

France & Colonies Philatelist



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The Oval
V. P. M.
Postmark
of the
1850's



By Ben Reeves

Referring to the article on the V.P.M. mark, in the France & Colonies Philatelist, May- June 1952, see the article on this marking, in the S. P.A. Journal of August 1949, by the writer. The usage of the marking can be cleared up fully by referring to the article in the S.P.A. Journal. (We reprint this article elsewhere in this number --Editor).

Since this article appeared in the S. P. A. Journal, another somewhat similar one appeared in the Deutscher Altbrief-Sammler Verein's house organ, by Mr. I.V. Hanacek. Mr. Hanacek also comes to the conclusion that this marking is not of French origin but a Tuscan Health Office mark, just as outlined in my article.

V.P.M., meaning Via Particolare Marittima, is translated as accurately as possible in the phrase "By Special Maritime Service."

To the best of my knowledge, I own the largest collection on this side of the pond, of this marking on covers. The list of the covers with their dates follows: all are red marking, 26 x 18 mm:

Genova to Livorno, Feb. 10 1851
Genova to Livorno, Feb. 15 1851
Napoli to Livorno, May 16 1851
Napoli to Livorno, Aug. 8 1851
Nizza to Livorno, Aug. 7 1851
Livorno to Nizza, Aug. 12 1851
Napoli to Livorno, Sept. 20 1851
Marseille to Livorno,
Nov. 11 1851
Genova to Livorno, Dec. 29 1851
Marseille to Livorno,
Jan. 2 1852

Palermo to Livorno, Apr. 12 1852
 Napoli to Livorno, Apr. 25 1852
 Napoli to Livorno, July 31 1852
 Napoli to Livorno, Aug. 11 1852
 Napoli to Livorno, Sept. 2 1852
 Genova to Livorno, Sept. 6 1852
 Palermo to Livorno, Sept. 27 1852
 Trapani to Livorno, Oct. 26 1852
 Genova to Livorno, Dec. 18 1852

Earliest reported date hitherto:

March 14 1851

Latest reported date hitherto:

Nov. 25 1852

Thus in this article I report two covers of dates earlier than perviously recorded, and t

Thus in this article I report two covers of dates earlier than previously recorded, and one of later date. The previously first and last are in Mr. Moutareff's article of 1949, in L'Echo de la Timbrologie.

The correct measurement of the red marking is 26 x 18 mm. When it appears 19 mm. high, that is caused by slight movement when it was struck.

The blue marking is very rare. I have seen just one: it is 15½ x 6 mm. See my 1949 article for the small marking dates and colors.

All mail passing through the post office at Livorno had to go through the health office. There it received this marking. Most covers had travelled outside the mails to Livorno, in most cases probably handled by ship captains. Few of the covers bear origin postmarking, but some do have transit markings; all have receiving mark of Livorno (those outbound from there bear the dispatching mark of that office).

The V. P. M.

Postal Marking

S. P. A. JOURNAL

By
 Ben Reeves
 Chmn. S. P. A. Postal
 History Unit.

AUGUST 1949

Some years ago the writer came across a cover with an unusual postal marking consisting of the letters "V. P. M." enclosed in an oval, and was curious as to its connotation. It was learned from one source that these letters were supposed to stand for the French phrase "Voie Paquebots Mediterranee," meaning "By Way of Mediterranean Packet Boat." Further inquiry about the marking brought a reply from the well known dealer-philatelist, Mr. F. Fritz Billig of New York, who sent a tear sheet from the French magazine "L'Echo de La Timbrologie" containing an article by L. J. Moutaoff entitled "Voie Paquebots Mediterranee, Non, Via Particolare Marittima."

The writer thereupon enlisted the services of Mr. A. S. Arnold of Metuchen, N. J., who was kind enough to translate the article and had Edward Hesly make the illustration shown herewith. The facts are most interesting and informative as to the origin and meaning of this postal marking and it is felt that they are worth presenting for the benefit of our readers, especially those interested in postal history.

Mr. Moutaoff in his article starts out by stating that the red marking "V. P. M." in an oval frame is found quite rarely on covers of Mediterranean origin, usually arriving by way of Marseilles (1851-2) and that this marking has always been considered of French Maritime origin, probably struck on the cover at Marseilles, and signifying "By way of Mediterranean packet boat."

He goes on to narrate that he had picked up some covers with this marking addressed from Italy to Nice and from Nice to Italy, and that he had determined from the departing and arrival markings that it would have been practically impossible, according to the time imprint of the markings, for these covers to pass thru Marseilles, and there to receive the V. P. M. marking. On the otherhand he knew of a number of covers bearing this mark addressed to Leghorn, to Civita Vecchia (Roman States) and to Naples, which had not passed thru Marseilles.

The author then states that he felt the mystery was solved when he came across a copy of "Corrier Filatelico" (Philatelic Messenger) which contained a letter by E. Sofno, dated March 31, 1941 mentioning the marking and referring to an article by Carlo Ravisini in the Roman periodical "L'Italia Filatelica" (Philatelic Italy) of February-March, 1946. In this article there appeared a copy of a decree (#153) dated December 28, 1850 concerning the "Leggi postally sui bastimenti" (that is "postal laws concerning ships") signed by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Leopold II, and the Minister G. Baldasseroni

which provided that all letters, etc., carried by steamships and sailing ships which docked at the port of Leghorn, destined for the Grand Duchy, or in transit on Tuscan territory, must be delivered to the Health Office of the Port. Supplementing this decree, the Superintendent of the Posts, Commander Pistor issued additional instructions which provided that after opening the mail bags and extracting the correspondence, a record should be made of the number, weights, etc. in a register and the letters should be stamped with a dated postmark and the "VIA PARTICOLARE MARITTIMA" (V. P. M.) marking in red, and then released for distribution. Article 15 of the Postal Regulations, following the Grand Ducal decree, provided that the marking "V. P. M." must also be applied in red ink on departing correspondence by sea post in the particular case ("in corso Particolare").

The mark "V. P. M." exists in two sizes: the large one measuring 26 x 18mm in red ink, which was in use from March 14, 1851 until November 25, 1852. (Mr. Moutaoff states that he knows of one example in blue ink on a letter which left Malta for Marseilles on June 18, 1856. The small marking measuring 15½ x 6 mm. was applied in red ink and was in use for a short time, from January 30 to February 12, 1852, according to Carlo Ravisini. However Mr. Moutaoff states that he knows of one piece with the small marking dated February 7, 1851.

As to the two special examples mentioned above, that is the large size in blue ink and the small size dated Feb. 7, 1851, Mr. Moutaoff stated that the dates are indisputable, altho abnormal, and that he had no explanation for them at that time. He further commented that the marking in the large size is not common, and is very rare in the small size, and exceptional on postage stamps, being known on the 4 and 6 crazies of Tuscany.

In conclusion Mr. Moutaoff points out that the meaning heretofore given to the letters "V. P. M." by various French and Italian publications was erroneous; that the marking is therefore a Tuscan marking which signifies "Via Particolare Marittima," meaning "By Special Maritime Route" which was used at Leghorn for the arrival and transit of mail and that these initials have nothing to do with the two French marks "Paquebots de la Mediterranee" in three lines, in a rectangle with rounded corners, in black and red ink (1838), and in the large oval in red ink (1845).

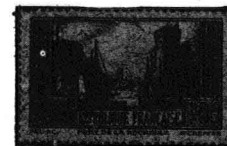
Report of another V. P. M. Cover

In a letter of July 7, 1952 to your editor Mr. Ernest L. Rothschild, our member, says:

"I have a folder with a very fine strike of this V.P.M. mark, dated Marseilles, July 31, 1851, addressed to Pate & Fils in Livorno. The sender is Geinot & Lelunan, Ship Brokers. It would be interesting to know if Mr. Arnal's specimen is from the same correspondence. The letter bears notation "p. Languedoc" which I suppose is the name of the ship. There are two ms. figures, an 8 and a 4 (French type) and on the back a Livorno arrival mark with date Aug. 5, 51 in black."

Mr. Arnal's cover, reported in No. 63, on p. 10, was from Marseilles, May 27, 1851.

Mr. Rothschild went on to express surprise at the information that the V. P. M. mark is not French, since Yvert, Maury et al, have so named it. For him and all others who may have missed the 1949 article by President Ben Reeves of the S.P.A., that article is reprinted just ahead of this note.



More Port de La Rochelle Small Varieties

Our member, Dr. Douglas H. Wells, reports the Die 1 stamp (Scott 251 showing breaks in the upright lines of the numeral 0: apparently one on each side, according to his wording. He says shading in the 0 is broken at top as well as at bottom. The identification as a Die 1 stamp is checked as correct. He and your editor both are inclined to think of these as plate wear flaws.

In an S.P.A. sales circuit, in books from two different owners, your editor found, late 1952, several of the Type 1 Port de la Rochelle, this same stamp, with areas along the lower circular ends of numeral 0 completely bare of shading and the outer line around the 0. These areas had dimensions up to 1 mm. square.

Standard Postage Stamp Catalog, 1953 (109th Edition) Vol. 2. New York, Scott Publications Inc. Nov. 1952.

We regret to have to write the usual "annual jeremiad" when the Scott firm does us the favor of sending a review copy of the new catalog. If we did not do this, however, we would be untrue to the confidence the Group puts in its editor.

Let us put it plainly: except for listing of new issues, the changes made since the catalog of 1952, do not justify purchasing a copy of the new edition. A few price changes, of no special account, all upwards, have been made in France and the Colonies. A few listings, for the 1862 Rothschild reissues, have been changed to minor numerings. The two Petain Government stamps of French Guinea which actually got to the colony and did postal duty have been listed, with what seem to us fairly reasonable pricing.

France No. B43, on which an absurd down change of price was made last year, has been raised to a figure which, for once in the whole book, is close to an accurate retail market report. Some few price changes on other semi-postals appear, small and apparently based on the idea that the lower face-values "automatically" should be of lower prices.

Confusing or inadequate notes do not seem to have been amended anywhere among the French or colonial listings. Nor have confusing names for colors been rectified anywhere.

The confusing mislisting of French Morocco as if it were still the old "French Offices in" the country, instead of separated out, has not been rectified. But this is quite in line with usage on other countries still not rectified:--Iran as "Persia" still, being a conspicuous example of such lags, along with the never-existent "Dutch Indies" name for what should be the first division under Indonesia. The infantile initials of continents still clutter the names of countries.

Scott's catalog continues to suffer, not on French countries' stamps alone, from two faults which the publishers seem determined not to remedy. One is that on early issues, such as the 1849 through 1871 of France, and corresponding issues in U.S., Cape of Good Hope, Chile, Roman States, etc. the listings are half-heartedly of a "specialized" sort--while for modern material they are straight major-variety reports only. A second fault is that the prices continue to be without either stated or uniform relation towards the actual market. On this matter, price, the trend seems to be for the list prices to go further from market, to become less and less of uniform relation thereto. That trend does need to be reversed--urgently need to be reversed.

S.G.R.

Reclassification of Madagascar Issues and Usages

The catalogs, of all countries, seem to stay uninformed. The stamps issued for Madagascar in 1889 to 1896, before the Group Type, belong to French Offices Abroad. They are definitely not issues of or for a French Colony.

From the 1896 Group Type on, we have colonial issues.

Right up to and including the Scandal Overprints in 1912, Madagascar is rich in what may be called "Cross-Usages," corresponding to the "Interprovincials" or South Africa and the Australian "Interstates." We find stamps of Anjouan, Grand Comore, Diego Suarez, Mayotte, Nossi Be and Ste. Marie used interchangeably throughout the whole colony including the outer islands.

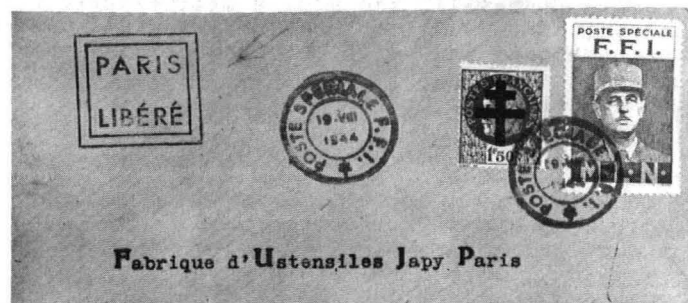
The Paris

1944 Heroic Week

Stamp, Frank

and Postmark

In No. 32 of this paper, March-April 1947, we ran the story of this usage, with picture of a cover. We reprint the significant paragraphs of that story, and follow with new material. Our member Everel Keys is the contributor of the new information.



When Paris was being liberated from German occupation, during the insurrection of the "Heroic Week" of August 19 to 26, 1944, the regular postal services were completely suspended in the city and suburbs. The F.F.I. (Forces Françaises de l'Interieur), usually called the Maquis, established a temporary service for mail by motorcycle, with military carriers.

The F.F.I. surcharged a supply of the current 1.50f red brown Petain stamps with a bold face Cross of Lorraine in black. 20,000 copies were thus made.

Mail franked with this stamp always also had a large blue label of the F.F.I., with picture of De Gaulle. This De Gaulle label appears as a required additional franking, and thus must rank as a postal frank of this service. Proceeds of sale of the blue label went to help the funds of the Maquis, we learn.

Cancellation was always the special double circle, apparently a rubber handstamp, struck on both stamp and De Gaulle frank. There were several of these devices, differing slightly in lettering style, but not in wording.



The picture herewith is one of two covers, in Mr. Keys' possession. The other one differs in being dated 24-VIII 1944 instead of 19-VIII and in being addressed to "Cie Locations Terrains." The one shown in 1947 was dated 21-VIII, address "Société Française Pyrotechnie," and lacked the square "Paris Libéré" cachet.

The "Poste Speciale" postmark appears to be originally a device with double outer circle. In two of the three copies the space between outer circles is filled in, producing a substantially single circle, very broad.

The "philatelic" nature of all these covers is quite obvious. The firm names without street and number, would of themselves point to such a nature. But the firm names themselves seem to be fictitious.

Mr. Keys' two covers add to the story. The square double-border cachet has not been shown, in American publications, hitherto.

On Saturday, Nov. 8, 1952, the Group had the main meeting room of the Collectors Club, for a Symposium of exhibits and talks, to attract the general public. All afternoon, visitors, whom notices in the stamp papers and newspaper stamp pages had attracted, came and went, with a good large group staying for the talks.

"France Has Everything" was the slogan.

Mr. Wattson, of the Voice of America, was on hand with a recorder, and took down talks made by Messrs Bretagne and Boutrelle and by President Clemenceau.

The exhibitors and their showings were:

Earl Hunnewell, who made a special trip from Malden, Mass, for this meeting, with a varied assortment of unusual items "too numerous for a specified listing."

Charles Neidorf, with Morocco.

Max Bass, with Old Time Fine Covers(France)

Charles Bretagne, with Specimen and Annule stamps of France.

Charles E. Meyer, with the 5c green, Sower Type: a developed collection of a stamp low in price.



Supposedly
Surcharged
France 1869
Newspaper
Stamps



In our September-October 1950 number (No. 53) we pictured what appeared to be perf. and imperf. 5c on 2c France 1869 Newspaper stamps. As a result of this article, our member Mr. Frederic Muhlenheim made inquiries of stamp men in France--Mr. Brun and Mr. de Belleville.

We quote a portion, all relevant that he has written us, from his letter of March 22, 1952:

" The result is that these stamps were some joke made by some unscrupulous dealers in the old time. Perhaps by "Papa" Maury, who was the first stamp dealer in France, about 1850. To intrigue the collectors of that time has was a good Bernum, and made many and many "rarities" of that kind. The Maury house is still existing, but its way has changed."

Mr. Muhlenheim wrote that the French postal administration was working on the problem also. Up to going to press with this number, we have no further word on this matter from him.

However, we may safely presume that these 5c on 2c are, in plain language, fakes.



A colonial design by Pierre Gandon; the Marianne which he designed, with Mrs. Gandon as model; and Mr. Gandon.

For an excellent story, see Scott's Monthly Journal, of April 1950. Space does not allow us to reprint it.



Charles



Bretagne



** THE CROSS OF LORRAINE **



In 1429 A.D. A Nobleman, the Duke of Lorraine, an old man, sick of a leathsome disease and of mind, and, hearing of the importunate girl who claimed to be the chosen of Heaven to save her Country, France from the English, sent for her to come and cure him. This young girl known as the Maid of Orleans, was Joan of Arc. Told she could not disobey one's feudal lord she should proceed at once to the Chateau. In her peasant dress her feet bare, she stood squarely on the rich carpet before the Duke. She told him that she knew no cure for his malady, save to alter his style of evil living, and help her deliver France from the English. If he would give her, his Son-in-Law, fighting men, horses, and gold to conduct her into France, she would pray the Lord for his recovery. In desperation, and tho Charles de Lorraine had pledge to abide by the Treaty of Troyes, he give her gold and men and horses, and his private banner, the family and House of Lorraine banner, on which was display -ed the now famous Cross of Lorraine. With this banner, Joan of Arc, liberated France from the English, and carried this cross with her, into the Cathedral of Reims to Crown her King, King Charles VII. With the occupation of France, by the German armies during the last World War II General Charles de Gaulle, himself a nobleman, was destined to carry the "Spiritual Torch" of liberation. Seeking a banner symbolic of liberation attractive and able to revive the spirit of the French population, he selected the banner showing the Cross of Lorraine used by Joan of Arc. This Cross symbolic of liberation, was displayed over most of France during the occupation and placarded on buildings all over the Country, as the V for victory was displayed in England. Consequently, this Cross found usage, on letters and stamps, and enriched philately.

Charles de Bretagne.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

The report in No. 65, which appeared very late, extended to Nov. 15, 1952. I therefore defer the next report, which will cover to Jan. 15 or even later, to the next number.

MEMBERS' APPEALS

Want and exchange notices only; members only; one or two insertions only; no charge. Those who reply will please offer only what is asked.

Wanted: Occupation stamps of Alsace-Lorraine 1870-71; interested in cancellations. Paul Baudry, 47 East 87 St., New York 28, N.Y. (Member 93)

The elusive early dated copies of 40c Type Sage, are still wanted, on or off cover. No. 74 (T-1) earlier than Oct 1878; No. 95 earlier than Nov. 15 1882 wanted. Price each item, please. S. G. Rich, Verona, N.J. (Member 2)

Have extensive M & U France for exchange to improve my French collection. Write; state your wants; will reply. Even trade, Scott 1952 values. Col. V.N. Scott, 1530 Hermosa Ave., Hermosa Beach, Calif. (Member 480)