



THE FRENCH CONSULAR POST OFFICE AT CAIRO, EGYPT 1866-1875

Purpose: This single-frame exhibit traces the history of the French Consular Post Office at Cairo, Egypt, from its opening in January 1866 to its closing in March 1875.

Scope: This exhibit uses examples of postal history to:

- Illustrate the postmarks used in relation to the French Post Office at Cairo;
- Identify the rates applied to mail despatched from the French Post Office;
- Describe the routes by which mail was conveyed from Cairo via Alexandria to France and other destinations in Europe;
- Show the stamps used on the mail.

Exhibit Outline

1. Historical Background
2. Predecessors, Opening & Development of the Cairo Post Office
3. French Stamps Used at the Cairo Post Office
4. Postmarks, Rates, Routes, & Underpaid Mail
5. Mixed Frankings
6. Mail to Non-French Destinations
7. Discovery of a Rare Auxiliary Handstamp
8. Registered Mail
9. Closing of the Cairo Post Office



1874: Cairo, Egypt to Paris, France
80 Centimes Single Letter Rate

February 23, 1874
Posted at Cairo, Egypt

February 23
Rec'd at Alexandria, Egypt
placed aboard English P. & O.
Packetboat Tanjore

March 2
Arrived Marseille, France

March 2
TPO Marseille/Lyon/Paris

March 3
Arrived Paris

Cairo
Obliterator

5119

In the 18th and 19th centuries, European citizens moved to major cities of the Ottoman Empire, of which Egypt was a vassal state, to establish businesses there and to serve in diplomatic roles. Embassies representing the countries of these merchants soon followed. French entrepreneurs established businesses first at the port of Alexandria, Egypt, but by 1865, the increasing number of businesses, diplomats, and their families based on Cairo prompted the French Postal Administration to establish a post office at in that city.

Synopsis of Exhibit

THE FRENCH CONSULAR POST OFFICE AT CAIRO, EGYPT

1866-1875

Minnesota Stamp Expo 2025

EXHIBIT PLAN

1. Historical Background
2. Predecessors, Opening & Development of Cairo Post Office
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PURPOSE OF EXHIBIT

This single-frame, postal history exhibit traces the history of the French Consular Post Office at Cairo, Egypt from its opening in 1866 to its closing in 1875. The Cairo office was the shortest-lived of the French post offices in Egypt. The expansion and improvement of the Egyptian Post Office, the completion of the Suez Canal, and the establishment of GPU/UPU all led to its closing.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

How were there French post offices in Egypt?

The Ottoman Capitulations, a series of treaties between the Ottoman Empire (of which Egypt was a vassal state) and European powers, gave special privileges to European citizens. Through the Capitulations, the Ottoman Sultan gave, in this case, the French, the privilege to be subject to the laws of France instead of the Muslim Sharia Law of the Ottoman Empire. From the standpoint of postal history, the Capitulations of the Sultan allowed local French consulates in Egypt to operate as post offices of the country of France. These French post offices in Egypt:

- employed staff from France,
- levied French postal rates,
- applied French handstamps on mail, and
- used French postage stamps of the period.

The French first opened a post office at the consulate in Alexandria in 1837, followed by post offices at Suez (1862), Cairo (1866), and Port Said (1867). Each post office was assigned a numbered obliterator to cancel stamps, with the post office at Cairo assigned the number 5119.

ESSENTIAL SOURCES

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Salles, Raymond, *La Poste Maritime Française, Tome II* (Limassol: James Bendon, 1992)
Smith, Peter A. S., *Egypt, Stamps and Postal History, A Philatelic Treatise* (Limassol: James Bendon, 1999)
Yvert et Tellier, *Catalogue de Mondial Cotation, Colonies Françaises et Bureaux Français à l'Étranger*, 2025 Edition

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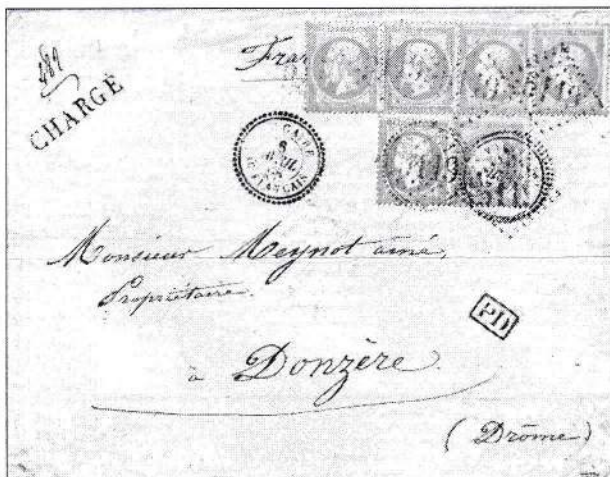
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CHALLENGE FACTORS

Because the French Post Office at Cairo was open for only 10 years, compared to the Alexandria office - open for 94 years -, and was used significantly less than the Alexandria post office, there are few or no examples known of several postmarks and usages originating at the Cairo office:

- Until the 2000's, there were no examples known of the postage due handstamp (AFFRANCHISSEMENT INSUFFISANT) applied at Cairo, and until now there was no known example of the "after departure" handstamp (APRÈS LE DÉPART).
- Just two complete letters are known sent registered from the French Post Office in Cairo.
- After a search through auction catalogues and published research from the last 50 years, only two examples been identified - including the one exhibited here - of a letter posted at the French Post Office at Cairo and sent via the Brindisi route to France.
- There is currently no known example of a letter bearing the "Return to Sender" postmark (RETOUR A L'ENVOYEUR 5119).
- There are no known examples of mail sent at printed matter rates from the Cairo office.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EXHIBIT



One of Two Known Complete
Registered Letters from the
French P.O. at Cairo



Earliest Known Letter from the
French P.O. at Cairo



One of Two Known Letters from the
French P.O. at Cairo Sent via Brindisi