

## Stamps that tell a story 1: Talaat Harb and Banque Misr

David Ogden (ESC 480)

In 1970 a striking multicolour Egyptian stamp featured the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Banque Misr with a portrait of its founder, Talaat Harb Pasha: 1.5 million copies of this 20 millièmes stamp were printed in photogravure by the State Printing House. It is SG 1060.

On my first visit to Cairo in 1985, and ever since, I have found the Talaat Haab statue in the square named after him a useful landmark in downtown Cairo. Talaat Harb Street connects Tahrir Square with Talaat Harb Square.

Who was Talaat Harb? A leading Egyptian economist and entrepreneur born in 1867 who created Banque Misr and its group of companies in May 1920, he was known as the father of the Egyptian economy. His legacy continues to impact on modern Egypt. A talented financier, Harb took a law degree and began his career as an economist.

The establishment of Banque Misr, the first Egyptian bank owned by Egyptian shareholders and staffed by Egyptian nationals, where Arabic

was used in all communications, was a major step in establishing a national economic identity. The bank now has more than 620 local branches in Egypt and a global network of branches, correspondents, and subsidiaries. The magnificent neo-Mamluk Banque Misr building in Mohamed Farid Street was designed by the Italian architect Antonio Lasciac in 1927.

Harb co-founded a newspaper, *Al Jarida*, published 1907-15, as the official organ of the Umma Party. It claimed to be a “purely Egyptian” paper which aimed to defend the rights and interests of Egyptians.

In 1907 Talaat Harb contributed £E100 to establish Al Ahly (the National) football club, winner of 46 Egypt Premier League titles at the last count. In 1911 his book *The Egyptian Economic Reform and the Nation's Bank Project* explained his economic dreams. Banque Misr, under Harb's leadership, established a number of companies including Egypt Air, the first

national airline, founded in 1932 as Misr Airwork. The airline began commercial operations with a three-engined Spartan Cruiser flying between Cairo and Alexandria. In 1935 Harb also launched Studio Misr, which captured the Arab world by producing many Egyptian film classics including Umm Kalthum's *Wedad* in 1936.

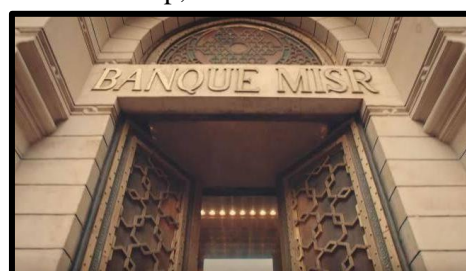
Until 1954 Talaat Harb Street and Square were named Suleiman (Soliman) Pasha for Napoleon's military commander who converted to Islam. Older people (as in Alaa Al-Aswany's novel *The Yacoubian Building*) still refer to the previous name.

Harb died in 1941 survived by four daughters, one of whom left funds to set up the academic cardiac institute at Ain Shams Faculty of Medicine. In 1980 President Sadat posthumously awarded Harb the Nile Collar, highest ranking of all Egyptian decorations.

More colourful stamps featuring Harb and/or the Banque Misr building were issued in 1992 (SG 1859), for the bank's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1995 (SG 1954) and its centenary in 2020 (SG 2760).



**Talaat Harb statue,  
a city landmark**



**The imposing façade of the bank on  
Sharia Mohamed Farid; and below,  
the spectacular Talaat Harb Square**

