

A STUDY OF THE 25 CENTIMES COLONIAL SAGE-TYPE BLACK ON RED-LAKE

(A Communication to the Académie de Philatélie of Paris)

By Dr. Pierre Bouvet

Translated by Robert G. Stone from L'Écho de la Timbrologie #985, Jan. 1937
(A Contribution of the France and Colonies Philatelic Society)

(Translator's Note:-- This article is a very important reference for specialists in the General Issues of French Colonies, as well as experts and dealers in rare stamps, as it gives a very authoritative and careful study of the rare 25c black on red Sage-type stamp, indicating how it may be expertized. It is a companion study to one of the 4 centimes Ceres Colonial stamp, a translation of which appeared in France and Colonies Philatelist #93, pp. 11-14. The two studies were commissioned by the Académie de Philatélie in 1935.)

As I said in my closing to my preceding exposition to you (that on the 4c Ceres Colonial) the 25c Sage black on red-lake of French Colonies is much more difficult to study and identify than the 4c Ceres.

I shall follow, for this analysis, the same plan as for the latter stamp.

The 25c Colonial Stamp

The Dates

According to Maury, the corresponding French stamp had been put into use on 1 October 1878, whereas the use of the colonial stamp did not begin until the month of May 1879, or even later depending on the colony.

This is the place to state right off that this stamp was only sent -- in a formal manner -- to three colonies: Mayotte, Mossi-Bé, and New Caledonia.

It is intentional that I do not mention here Oceania: although certain people have inquired whether this stamp was not also sent to Tahiti; I shall tell you in due course the reason.

Date of Printing

--- I have found that the annual printing of colonial stamps of which the 25c was a part, was completed on 11 December 1878, and delivered to the principal commissary of the Ministry of Marine and Colonies on 21 December 1878.* ^ --- In any case, --- as for the 4c, --- this printing was the sole one (of this stamp).*

* We have substituted here for the author's original sentences the essence of his footnote which corrected them in proof. --Translator.

Dates of Issue and Use

As I have indicated above, these were different according to the colony in question; but it is interesting to note that the three colonies where the stamp served were, during this period, making normal and regular (annual) requests for provisioning (with 25c stamps), since the 25c black followed the 25c blue and since in all three colonies it was the 25c yellow Sage which replaced it (the 25c black).

Nossi-Bé.-- It is on the copies coming from Nossi-Bé that I find the basis for the date of issue given by the Yvert specialized catalogue ever since its 1929 edition, that of May 1878. In fact, the earliest date that I have noted so far is that of a postmark of 20 May 1879 cancelling three copies of the 25c on a piece.

Mayotte.-- For Mayotte, I have not yet found a date prior to 27 August 1879; and I could, on the otherhand show you a copy of the 25c light blue cancelled 18 July of the same year. It seems therefore, until further information comes to hand, that the issuance of the 25c black on red in this colony was later than in Nossi-Bé.

One can pose the question, in regard to these two Indian Ocean colonies, as to whether the provisioning of stamps to Nossi-Bé came from Mayotte. You know, in fact, that for a long time the isle of Nossi-Bé was simply a "dependency" of the latter.

But the administrative separation of these two colonies had become effective on 14 July 1877. Was it likewise for postal matters? I do not think so, because the concurrent use of the same values of the same type during identical periods leads me to doubt it. Moreover, one could object that the cancel with interior circle of dots reading "Mayotte et Dépendances/Nossi-Bé" served to 1880 inclusive.

New Caledonia.-- As for New Caledonia, to which the greater part of the printing of this stamp was sent, the issuance must have been later because I have not yet found a certain date before 18 September, and I think that the 25c light blue was still serving concurrently with the 25c black through the entire month of October. Thereafter, I can follow cancels (on 25c) at regular intervals up to 28 February 1880. What happened after that? I do not exactly know, but the shipment of the 25c must have been exhausted by then, which does not surprise me, I can show you, in fact, a mixed franking of 20c + 5c on a letter from Noumea dated 14 April 1880. A single letter does not prove anything of course, but experience shows me that in general -- prior to the invention of the surcharges, which did not appear until the following year even in New Caledonia -- the appearance of combined frankings speaks of a lack of certain denominations. Permit me, furthermore, to observe that, whether because of its remoteness, or perhaps also of the negligence of certain officials, this colony seems to have been one that really suffered for lack of certain denominations: I mention here merely to refresh your memory the well-known "PD" mark in a triangle which previously served here in 1876 and 1877.

What is one to make of the notice which was so long given in the specialized catalogue of France and Colonies, the note which long ago plunged me into this perplexity and whose suppression I finally obtained from Baron de Vinck (the editor). This is what it said:

"The 25c black on red seems to have been sent only to Madagascar, on which depend the Indian Ocean isles of Ste.-Marie, Nossi-Bé, and Mayotte, and to Tahiti. Reunion received its allotment directly from the Métropole. The used stamps are thus cancelled in the above islands. As the office of Madagascar had distributed the stamps after gumming them, the majority of them were useless upon receipt because they had stuck together -- these were burned up."

It is possible that "Madagascar" had corresponded, in the mind of the author of that note, to Diego Suarez, on which Nossi-Bé and Ste.-Marie actually depended, but much later, because the office of this place (D.S.) was not opened until October 1888 (1885?).

I have already alluded on the otherhand to the possible use (of these stamps) in Tahiti: later on I shall discuss likewise what I think about that and about use in Reunion.

As to gumming of the stamps in the colony itself, the allegation is certainly incorrect, because the stamps were sent gummed from the Métropole. But it is also certain that under the action of the warm humid tropical climate the sheets of the stamps often stuck together and thus became more or less unusable. The return of packages of such stamps by the colonies to the Central Administration provoked sermons from the Director of Colonies in which the latter advised the Governors to soak the sheets in water and then regum, or burn them. Did they as a result sign autos da fé for the 25c black on red, as the catalogues at one time seemed willing to claim in explanation of the rarity of this stamp? I do not exactly know; in any case, what I can tell you on this subject is that it seems definite that an incineration of stamps took place at Nossi-Bé, but at the end of January 1886. In fact, on the 28 January of that year a commission was named for the purpose; were any sheets of 25c blacks found there? Only the minutes of the proceedings -- if they ever existed -- could perhaps clarify this subject.

The Paper

The question of the paper takes on a very special importance here, but you will excuse me if I first digress a bit.

You know that the "stamps made at the Mint before 1876 were printed on colored paper". That is the wording of the first phrase in the note written at the top of the booklets of the Bank of France -- of which we will speak further below.

As the color of each value was different and was printed on a tinted paper, it was necessary to have as many different papers as colors -- which required a considerable stock and raised the net costs.

It was only in exceptional cases of urgency that they printed a value on a paper intended for another value, producing thus an "error" of papertint of the 20c imperforate Empire on green 5c paper, of 5c 1871 on 1c paper, and in my opinion of the first 5c Ceres on blue paper.

You also know that all administrations -- especially those concerned with finances -- sought to realize their goal of economy, and that that is the reason why the Bank of France decided to adopt the principle of using only a single make of white paper, even though as a result of creation of new denominations (all envisaged in 1875) the total number of them increased from 11 to 15. To obtain the desired tint of the paper they overprinted it typographically (with a smooth block) with a different color for each value. Thus this white paper can be distinguished immediately and clearly from that formerly used.

Its thickness in particular is very different and, as it ranges from 20 to 30 microns, one can say that the paper of the Sage type is thin relative to the preceding paper. I recall in fact that for the 4c Ceres the mean thickness was 45 microns.

As to the 25c colonial, it must be noted that its regular thickness is 30 microns, but the stamp also exists on a thinner paper, not over 25 or even 20 microns. So far I have not found copies on this really thin paper that are cancelled with dated postmarks of other than Mayotte. This fact is I think of capital importance, as it permits the conclusion that in no other case can the thickness of the paper -- if it be assumed to have any signif-

icance at all -- be considered as a definite sign for identification. Mr. Kohler expressed the same view in his letter.

Its Texture.-- You recall that the Bank gave the paper a typographic face-block imprint in the desired color. For the 25c of 1879, the color chosen was red-lake (lacque-rouge), that is, a brown-red tending toward red. Its tone is dull. This background tint is not uniform, as you know: it reveals unevennesses and specially at cut edges shows the white warp of the paper. Also the tint does not entirely cover the sheet but leaves a white margin of variable width depending on which edge of the sheet it is on. Note that the stamps with white sheet margins are a little less numerous from the sides than from the top and bottom of the sheet, as there are 30 lateral-margin stamps against 40 top and bottom ones. On the lateral margins of the sheet the colored border extends 10-11 mm beyond the stamps.

Impression.-- The impression of the colonial stamp is truly good. The interior frame line, which is sharply outlined, is only rarely broken. The shadings on the allegorical figures, on the bare areas of the bodies as well as on the draperies, are clear and sharp: the outline of the continents on the globe are without breaks. The letters of the inscription "Republique Francaise" are full and well-proportioned.

The Color.-- It is black and of a slightly dull shade on certain stamps from Nossi-Bé which haven't yet been put in water.

The Gum.-- Shiny and little cracked, it makes on some copies the design clearly visible from the back. But if, as I have actually experienced on a used stamp which still had its gum, one delicately lifts the gum up layer by layer, the view of the design on the back gradually disappears, finally taking on the opaque, dull, and whitish aspect which I have already described. On the otherhand if one observes this gum with a lens one sees sometimes a deep pebbly grain as if sprinkled with small grease drops. The gum extends over the whole sheet including the white borders.

Pairs and Mint Blocks.-- Rather uncommon mint, this stamp cannot be compared in any way as to rarity with the 4c Ceres, because one still finds it rather frequently in pair and even sometimes in blocks of 4, like the one you can admire this evening and which comes from the collection of our President. I call your attention to the fact that the clichés seem to be perfectly alligned in the plate and that the spacing between stamps is rigorously 2 mm.

Reaction to Mercury Lamp.-- Exactly comparable to that of the corresponding French stamp; it gives a black color in front and a grayish one in back,

Cancellations

I am going to review successively here those of the three colonies mentioned, but first I wish to say that in cancelled state this stamp is scarce in pairs, really rare in strips of three, and unknown as yet in block of four.

Mayotte.-- The cancels of this colony are two: the lozenge of mute points and the dated postmark.

The mute lozenge is the well-known one of 56 points (8 x 8 with 8 cut out of the center) measuring 18mm on the side and open in the center; it is the only lozenge that one can find on this stamp. I do not know during exactly what part of the year 1879 it was used, but a letter in the Hallé collection

shows that it was still used at the beginning of 1880 (23 Jan.).

The date postmark is that of 23 mm with interior circle of dots inscribed "Mayotte et Dép^{es}/Mayotte 1" with lateral fleurons. It is not known what the numeral "1" means, because as yet no one has found a number "2".

These two cancels are struck in blue, but because of the red-brown paper-tint of the stamp, the cancellation ink appears black under artificial light.

Nossi-Bé.-- The lozenge of points with "NSB" not being used anymore after 1876, it is only the dated postmark that one finds in this colony. It also is 23 mm with interior circle of dots and lateral fleurons, inscribed with "Mayotte et Dép^{es}/Nossi-Bé". This mark is also struck in blue.

New Caledonia.-- At Noumea, it was likewise the postmark with interior circle of dots reading "Nlle Calédonie/Noumea" and lateral fleurons which served at this epoch. The letters and numbers of the date in center are always very characteristic, with serified letters; the ink used was black. This cancel of Noumea is the one most often encountered on the 25c black on red-lake, and does not add any premium to the value of the stamp.

On the otherhand, one can consider the postmarks of other New Caledonia offices as rarities. I know in fact of only two. One is the mark "Postes/Bourail" with lateral crosses, dated "28 Fevr. 80", and the other on an entire letter is the mark "NC Postes/Canala" dated 27 Dec. 79. This letter also bears on the back the transit postmark of Noumea of 5 Janv. 80.

Are any other cancels known on the 25c? I have heard of a copy with a mark of New South Wales -- which is plausible for a stamp coming from New Caledonia -- but I cannot verify it as a fact.

Modes of Use

The 25c stamps were used for franking the basic letter rate to France and for foreign destinations also. In fact, in New Caledonia after 7 June 1879, an Arreté was in force lowering the letter rate to not only France, Algeria, and French Colonies, but to all the countries of the UPU. (The Décrets of Jan.-Feb. 1879 lowered UPU rates to 25c from 35c, the various colonies implementing this by local Arretés at somewhat later dates.--R.G.S.)
- - - - Thus one notes that letters from New Caledonia addressed abroad, and previously franked at 35c, did not require any more than 25c at this time. From that moment (June 1879), an unusual rate of consumption of that value set in, finally resulting in the lack of these stamps (25c) which I believe existed in 1880.

I come now to consideration of what other stamps might be confused with the 25c colonial. This to say, that after passing rapidly in review the stamps intentionally made to deceive collectors (stamps of France deperforated and with forged cancels, and forged stamps in entirety), I shall dwell a little longer on the imperforates of France, the so-called Regents of the Bank of France stamps, and the Granet reprints.

6 The 25c France Deperforated

Given an absolute identity of a part of the 25c France printings with that of the colonial stamps, it is understandable why the counterfeiters have thought of taking French stamps and after cutting off the perforations adding a false cancel. It is well therefore to beware of stamps with close margins -- and above all ones very short on two sides, as it is usually the off-center stamps of France that have been chosen -- and I remind you that a very fine copy should have each margin at least 1 mm. An examination under

great magnification may show moreover, traces of one or two cutoff perfs. As to false postmarks, I note the existence of a mark "N^{lle} Caledonie/ Noumea" in a type not conforming to the genuine.

Fake 25c

Messrs Gilbert and Dillemann have advised me of the existence of a rather well-made forgery, but you will have to excuse me from describing it as I have not been able to examine one. But I can tell you that among other characteristics this stamp was slightly too narrow and the spacing between stamps was too large. It fluoresces red under a mercury lamp. Moreover, -- and this fact has a special importance -- the cancellation was a mark of Papeete (Tahiti) with date more or less legible, probably of '88.

Given the suspicions of specialists on the General Issues as to the use of the 25c black in Oceania, I ask myself whether, in the rare cases that this mark has been observed, it isn't a false cancel on a forged stamp. This is the reason why I have on general principles eliminated the name of this colony from the list of those where the stamp certainly was used.

The 25c Imperforate of France

The first question to pose on this subject of the imperforate of France should be to find out if there were two distinct printings of this stamp.

In fact, the imperforate of France was definitely printed in sheets of 150 because such half-sheets exist in the files of the Mint. On the otherhand a philatelic observer, Mr. Dévoitine has reported in L'Écho de la Timbrologie of 31 Dec. 1919, the visit he made to the Postal Museum of Paris, at that time installed at 107 rue de Grenelle. He describes the frames where the sheets of stamps were displayed and writes of them: We see here all the stamps in panes of 25 and it seems that these stamps have been specially printed for exhibition, their margins leaving no doubt of it." Further along he notes: " --the Colonies General Issues imperforate, in the Group Type (Sage) comprise here the famous 25c deep blue and 25c black on red, all in panes of 25 stamps." As these sheets of 25 could not be colonial stamps, could they be imperfs of France always printed in sheets of 150, or could they be from the stamps called "Bank of France" of which we will speak a little later. Only a direct examination could answer this question and in any case the definition and delimitation of these two categories of stamp will be necessary.

Be that as it may, here are the principal characteristics of the imperforates of France:

Paper.-- It is thin (about 20 microns) and of average opacity. On an upper sheet margin copy (that through the kindness of Mr. Brun, I show you this evening) I have noticed that the margin measures over its full length 27 millimeters.

Background Tint.-- Although close to that of the colonial stamp, it is nevertheless always definitely lighter and rosier than the latter; this is still more definite in artificial light and above all with an illuminated lens than in daylight. I strongly insist on this point, because it is to my view the constant and capital element for distinguishing the two categories of stamps.

Moreover, on certain copies, the background tint presents horizontal striations recalling somewhat the lining on the medallion of Ceres, stripe that I have never encountered on the colonial stamp.

Color and Reaction to Mercury Lamp.-- These are identical to those of the 25c colonial.

Gum.-- It is comparable to that of the colonial stamp; on some copies one even finds the greasy pebbling we noted on the latter. But on the sheet margins the gum stops almost at the edge of the tint block and does not extend onto the white margins.

The 25c Called "Of the Bank of France"

This deserves here a whole special study, because it seems to me that we do not yet know very well all the stamps to be given this designation. (The subject is since dealt with in an important study by Guericault in Cahiers Philatéliques #3, May 1946. -- R.G.S.)

You know that the Bank of France had made some booklets, intended -- it is said -- for the Regents of the Bank. I could not do better for you in a few words than quote from the excellent description given by Maury in his book, where he called these booklets "Carnets d'Essais".

These booklets contain a certain number of pages each containing a group of 25 stamps similar to those which were current, except that they were not perforated and that their impression was very careful. Further, three sheets of each booklet are mounted on linen, opening out like a triptych. The middle sheet presents the series of stamps in use, but printed without background tint, that is on white paper. The left page shows only strips of tinted paper representing the tint of each stamp and the right page the definitive stamps, i. e., printed on the tinted paper.

It seems likely that the composition of each of these booklets varied: I can in any case tell you that the one now possessed by the Bank and which I had occasion to examine with Mr. Kastler does not contain the 25c, neither black on red nor the yellow.

But in other examples there are blocks of 25 and perhaps strips of 3 of the 25c black on red. I must add immediately that these blocks of 25 do not have large margins.

The collection of our President contains a group of pairs which correspond to the contents of these booklets of the Bank, i. e., background tint, stamp on white, and on tinted paper. Among the reference material of Mr. Champion is found a similar example. These stamps come from Bank booklets and one could say they are printed on card of a thickness ranging from 80 to 105 microns.

You can say that the 25c on card is, even apart from this, different from all other stamps that I have previously discussed: its black color is more vivid and stands out to advantage on the frankly lighter tint.

Also, detached blocks of 25 and in particular the lot #192 of the collection of France in the Hind sale contained some 23 or 24 sheets of these imperforate stamps specially printed by the Bank.

The 25c coming from these blocks of 25 printed on paper would be, according to Mr. Gilbert, dangerous when provided with false gum or false cancels.

The 25c Granet Reprint of 1887

You know that this 25c was, with other values, reprinted 8 years later, in 1887, on the order of Mr. Granet, Minister of Posts. These reprints in Type Sage were, according to Maury, all printed in blocks of 25 with small margins without white borders and were not gummed. Here again a special study -- which remains to be done -- would be desirable first. But already I am

convinced that, as far as some of these designs are concerned, and in particular this 25c, it is proper to speak of two different printings of these reprints. In fact, there exist two kinds of this stamp which have certain common characteristics that permit one to identify them as reprints, but which have other characteristics that seem to differentiate them. The two common characteristics are: the state of the impression and the reaction to the mercury lamp.

The Impression:-- This element, on which Mr. Brun insists particularly and with reason, is very important. Always mediocre, if not bad, the state of the impression betrays that of a plate worn out by printing. All the shadows are much less numerous and less marked. There are breaks in the lines of the interior frame and of the cartouche. In fact, the letters of "République Française" are visibly more slender.

Reaction to the Lamp.-- The yellow color which all the 25c, without exception, take when examined under the special lamp is absolutely characteristic and permits one to identify them with certainty as reprints.

Apart from these two factors the differential characteristics of the two kinds of 25c reprints are:-- the paper and the tint of the background. One kind has a somewhat thick paper, of about 40 microns, and a tint of dark brick red, and sometimes even very dark, entirely different from the colonial stamp or the French imperforate. Further, this tint of the background is always spotted with very peculiar white dots. Finally it is altered if one soaks the stamp in warm water or for a long period in cold water. Benzine would for a certainty be prejudicial.

The other kind, more difficult to distinguish, is on paper the same thickness as the colonial stamp (30 microns) but more or less transparent, sometimes very transparent. The color of the background much resembles that of the imperforate French stamp but it is nevertheless more rosy.

These Granet reprints have sometimes false cancellations (in particular a little cachet of 21 mm of New Caledonia, which never existed in this type). Others have passed through the post on letters; Mr. Lemaire has seen one on a letter from Reunion. This latter instance brings me again to the question of the identification of the colonies in which the 25c black on red was used, for I am convinced that it was never sent to this colony (Reunion). One should beware of the dodges that have been perpetrated on letters coming from Reunion. I am showing in particular a photograph of a letter offered some years ago in a philatelic magazine, described as being franked with two copies of this stamp and bearing the cachet: "Réunion/St. Pierre" of 28 Nov. 1882. The upper right-hand corner of the cover is missing; it is there that the stamp, almost certainly the 25c Ceres (which lasted in this colony until the beginning of 1883) would be seen. Further, the author of this fake was not aware that up to 1886 inclusive all the stamps except the low values, 1c and 5c, were always cancelled at St. Pierre with the mute lozenge of dots. Finally the state of the margins raises the suspicion that this is a dodge perpetrated with French stamps with cut-off perforations.

To sum up this too-long explanation, I shall specify again the following characteristics:

- (1) 25c Colonial: exists on two papers, one medium, one thin, of variable opacity according to the paper - - - tint of background dull lake red - - the impression good - - used copies from "Ayotte, Rossi-Bé and New Caledonia only.
- (2) French Stamp with perforations cut-off: -- narrow margins, false canc.
- (3) Complete fakes:-- special distinctive signs: false cancellations.
- (4) French imperforates:-- thin paper, tint of background more rosy.
- (5) Reprints:-- impression mediocre and worn, yellow reaction under the lamp.

Only the differentiation between the 25c colonial on thin paper and the imperforate French stamps presents some difficulty; the minute examination of the color of the background tint will remove all doubt.