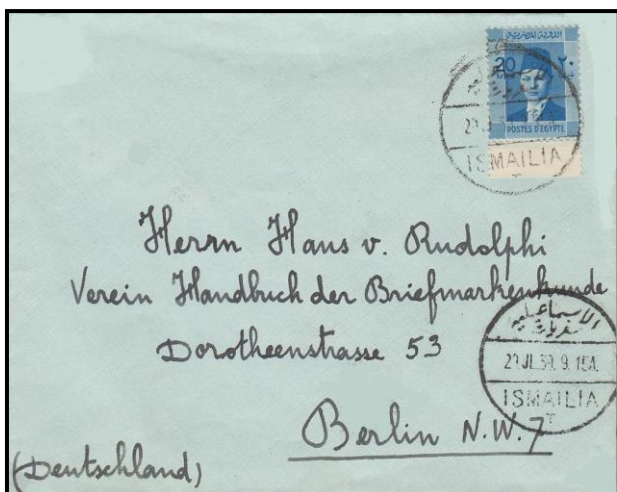


Fig. 20 - Ismaïlia, 29 July 1939. Cover franked with Farouk 20 mills (UPU surface rate). Cairo transit the same day. Addressed to Berlin on the eve of World War 2.





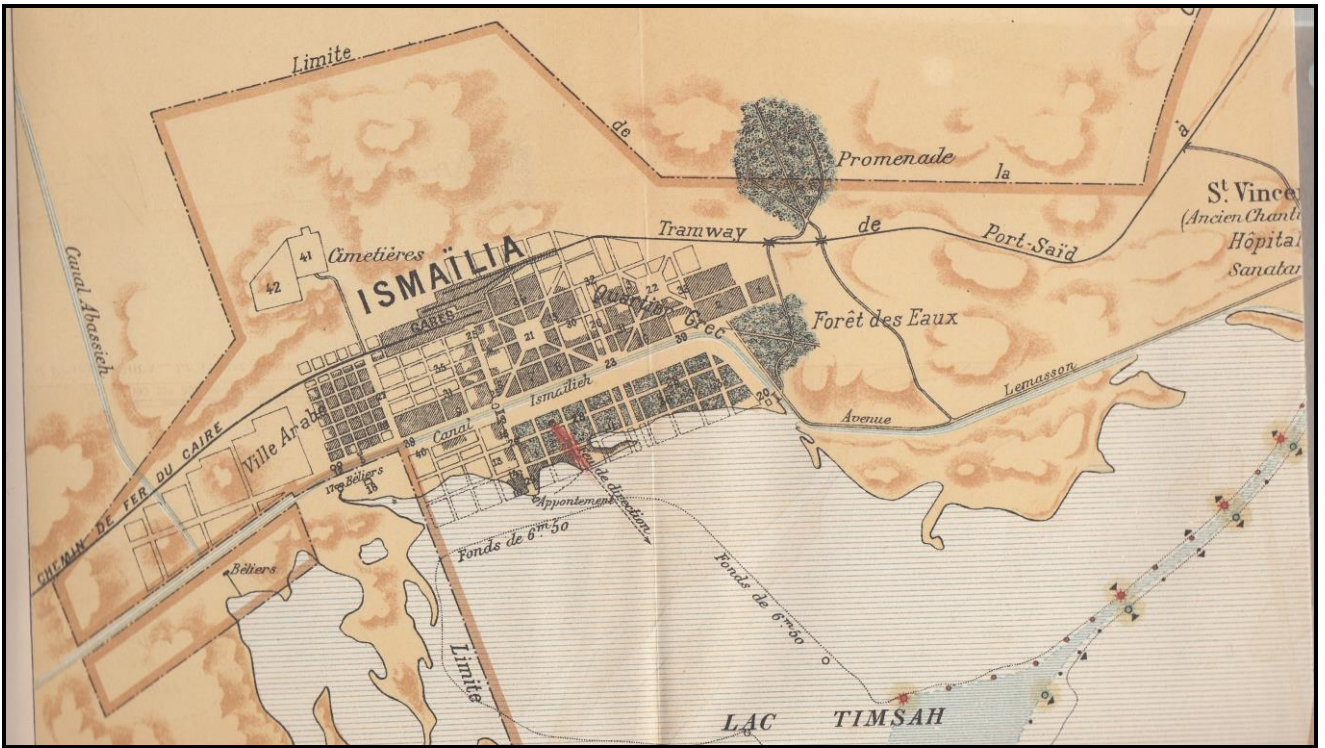
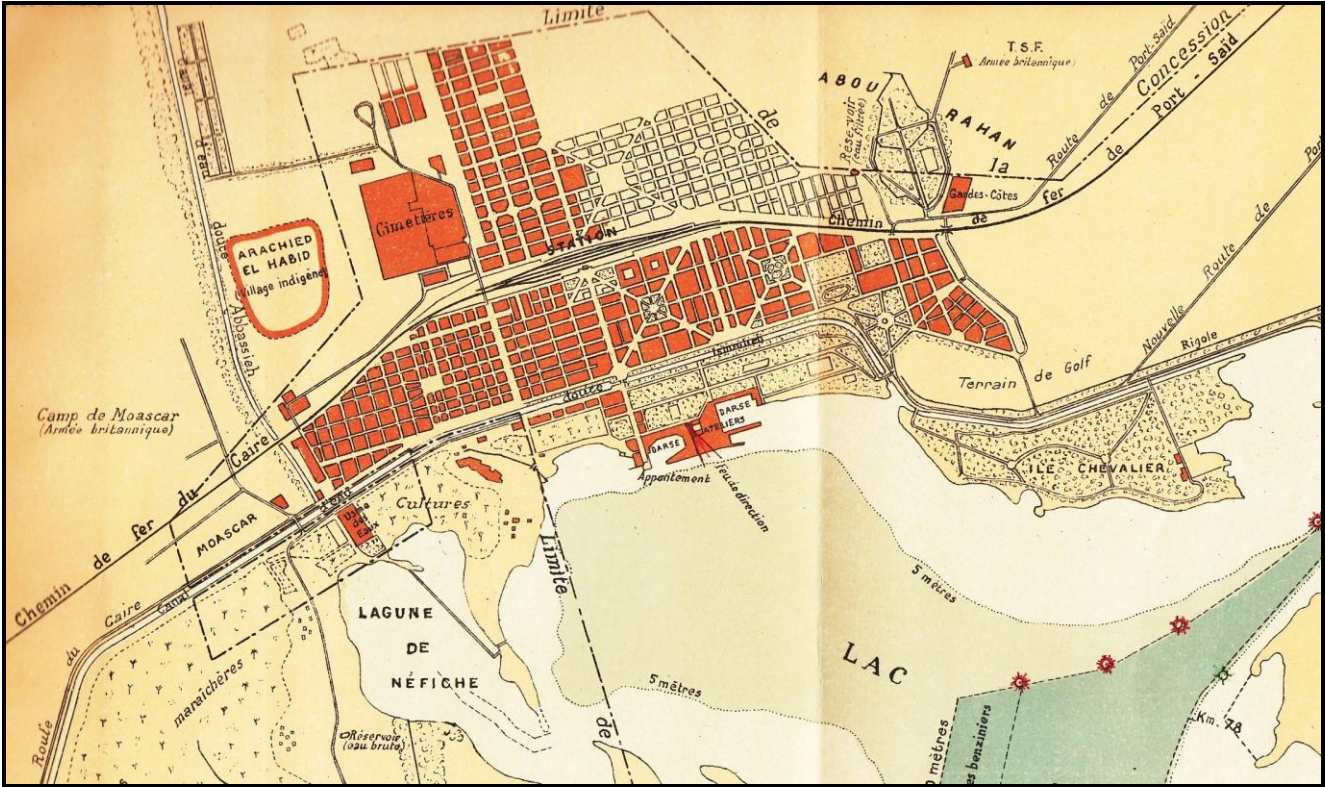


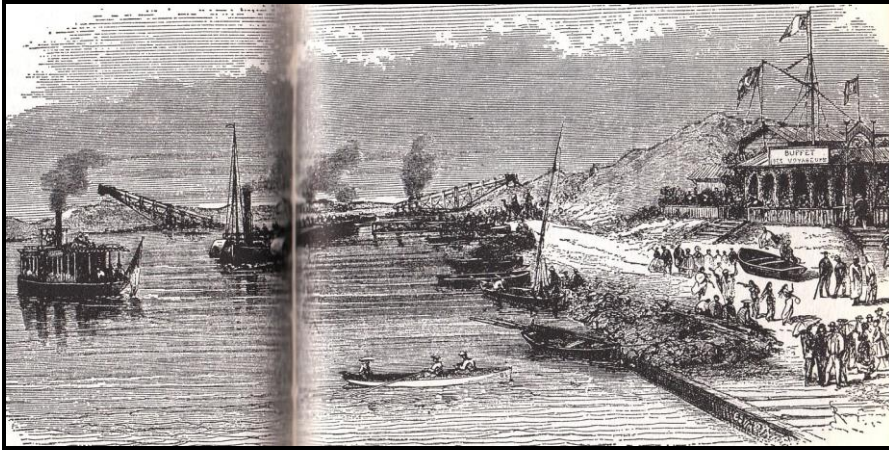
Fig. 21 - Official Suez Canal maps of Ismaïlia: in 1900 above, and 1936 below; presented here to illustrate the city's development and communications, in particular the railway links to the town. At the top of the upper map, leaving to the right, is the Canal's "Tramway de Port-Saïd", while the State Railways' "Chemin de Fer du Caire" is exiting to the left. There are two separate stations (gares, plural) for these lines. In the lower map, following the 1902 agreement between the Canal Company and the Egyptian Government for extending the State Railway to Port-Saïd, there is now only one railway station shown and the tracks are continuous through Ismaïlia, though following a slightly different route out of town towards Port-Saïd, replacing the steam tramway. Note the British Army's Moascar Camp at left, in the 1936 map.



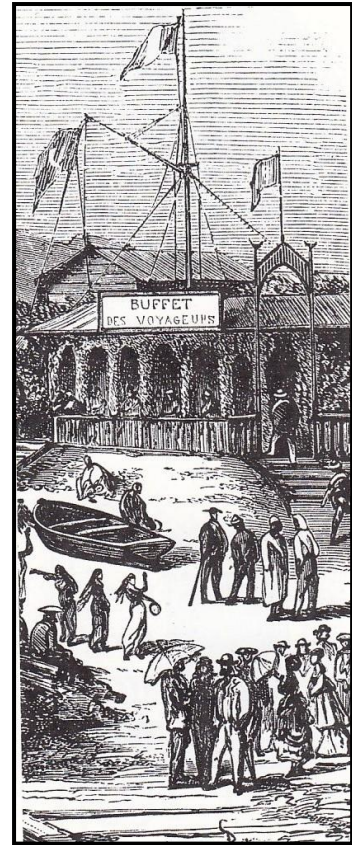
## Notes on Ismailia - Timsah

During the preparation of this article it was pointed out that not all the readers of the *QC* would be familiar with some of the locations mentioned in the text and that explanatory notes would probably be useful.

### 1. "Buffet de Kantara":

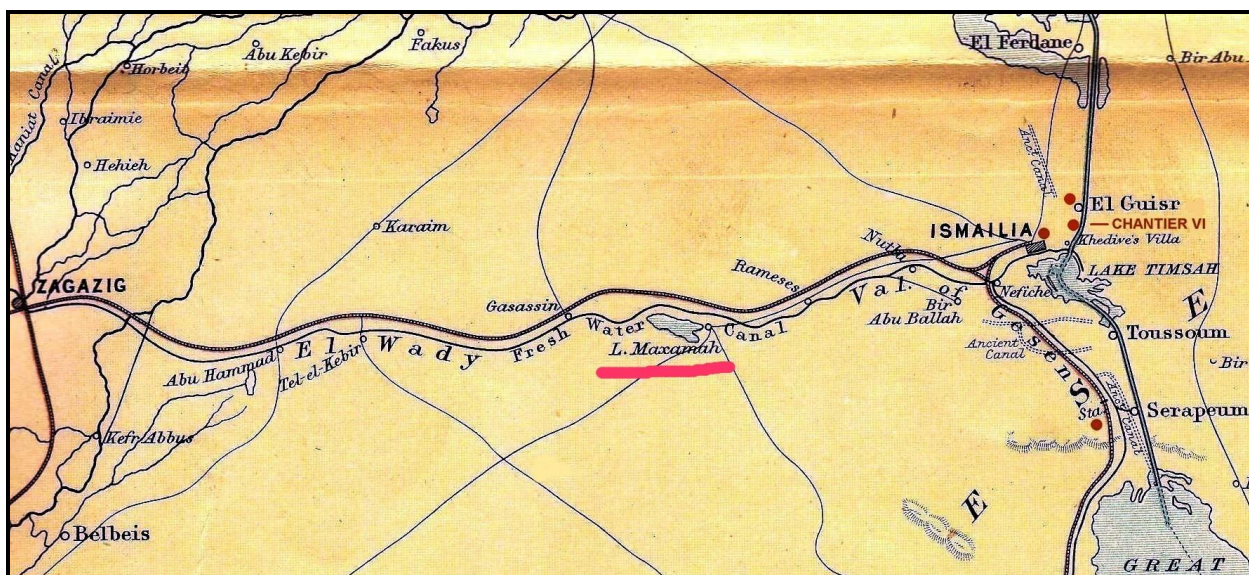


This "Buffet des Voyageurs" was erected during the excavation of the Suez Canal, on the west bank, at the new town of El-Kantara, and had already become famous by the time of the Canal's inauguration in November 1869. Situated about half-way between Port-Saïd and Ismaïla, it provided a rest-house with food and refreshments for workers and travellers sailing on the Canal, offering them a welcome break during the long hours of the journey. The Buffet was mentioned in certain guidebooks and travel literature. Its importance decreased after the introduction of the Steam Tramway in 1893, which made the journey between the two towns much more rapid.



### 2. "Lake Maxamah":

This small lake, situated between Zagazig and Ismaïlia and mentioned in this "Ismailia - Timsah" *QC* article, lies along the route of the Fresh Water Canal and is close to Tel-el-Kebir, site of the famous battle in 1882. The illustration below is extracted from the "1870 Map of the Suez Canal and surrounding area" on page 121 of P.L. Grech's *The French Post Offices in Egypt, Part 1*, showing the contemporary topography.



## New research among TPOs

**Frank Van Geirt (ESC 649)**

I have been a collector of Egypt for more than 15 years and an ESC member for about ten of them. But during the past eight years the time I have been able to spend researching our hobby has been very limited. This is going to change. For a start, I have examined my travelling post offices and have some observations. I am still busy reading past *QCs* so I might have missed some information, but as a reference I am using Peter Smith's *Travelling Post Offices of Egypt* (1983) and the updated list on the Circle website (February 2018).

### **Diameter size**

A general remark or question I have is about the dimensions. Neither publication mentions how the cancels are to be measured. Do we note the outer or the inner measurement? I would expect that we list the outer dimensions. I have collected Belgian railway cancels for years, and, believing the outer circle to be a fundamental part of the handstamp, that is how we measure and catalogue them. The reason for mentioning / questioning this is because I find cancels in my collection which do not fit the recorded dimensions precisely.

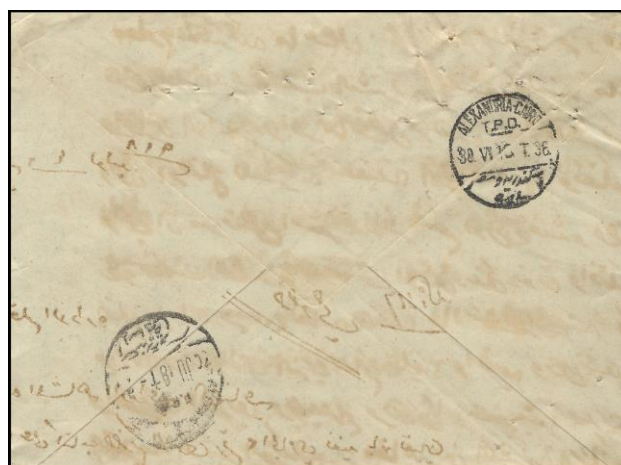
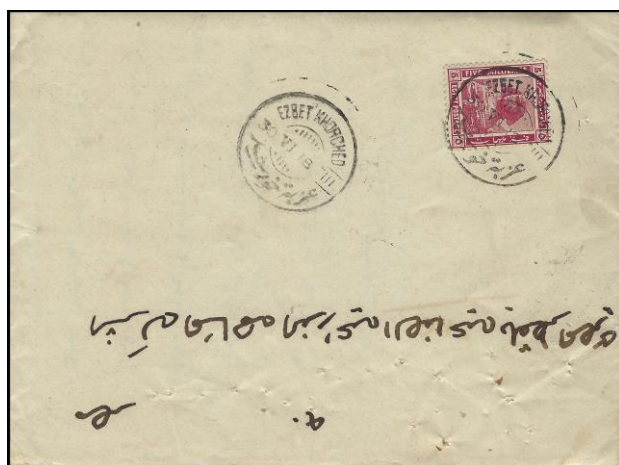
For instance: 1) type 5D1 Alexandria-Cairo, listed as 28mm. I measure an inner diameter of 26mm and an outer one of 28 mm. OK for me. 2) type 7A3 Cairo-Alexandria with Roman month indicator. The list says 30mm. I measure 30mm inner diameter and an outer one of 32mm. I imagine this might be a typo in the list.

For the 7A3 there are two dimensions listed: 30 and 35mm. I have only one of them, so I can not compare. I assume they will be diistinguishable enough and that some collectors will have both in their collection. But if it happens that the 30mm should be 32, and the 35mm should be 33, then they come very close to each other.

**Type 3A1b – Beni Souef-Cairo** - This postcard (*right*) from Baliana (El Balyana) to London on 16 March 1900 bears a TPO 3A1b of Beni Souef-Cairo with month in Roman numerals and no brackets. The ESC 2018 list mentions a date of 27 December 1900, so it seems we can add an earlier date. Intriguingly, the cancel does not have a T number, but an X.



**Type 5A2 – Alexandria-Cairo** - This cover (*below*) is sent from Ezbet Khorched on 30 June 1918. I do not know the destination because I can not read Arabic (yet). If a fellow member could provide me with that information, I should be grateful [*addressed to Cairo – Editor*]. It is a cover with contents intact, so if anyone is interested I could make a scan of the Arabic letter inside.



On the back of the cover there are two TPO cancels.



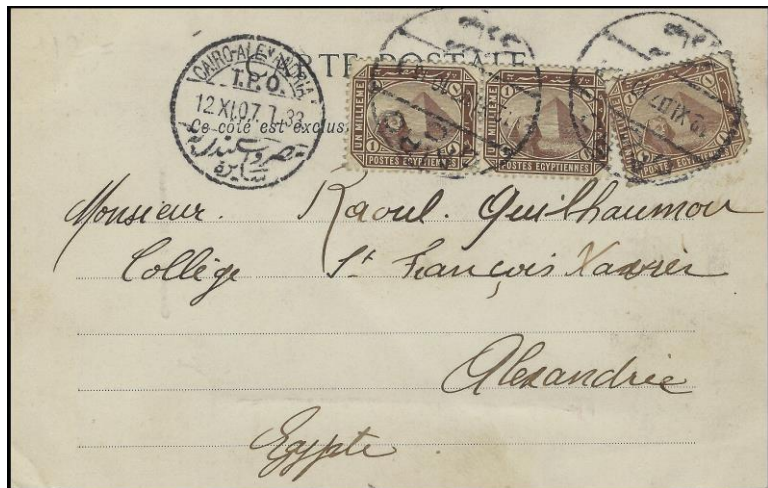
TPO Alexandria-Cairo, type 5A2, of 30 June 1918 (30 VI 18 T. 36). The ESC 2018 list records a latest date of 1913 for the “month in Roman” version, but lists a diameter of 28 mm. This cancel (*left*) is 25 mm (outside dimensions). A new version? As far as I can make out, this CDS at right is also a 5A2 Alexandria-Cairo, but with the month in European



(30 JU 18 T – ??). Though it has been stretched, I measure about 26 mm horizontally. It has *saayrah* in brackets. It seems that this CDS is not mentioned in the ESC 2018 list.

### Type 5A3 – Roman Cairo-Alexandria

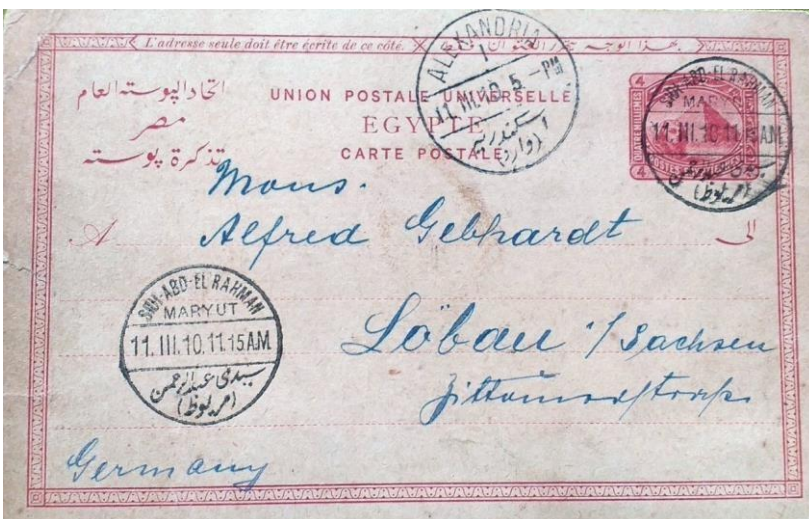
A postcard sent from Cairo to Alexandria on 12 November 1907 (*right*). On the same day it also received a type 5A3 Cairo-Alexandria with its month in Roman figures. The ESC list records an earliest date of 15 April 1908, so we can add a new earliest date here.



### Sidi Abd el-Rahman-Maryut: Is it a TPO?

**Antoine Winter (ESC 149) and Mike Murphy (ESC 240)**

This intriguing 4 mills postal stationery postcard, addressed to Germany from the Mediterranean coast of Egypt on 11 III 10, has a strikingly beautiful CDS with all the immediate appearance of an 8A1.2 TPO with its termini at Sidi Abd el-Rahman and Maryut – but closer examination reveals that instead of a train number in the CDS there is a specific time, 11.15AM, Maryut is set between brackets in the Arabic, and there is no mention of any return journey.



At another period this datestamp might really have been a TPO: the 1911 and 1914 Postal Guides both list Sidi Abd el-Rahman as a Class 3 post office served by the Alexandria-Maryut railway line; but in the 1920 Guide it has become a Class 7 (ie, served by TPO) station on the

extended Alexandria-Dabaa line. So at some date between 1914 and 1920, but unknown from the information we have, TPOs were introduced on the former royal line west out of Alexandria. As a matter of interest, in 1924 and 1928 it is still listed as Class 7 on the Alexandria-Maryut (Hammam) line; and in 1932, presumably as a result of a further extension of the railway line, it is a Class 7 served by the Alexandria-Fuka railway. Plenty of opportunity for TPOs there – but where are they?