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## *French Posts in Abyssinia* by E. F. Hurt (63)

A glance at the map will show where the mountains on the east of Abyssinia, behind which lie the high table lands, form the boundary between that country and French Somali Coast. The latter territory is bounded to the north by Eritrea and the Danikil country and to the south by British Somaliland. It is on the latter border that lies the Port of Djibouti facing the Gulf of Aden, while, across the Bay of Tajurah, lies Obock, the first port of the Colony, just south of the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb.

Obock came into French hands in 1862 but was not actively occupied until 1884 when Sagallo and Tajurah were also ceded to the French. It was from this date that Obock took on importance as the port of entry and around it was built up the Somali Coast Colony. In 1888 Djibouti became the main port and the seat of government was moved there and the first stamps of Djibouti issued. For a time a regular mail service was run between Obock and Djibouti and it was for the parcels carried on this mail that the high value 5 to 50 frs. stamps were issued. Djibouti rapidly gained in importance until in 1894 the post office was entirely transferred from Obock to the former port in view of the commencement of the building of the Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway.

The inscription "Côte française des Somalis" first appeared on the stamps as the result of an official decree of 1896 which combined certain places in the territory. The actual boundary with Abyssinia was an arbitrary one of "fifty miles from the coast" fixed by the convention of March 20th, 1897.

The railway from Djibouti was opened as far as Harrar in Abyssinia in December 1902 and this took over much of the traffic which had formerly passed via Aden and Zaila, through which post offices also the British Consular Mail from Addis Ababa had previously passed.

Before the opening of the railway, M.Martineau, Governor of the Somali Coast, had arranged a service in both directions between Harrar and Djibouti. Letters from France for Harrar were carried without additional payment. Camels were introduced to carry this mail and the service was somewhat irregular. This was probably because, as was reported in the "Journal de Djibouti" at the time, the mails seldom exceeded three kilogrammes of letters and the cost was running into thousands of francs. The irregularity of the services did nothing to cut the cost since the camels belonged to, or were contracted for on a yearly basis by, the government and the expense was therefore a constant one. M.Martineau became worried about this expense which seemed out of proportion with the result and, on studying the matter, came to the conclusion that foot posts were actually as fast as the camels since the tracks, unmade and often blocked by boulders, were unsuitable for the latter. So in 1899 foot posts by runners were substituted and the first of these left on May 29th. This service was now put on a weekly basis in each direction. There were several relay posts on the route and an officer of the French Administration was established at Harrar, on Abyssinian soil, to supervise that end of the service. It was then reckoned that the foot service cost about 12,000 francs per year, a saving of some 40,000 francs over the previous camel service.

(Continued on next page)



As from 1899 also the Emperor of Abyssinia, Menelik, agreed to arrange for the immediate taking over at Harrar of any mail for Addis Ababa as he had long considered it desirable to have postal services established in the interior. It is doubtful if the first issue of stamps of Abyssinia came into use until January 1895 though at that date covers exist showing that mail from Harrar (the outlet for Europe) bore the stamps of Djibouti in combination. The Abyssinian postal rate at that time was fixed as follows: 2 gueres for 15 grammes on letters and 1/4 guere for 30 grammes for newspapers, these rates being entirely internal, of course, and over any distance.

In 1895 the Abyssinian postal services were: (1) Ankober to Entotto (then the capital), (2) Entotto to Harar, (3) Harar to Djibouti, each one running twice weekly. The first two services were entirely Abyssinian but the post between Harar and Djibouti was carried out by mutual arrangement between the Abyssinian and French governments by the already mentioned camel service, largely undertaken by the Roman Catholic Mission to Abyssinia, at Harar.

The stamps of both Obock and Djibouti were stocked at Harar in order to facilitate transmission of letters overseas. These stamps were of course at first only cancelled on arrival at Djibouti, the postage from Harar to the frontier being paid in Abyssinian stamps.

But when the railway reached Dire-Daoua (New Harar) in the latter part of 1902 a French Consular post was opened at Harar itself - the distance between Dire-Daoua and Harar is 50 kilometres - and this office was supplied with a date stamp of the double circle type reading - HARAR/POSTES FRANCAISES, the word Harar being preceded and followed by a "star." This date stamp was supposed to be used only on the cover, the cancellation of the French stamps of Obock and Djibouti to be left to their arrival at the latter place, though often they were undoubtedly cancelled with the date stamp before leaving Harar. The 5c and 10c stamps of Port Said are also known with this cancellation.

About 1904-05 a further post office was opened at the French Legation at Addis Ababa and this office was supplied with stamps of the Somali Coast. In 1906 a further post office was opened at Dire-Daoua, which was a rail junction.

It was in 1906, after the opening of the third office, that all three French offices in Abyssinia were placed under jurisdiction of the postmaster at Port Said and now we come to a very interesting piece of philatelic history.

If you will turn to French Levant in your Scott's catalogue you will find under OFFICES IN THE TURKISH EMPIRE, 1907, that the 25c, 50c and 1 fr. of the 1902 series are listed without the usual surcharge in Turkish currency (Scott Nos. 29, 32, 33) with a footnote to the effect that "the above were issued early in 1907 for use in the French Offices of Harar and Dire-Daoua in Abyssinia." Actually Scott is not exactly correct here because the 25c blue was issued for this purpose at the end of 1906, the 50c (deep brown) in March 1907 and the 1 franc (deep claret) in 1908. And furthermore these stamps were also used at Addis Ababa.

But there is a further word still to be said on this subject. Abyssinia joined the Postal Union on November 1, 1908 and the French Post Offices in Abyssinia were then closed. The three stamps in question were used from the date of issue until June 30th by the post offices and there received the French cancellations in the type already described with the

wording "POSTES FRANCAISES" at foot. Scott's prices for used copies are quite out of line with the rarity of these stamps particularly as the 1 fr. was only used for a very short time indeed. The 25c was in use for two years and is therefore the commonest, but all should be collected on cover because these same stamps were also sold in Paris and a number were sent out to Abyssinia to be "cancelled to order," many receiving cancellations dating after June 1908, these latter being quite valueless. The 50c deep brown is worth double Scott. The 1 fr. deep claret is well worth \$60 genuinely used, but the claret is only known cancelled to order, as this shade is the 1920 printing.

The office at Dire-Daoua had been opened on Jan. 11, 1906; at Addis Ababa between December 1904 and January 1905 while Harar, as has been stated, was opened in 1899, having until 1904 been carried on at different periods by the Catholic Mission and the French Consulate. The latter was always spelt "Harar" until the commencement of 1908 but was later spelt "Harrar!" The cancellation of the French stamps was supposed always to be done at Djibouti until 1904 though the rule was not always kept.

After the closing of the French Post Offices the date stamps were handed over to the Abyssinian Post Office which removed the words "POSTES FRANCAISES" and used them for cancelling the Abyssinian stamps.

Now let us recapitulate the French stamps which were used in Abyssinia:

HARAR: For a very short time in 1906, French Levant stamps and 5c & 10c Port Said

HARAR & DIRE-DAOUA: French Somali Coast, Obock and Djibouti

ADDIS ABABA: Somali Coast

ALL OFFICES: French Levant 25c, 50c & 1 fr. without surcharge over the short period already given

#### NEW MEMBERS Welcome to our new members:

- 114-MEYER, Charles E. 23 Verona Pl., Verona, N.J. (F. New Caledonia specialized)
- 115-SPECULAND, Joseph, 4331 - 45th St. Long Island City, N. Y. (France and Colonies)
- 116-HARMER, Gordon, Harmer Rooke & Co., 551 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.
- 117-PFEFFINGER, Joseph, 83 Smullen Street, Sayreville, N. J.
- 118-KIRCHER, Jerome F. Jr. 41 Picardy Lane, St. Louis, Mo. (F. & F. Offices in China - anxious to contact other members similarly interested in F. Offices in China)
- 119-RICE, F.R. 544 W. 110 St., N.Y.C. (F. U. & Un. mostly 20th century)
- 120-MEGHRIG, G.M. 270 Riverside Drive, N.Y.C.

#### \* CHANGE OF ADDRESS \*

LABINE, R.P. (51) to 329 Carew St. Springfield, Mass.  
NOVY, Joseph (48) to 340 W. 72 St., N. Y. C.

Correction: Engerrand, G.C. (83) should be DR.G. G. Engerrand - now collects Used France and Col., no varieties.

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The October meeting was a Round-Table discussion.

At the November meeting Mr. Raoul Lesgor (1) gave an exposition on the early postage dues of France. These much neglected stamps were brilliantly explained and illustrated by Mr. Lesgor's stamps, and remarkable photographic enlargements done by our member, Mr. Adrien Boutrelle (12). Anyone needing philatelic photographs may get in touch with Mr. Boutrelle.

Will members please save Group postage and send in their 1943 dues if not yet in? Your cooperation much appreciated.



### SEMI-POSTAL STAMPS

The first semi-postal stamp for New Caledonia was issued in 1915, 200,000 of the 10c of 1905 being typographically surcharged in red with a large cross, figure 5 and NCE. It exists with inverted surcharge, broken E (illustrated) and with cross omitted due to defective impression.



In 1917 the 10c and 15c of 1905 were surcharged in Paris in sheets of 150, the cross 5c surcharge being the same on both values. The 5c on 10c exists with the double surcharge. These two stamps and the one of 1915 were withdrawn on April 1, 1921.

It was "a long time between drinks" and not until 1938 did the next semi-postal appear. On October 24 of this year a series was issued, one stamp for each colony, in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the discovery of radium by Pierre and Marie Curie, whose pictures are on the stamp. Designed by J. de la Nézière and engraved by J. Piel, the stamps had a franking value of 1.75fr., the additional 50c going to aid the work of the International Union for the Control of Cancer. They were withdrawn from sale on July 10, 1939.

The 150th anniversary of the French revolution was commemorated on July 3, 1939, by the issuing of a set of five stamps (designed by Ouvre) picturing the fall of the Bastille. Similar sets were issued for the other colonies. The set had a franking value of 5.55 fr. and a surcharge of 3.90 fr. for the colonial defense fund. They were lithographed by Vaugirard of Paris in sheets of 20.

In 1941 Vichy issued a series consisting of 24 sets of three stamps each, one set for each colony. That for New Caledonia consisted of a 1 fr. plus 1 fr. ("La Zélée", ship of explorer-navigator Dumont D'Urville), 1.50 fr. plus 3 fr. (soldier of the colonial infantry) and 2.50 fr. plus 1 fr. (Kanaka militiaman and native huts). The second denomination was of the same design for each colony, the other two typical of the colony for which they were issued. Surcharge was for a fund for aid to the "military and workers of the French empire." Because of the political situation it is highly improbable that any of these stamps issued for a "Free French" colony (including New Caledonia) were sent to that colony. The same is true of the issue of two large size pictorial stamps with the head of Marshall Pétain in upper right corner. These stamps were issued in 1941 and are part of a series of 2 stamps each for the 24 colonies. - They are semi-postals but what the surcharge is for I do not know and I have not even seen the stamps.

### POSTAGE DUE STAMPS

Unlisted by Scott and debated by experts are the "T in triangle" dues which Yvert credits to New Caledonia for 1894 and 1900. Counterfeits are numerous and varied and, as a matter of record, I have never been able to find one that I felt in my own mind was good. These were temporary overprints on regular postage issues, used during a certain period of time because of a shortage of general colonial dues.

For 1894 Yvert lists the following denominations overprinted T in a solid triangle: 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c, 15c, 20c, 25c and 30c. Baron de Vinck doubts the authenticity of the 1c, 2c and 30c. These do not exist in unused condition and

should be cancelled in April or May, 1894.

The T in broken triangle on the 5c yellow green and 5 on 4c of 1899 was authorized in a decree dated Dec. 29, 1899. The 5 on 4c was used in January, 1900; the 5c in 1902. Baron de Vinck lists the 30c with this overprint as of 1902. Both he and Yvert note the possibility that it was used on other denominations.



The decree which authorized the jubilee overprints on postage stamps in 1903 also provided for the issuance of postage dues with the same overprint. They were issued on July 17 and were overprinted in sheets of 50 by means of the top rows of the plate used in overprinting the postal issue. The missing I in TENAIRE occurs in position No. 2, but its ratio is 1 to 49 instead of 1 to 149 as in the postage. There were not enough sheets of the 2 fr. in Nouméa to make up the quantity originally ordered, so blocks, pairs and singles were requisitioned from the other offices in the colony to be assembled into three sheets of 50 each, in which fashion they were overprinted. A further printing of all values was authorized on Feb. 4, 1904 at which time three complete sheets of the 2 fr., in a different shade, were overprinted. So the total printing of this denomination was 300, making 6 copies issued without I. Scott lists the 1 fr. with double overprint and some values have been noted without dates in the corners due to improper press feeding.

Eight denominations of a definite type designed by H. Vollet and engraved by J. Puyplat were issued in 1906.

Special printings of the 1 fr. were surcharged in Paris in sheets of 150, the 2 fr. on 1 fr. being issued on Sept. 6, 1926, and the 3 fr. on 1 fr. appearing on Oct. 10, 1927.

The current type, picturing a Sambar stag and niaulis tree, engraved by Hourriez, was issued on April 30, 1928; printed in sheets of 75.

### PARCEL POST STAMPS

Three surcharges--a 50c on a special printing of the 5 fr. and overprints on the 1 fr. of 1925 and the 2 fr. of 1905--provided the first parcel post stamps for New Caledonia. Overprinting was done in sheets of 75 and stamps were issued on Sept. 6, 1926.

Three denominations of the 1928 issue were similarly overprinted and issued Feb. 17, 1930, to form the second and latest issue.

### AIR POST STAMPS

The first authentic air mail stamps for New Caledonia were issued on March 14, 1938, the issue comprising three denominations. The design pictures a seaplane over the Pacific, with the island of New Caledonia outlined. Engraved by Decaris.

Eight colonies shared in the Bastille air post issues, New Caledonia being one of these. They were issued at the same time as the postal commemorative sets, with the same design, and carried a 4 fr. surtax for the colonial defense fund.

Three new values of the type of 1938--7 fr., 20 fr. and 50 fr.--were issued in 1940.

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I have in my collection a 25c of 1928 overprinted "PAR AVION." In explanation of this I quote from a letter from a New Caledonian cor-



respondent:

"I intentionally sent with my last lot a stamp with the surcharge "AVION." They are not yet listed in France, but I hope that they will be some day. Do not lose it as there are not many of them. I have but three on cover. These stamps were used in the first month of 1931. An Australian aviator named Roffey came here with a small plane and after having made some trial flights and exhibitions, tried to start a postal service between the different centers in the interior of the colony. That is why the postal service had this handstamp made, which was used to cancel all the letters carried by him. Not being subsidized by the state, he was unable to keep it up and abandoned it very soon and set out for Australia."

Contemporary accounts in the philatelic press give somewhat the same story, with a variant of the name to Ropfe, and one states that 35 varieties were overprinted. In all probability this was a cancellation rather than an overprint and was more or less a "favor" proposition.

Another such item appeared in March, 1939, when the aviator Martinet flew mail from the airport at Voh, New Caledonia, to Brisbane, Australia, from whence it was forwarded by regular commercial airlines. Stamps, both air mail and regular postage, used on covers carried on this flight were hand-stamped "1er Courrier 100% aérien/Nlle Calédonie-France/via Australie" with a cachet made of rubber. This, too, was probably a cancellation.

#### MILITARY FRANCHISE STAMPS

The military franchise stamps of 1893 were an unnecessary issue and of doubtful standing. Regular first-class postage rate, New Caledonia to France, was 25c and members of military forces on island were allowed a franchise of 10c, making 15c rate to them. Military authorities issued these stamps to represent the 10c franchise. They, with 15c in postage, paid the first-class rate. However, a letter bearing the proper corps cachet and 15c was accepted for mailing anyway, so the stamps were superfluous.

#### TIMBRES DE FRANCHISE



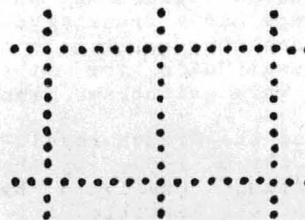
TYPE a (black, blue & red) was issued first and quickly withdrawn on complaint of postal authorities since it carried the value 10c and was considered an actual postage stamp. Probably someone tried to mail a letter with 2 of these and 5c postage. TYPE b (black, blue & red) replaced it. Then came TYPE c in gold, blue & red. TYPE d was prolific in its colors, black, blue, red and blue, red and green on white, green, -the various combinations providing 12 different color patterns. I've read somewhere that each color was for a different regiment, but don't take my word for it. All the stamps were issued imperforate.

For the novice who wants to plate a stamp, these can't be beat. All except type c are numbered from 1 to 25, according to their position on lithographing stone. I have seen several of these on cover but it is my opinion that 99% of them were made for philatelists. Complete sheets of many of the stamps were common in Paris before the war. (To be continued)

#### THE UNOFFICIAL SUSSE PERFORATION ON THE FIRST EMPIRE ISSUE by T.E. Gootée (44)

In 1854 when the first English stamps were perforated, the French postal administration began, in a half-hearted, and not too enthusiastic way, to experiment with stamp perforating. A number of devices were considered, but it was not until the fall of 1862 that the government issued stamps with perforations.

In the meantime - and particularly in 1861 and 1862 - several private perforations were permitted and successfully used on the First Empire Issue, current at that time. Probably the best known and most interesting of these is the Susse Perforation. It was first introduced on Jan. 1st, 1861 - and used until the fall of the following year. The Susse Brothers was a large firm of Paris stationers on the Place de la Bourse - and was licensed to sell the then current imperforate stamps of the government. To facilitate the handling of these stamps, they invented and patented a machine which perforated in a single operation demi-sheets of 50 subjects (10 x 5) with gauge 7 holes, as shown in the illustration.



SUSSE FRÈRES

This perforation can be found on the following stamps of the 1853-60 Issue: 1c, 5c, 10c, (type II), 20c, (both types), 40c, and the 80c rose.

When official government perforations came into being in 1862 the machine fell into disuse. In 1875 Messrs. Susse sold the device to a local stamp dealer, M. Maury, who then proceeded to privately perforate large numbers of existing stocks of imperforate stamps - and then sold the spuriously perforated stamps. Maury made one error, however. He almost always perforated the used single stamps - and hardly ever any strips or blocks.

Therefore, genuine original Susse perforations can best be identified by copies on cover (an infallible test), or by pairs, strips or blocks of any size. BEWARE of single used copies purporting to bear Susse perforations; 90% of such are bogus. Another good test of the legitimate Susse, is that the perforations are found, of course, only on the color shades of stamps current in 1861 and 1862. It should also be noted that the holes of the original Susse perforations were made so that the two vertical rows at each side of the stamp were diagrammatically opposite to each other; a condition not found on later wholesale reperforating.

Lastly, the teeth of the stamps (where they were torn apart from adjoining stamps) should always be rough and ragged. When cut smooth, it is a certainty that the stamps are not genuine Susse perforations, since most of Maury's perforations were on single copies, all bearing (in effect) four straight edges.

It is normal for the large holes (gauge 7) to cut into one or more sides of the stamps.

Mint copies of Susse stamps are extremely rare. Used single copies are fairly common -- and generally avoided by the experienced collector (for reasons set forth above). But nice copies on cover - and pairs, strips and blocks are all eagerly sought after, and worth a good price.

Watch for Group articles in the stamp magazines.