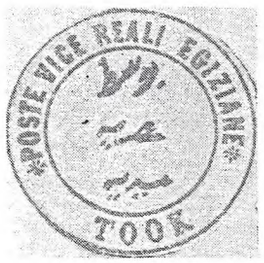
Egyptian Interpostals

HERE is a phase of philately, infiltrated with absorbing interest. Of special appeal to the collector of local stamps; yet a magnet to the steel of those whose proclivities lead them down the devious trails diverging from Main Street.

These are neither fish, flesh nor fowl. A large amount of factual evidence seems forever lost. The very



Issued in 1865

name itself is a sort of misnomer—Interpostal. It would seem the name was coined for distinctiveness, setting this strange group apart from all other stamp groups. Locals they are, Officials in a great measure, yet the mystery of their use precludes their full and unqualified acceptance into a brotherhood of staid and studied emissions whose lineage is unclouded.

There are in all about 1000 varieties known. In the 1890's Scott listed them at about 600 varieties. But since then much study has developed chronology of redrawn types and also the discovery of new towns to add to the old lists.

Their use was from 1864 to 1890. There are now 28 recognized types including the very rare variety carrying the inscription "Gouverneur General du Liban." Of this mentioned rarity but one example is known, now resting in the British Museum as an exhibit of the Tapling collection.

Generally, the name of a town appears on the (soi-disant) stamps. These towns are usually those of Egypt, but include many ports and cities of neighboring countries. This evidences their use in Egyptian offices abroad.

Nearly all are known with dated postmarks identifying them unmistakably, each to the town of its nativity. Or better, each stamp to its proper town. No cross ruffing of towns.

Their shape is always circular. A wide range of colors was used in their printing. Their diametric dimensions vary from 28 mm. to 40 mm.

All are without value, thus closely allocating them to the "frank" group. Or mayhap we could term them a sort of OFFICIAL SEAL. Yet not quite that, in the sense of the general use of officially sealed. In certain groups of revenues we encounter what has been dubbed IN LIEUS. It seems that these mysterious Egyptians might fall close to that aspect of things.

I have written several well known collectors and several well known dealers and experts of this country in the past, in an attempt to secure evidence of their use. But strangely, I have never been able to secure a cover.

Their very shape and lineaments cry for their use as a seal on the back flap of an envelope. It is manifest that originally this was intended. Yet at the last moment, at the very Zero Hour, the administration relaxed by saying "No" (?). So they were not then required to be pasted across the flaps of envelopes. And succeeding issues post-dating the earliest simply clung to the mode and format of the pioneers.

A wise dealer-collector friend of the Orient and also an ably informed sideliner of London suggest that the almost total use of these stamps was as

Issued in 1867

a seal to MAIL BAGS. The BAGS rather than the missives bore the stamps. I think this is a sage and well formed conclusion. Often the bags were tied with twine, and often shreds of fibre are found on the backs of the stamps. Perhaps other containers than bags were used for some mails, but probably the Interpostal was used as a combination FRANK-SEAL.

I smile as I note the "probable," "perhaps," "evident" and similar words I have used. But this is a mysterious matter at its best. I only relay the summary of opinions and the accumulation of ideas resultant from my years of contact with these stamps. The fact that my modest reader is conjectural in great part can well be excused; in that we have so few concrete facts, and only evidential shreds on which to erect a structure. If you can guess or reason it better, I'll gladly listen.

Like so many other strange corners in philately in which one can lose himself in delighful absorption, I have found few that surpass these mysterious Interpostals. I have accumulated during the flight of time a representative collection. There is no regular market for these stamps. Like so many sidelines they simply pop up now and anon. If a collector can get together, say 700-800 of them he has a top flight collection. The first 100 or even 200 are not very hard to annex, but thereafter it is greatly a matter of luck. Real collections of them seldom appear on the market although I have noted one now and then—usually at a fabulous quotation.

Many of these stamps may be had for a dime or less each. I find, however, that the majority are really very hard to secure. Still, with the exception of well known rarities and uniques, no great price is attached to them. They rank well with most foreign locals of the better class.

They are replete with alternative spellings and it takes quite some practice to detect these when arranging them. Several interesting errors exist, and like any group of stamps there is enough variation to hold interest.

The best list known of them is, doubtless, from the pen of the late Mr. O. May, an Englishman. From this list as a backlog, much study has resulted, and many varieties have been added.

As a thoroughly experienced collector of bizarre things in stamps I can wholeheartedly recommend these Interpostals to any collector. Every collector should have a fling, an escape from sameness, an adventure. Do not become totally catalog bound. Be no Prometheus on a rock. You'll be surprised how much fun stolen sweets can be. Or will you?

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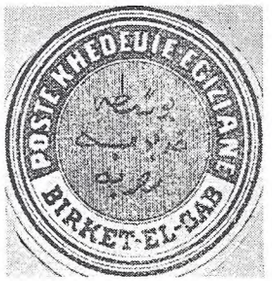
1868

1871



1877

1880

1884

By E. R. Vanderhoof

Written especially for
WEEKLY PHILATELIC GOSSIP