

MOROCCO : ITS FOREIGN AND PRIVATE POSTS.

By FRED W. EDWARDS.

The philatelic history of a country closely reflects and illustrates its political history, its form of government, and often even the customs and characteristics of its national life. In no other could we find more substantial evidence of this close inter-relation of philately and history than in the Empire of Morocco.

The government of Morocco is an autocracy, subject to religious influences, which severely repress all progress; and the general system is as corrupt as the people who administer and endure it.

From such a government, and from a people notorious throughout several centuries for brigandage and piracy, no properly organized postal service could be expected, and the natural and almost inevitable outcome of this lack of proper postal facilities was the establishment of Foreign Post Offices, supplemented by private courier posts—the latter system giving rise to abuses, corruption, and stamp speculation, with the result that practically all the "Local" stamps, good and bad alike, are under a ban and have incurred the disfavour of philatelists.

In Morocco, not only does the postal system illustrate a reactionary and corrupt system of government; but the picturesque stamps of the private posts illustrate the characteristics of the country and the Moorish people, by many dainty designs depicting camels, dromedaries, lions, palm trees, Moors, mosques, landscapes and seascapes.

The Empire of Morocco is situated in the north-west of Africa, and includes the former kingdoms of Fez and Morocco; the area of the country is about 220,000 square miles, the population is estimated at about seven millions, and the present ruler is Sultan Muley Abdul Aziz, who succeeded in 1894.

While Morocco has no proper Government postal system, there are services under the control of the British, French, German and Spanish Governments; and besides these foreign post offices there were various private posts which flourished between 1892 and 1900 and exploited the resources of the country in general and philatelists in particular, and by the latter were therefore condemned to everlasting execration.

But let it be remembered that these Moroccan private posts were by no means the worst stamp-speculating sinners; for, prolific as they were, all their records for number of varieties are easily eclipsed by the British P. O.'s in Morocco, from which no fewer than 87 standard varieties were issued from 1898 to 1907—and there are more to follow.

The foreign posts of Morocco claim priority of place on account of their greater importance, the higher status of their issues, and last, but not least, the greater number of their varieties; but we shall deal with the private posts at rather greater length, because they are known and even less loved!

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Great Britain competes with France, Germany and Spain in running courier mails along the coast of Morocco; and our own country has a long lead of the other powers as regards the number of varieties issued.

The first specially surcharged stamps for the British Agencies in Morocco were issued in 1898, when the contemporary stamps of Gibraltar, bearing values in Spanish currency (100 centi-

mos=1 peseta=about 7d), were overprinted at the office of the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, with the inscription, "Morocco Agencies"; and no fewer than 70 varieties of overprinted Gibraltar stamps were issued for the British offices in Morocco during the period 1898-1906; and in 1907 a set of eleven contemporary stamps of Great Britain (King Edward VII.) were overprinted with the same inscription, but with the addition of new values in the Spanish currency. There was however a set of seven of our late King's stamps overprinted with the inscription "Morocco Agencies," but without any overprint of new values, and these latter labels are said to be for parcel post.

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To our neighbors across the Channel belongs the distinction of having issued the first series of overprints for Morocco; for as early as 1891 a long set of the familiar French "Peace and Commerce" stamps were overprinted simply with a new value in the Spanish currency, there being, curiously enough, no name overprinted to indicate the issuing of these stamps specially for Morocco. These stamps were succeeded by a special series bearing the inscription "Poste Français Maroc," with overprinted values in Spanish currency, and curiously enough the overprinted "centimo" values correspond numerically with the original "cents" values on the contemporary French stamps; and this numerical identity holds good in all the values except the higher ones in "pesetas."

And whilst speaking of currency we might here express how grateful and comforting is our feeling that the following outlandish currency has never been adopted for the currency of any Moroccan stamps:—1 Mitkal=10 ounces=40 blankets=24 flocs=slightly over 3d. What a "money" table! Fancy asking for a "ten ounce" postage stamp!

The stamps of the "Sower" type of France overprinted "Maroc Gouvernement Provisoire 1907" are bogus. Speaking of bogus stamps of French origin, we might also mention that most of the private posts of Morocco were run by enterprising French firms, as is evident by the characteristic French inscriptions "Postes," or "Chiffre Taxe" (Postage Due), found on most of these private locals; whilst those of Spanish origin are distinguished by the familiar Spanish inscription "Correos."

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Though the "Fatherland" was about eight years behind France in the surcharging of stamps for the Moroccan mails, the Germans soon made up for lost time in the competition for quantity of varieties, for during the period 1899-1907, there were 46 varieties of contemporary German stamps overprinted with the inscription "Marocco," and new values in Spanish currency.

THE SPANISH P. O.'S.

Last and least of the foreign offices in Morocco come those maintained by the Spanish Government, and only thirteen varieties of Spanish stamps were overprinted "Correo Espanol Marruecos," and this set of thirteen values (1/4c—10 pes.) covers the period 1903-9. We might also mention that in the Spanish fortified seaport and convict settlement of Melilla, on the north coast of Morocco, special stamps of heraldic

design were issued in 1894 for the Spanish soldiers in the garrison.

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Having now briefly reviewed the three hundred odd issues of the foreign offices in the Empire of Morocco, we have next to consider a group of about 150 varieties of stamps issued in the private local posts of that troubled country, which has been so plagued with its Sultans and stamp speculators.

These Moroccan locals are generally considered and condemned as utterly worthless; but exceptions must at least be made in the case of the issues inscribed "Mazagan—Maroc," "Mogador—Marakesch," and "Tanger—Fez."

Considered as a whole, the Moroccan locals are picturesque stamps, and well produced; and thus they possess an attraction which is as deceptive as that of many other beautiful objects. However, as most of these stamps have been obsolete for several years, and are by no means common, perhaps philatelists will eventually favour them with a kindlier regard; especially considering that the Moroccan private posts compare very favourably with the foreign posts as regards the number of varieties and provisionals issued.

In our review of this interesting group of stamps, we purpose adopting the usual alphabetical order of classification, and instead of confusing the tyro with synonyms, we had better follow the writer's usual practice of spelling geographical names as they are spelled on the stamps themselves.

Alcazar—Ouazzan:—Alcazar is a town of the former kingdom of Fez; it is situated on the Strait of Gibraltar, and was taken by Alphonso, King of Portugal in 1468. A British consular representative was established in this town. Ouazzan is a small picturesque hillside town, famous as a religious centre.

The pretty set of seven speculative stamps (5c—1 franc), issued in 1896 for the private post, Alcazar to Ouazzan are all of one type which bears a well engraved picture of a dromedary as the central feature of the design.

The issue was suppressed within a month of issue by the Shereef (prince or ruler) of Ouazzan.

Fez—Mequinez:—Fez is a holy city, the chief commercial centre, and one of the metropolitan cities of Morocco. In the 13th century Fez was the capital of an independent kingdom; three centuries later it was conquered and annexed by Morocco. In 1905, British, French and German missions were sent to Fez to urge reforms; these the Sultan admitted to be necessary, but desired a conference of the Powers. Britain declined, and the question became acute between France and Germany, but later on a satisfactory agreement was reached, and a British consul was established at Fez. Mequinez is a royal burying place, about 36 miles from Fez, and, like the latter, is a metropolitan city.

The locals for Fez and Mequinez consist of one set of eight stamps, all of one type, bearing a portrait of a Moor, and this set was supplemented by a corresponding series of eight "Unpaid," which are of a less dainty design, and bear the initials "F. M." as the only indication of the post by which they were issued.

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Fez—Sefro:—Sefro is an inland town

in N. Morocco. The stamps issued under the title "Fez—Sefro," are utterly worthless and probably never saw these places.

Mazagan — Azemour — Marakech:—Mazagan is an almost deserted seaport near the Atlantic, and was opened to foreign trade, and here also a British resident was established. The place is situated at a distance of about eight miles from Azemour, and 120 from Marakech the Moroccan capital.

The set of seven speculative stamps issued under the above heading in 1898 are all oblong and of real beauty.

Mazagan—Maroc:—This was the first and best of the private posts of Morocco; the first stamp (25c) appearing in 1892, and shortly after a new value (10c) was made by surcharging.

In 1893 an ugly set of stamps appeared, which bore the names "Mazagan-Marakech"; and here we might remark that "Morocco," "Maroc(co)," "Marrakesch," and "Marakech," are synonyms for the capital of Morocco. After the issuing of a couple of provisionals, a new set of stamps appeared in 1897 and these latter stamps are of great beauty, depicting as they do a characteristic Moorish scene.

The set of seven "Unpays," issued simultaneously with these pictorial stamps, are "nondescript," stamps which bear the familiar French inscription, "Chiffre Tax," and these particular "Postage Dues" can be recognized by the kneeling dromedary which apparently supports a large shield on which is the numeral of value.

This private post fitly celebrated the incoming of the 20th century by issuing another pictorial set of oblong stamps, all of which are bi-coloured and of a dainty design.

Mogador—Agidir:—Mogador is a port with a small harbour and is an emporium of trade. Agidir is an inland town in the south.

The solitary set of seven stamps, all bi-coloured, issued in 1900 from these places are all of one type, the central feature of the design being an African lion.

Mogador—Maroc:—As in the case of "Mazagan and Maroc," which changed the spelling of the latter place to "Marakech," so the stamps of "Mogador—Maroc" changed to "Mogador—Marrakesch"; and it really appears as though the enterprising "postal officials" of some of these private posts created varieties simply by changing the spelling of geo-

graphical names instead of by the less original method of changing paper, watermarks and perforations!

The 1895-6 issue inscribed "Mogador—Marrakesch" are a handsome set of rectangular stamps all of a type bearing a design which looks like a panel picture of Paradise!

Saffi—Marakech:—Saffi is one of the Moroccan ports opened to foreign trade and in which a British consular representative was established. The lovely set of seven oblong stamps, issued there in 1899, are notable for bearing the finest seascape to be seen on any stamp.

Tanger—Arizila:—Tanger is a seaport and health resort on the Strait of Gibraltar, and possesses a castle, and the town is surrounded by a wall. It was taken by the Portuguese in 1471 and ceded to Charles II of England on his marriage with Catherine; but the "merry monarch" did not think the port worth the expense of its upkeep, and in 1683 he caused the works to be blown up. Arizila is a seaport in the kingdom of Fez, and was formerly a Roman colony and a place of considerable importance; but now does not contain more than 1,000 inhabitants.

The set of eight stamps issued under the above heading in 1900 bear a "geometrical" design—a marked departure from the usual landscape or marine view.

Tanger—El Ksar:—El Ksar is an inland town of minor importance.

The set of eight oblong stamps issued from this post in 1898 are of one type, the design being that of a ship.

Tanger—Fez:—Palm trees surrounding a rectangle in which is a large numeral of value form the principal feature of the design of the set of eight stamps (5c—5 francs) issued by the enterprising French firm which originated this post in 1892; and curiously enough this firm and several others apparently forgot that Spanish currency not French, was in use in Morocco, but this "oversight" is a minor matter!

Tangier—Morocco—Laraiche:—Tangier, of course, is another form of "Tanger"; and Laraiche is a strong port open to foreign trade, and possesses a castle and a good harbour.

The set of six stamps emanating from this source are crudely designed and are all of one type; the central figure of the design being a full length of a creature bearing a remote resemblance to a human being! The "artist"

from whose inspired soul the design came, seems to have intended to caricature Peary setting out for the Pole!

Tangier—Tetouan:—Tetouan is another port in which a British Consul resides, and from this port considerable communication is kept up with Gibraltar.

The most striking feature of the set of five stamps issued from this source in 1897 is the benevolent countenance of the lion depicted as lying under the shade of a palm tree. The kind creature was evidently snap-shotted while indulging in an "after-dinner nap," and there's a smile that won't come off! These stamps are also curious as being nondescripts; and the solitary Spanish word "Correos" is the sole inscription, excepting the value.

Tetouan—Maroc—Chechouan:—The set of seven stamps bearing the above cumbersome inscription, together with the date "1896" and comparatively small figures of value in the lower corners, are all of one type—a geometrical rather than a pictorial design. Here again the values (5 centimes—1 franc) are in French currency; but "accidental discrepancies" of this sort are not much worse than many inverted surcharges, etc., in our current catalogues.

Tetouan—El Ksar:—Instead of the customary camel or dromedary, a mounted horse forms the central feature of the design of the set of six stamps issued by the promoters of this private post in 1897; and this set is the last of our list of Moroccan locals.

We might, however, mention the Spanish stamps surcharged for Tetouan in 1909, and these latter like the French "Tanger stamps issued in 1891, though really regarded as "government" locals are of the same "kidney" as many of the private locals we have just reviewed.

In conclusion, the writer desires to express the hope that those of his readers who do not exclusively "go by Gibbons" and banish all private posts from off the face of the earth (whilst collecting Brunci, Caymans, &c.), may be interested in this elementary introduction to the issues of the Empire of Morocco—a curious country which even in the 20th century cannot boast of a properly organised government postal service; whilst those philatelists who have no love for "locals," will, by learning more about such stamps, better know what to avoid.—*Stamp Collectors' Fortnightly.*