

Book Review: Egypt Stamps Handbook Vol 1 and II, by Magdi Moukhtar Abdel-hadi

When I became the editor of the *QC*, in June 1998, in the first issue under my tutelage I had the pleasure to include a small note about the appearance of Leon Balian's *Stamps of Egypt* and extolled members to add it to their bookshelf. In the next *QC* Peter Smith wrote a review in praise: the "*writing of this catalogue was a monumental task*". Since then we have also had *The Nile Post*, another magnificent and much acclaimed work that also resides in my philatelic library. Neither of these books has been a mere ornament but frequently referred to. My Balian cover is undoubtedly, like myself, much frayed around the edges.

Do we need another stamp catalogue to replace the much loved Zeheri? I had just returned from a week enjoying the sun in the Middle East when I saw the new *Handbook* being offered on eBay. I had known for some time of the work in preparation - but then I know of many philatelic works in progress, of which few will see the light of day. Having steeled myself to resist "another", I was quickly intrigued by some of the web images and then, finding that Vera Trinder had the book in stock and being in town the next day, I could not resist the temptation to view. The two-volume work is now a new resident in my philatelic library.

Does the *Egypt Stamps Handbook* bring anything new that warrants its purchase? The answer is definitely yes. As the flyleaf states, our member Magdi Moukhtar started on the project in 1985 and found that "*since the 1972 Zeheri much new information and data has come to light*" and "*an enormous number of references and articles had to be checked and revised*". It soon becomes apparent that he draws on sources of information and material that have not been reported. He acknowledges no fewer than 12 philatelists "*for the time and loan of their rare material of many of their unpublished studies*". Many of the names are familiar and collections of Second Issue, French Post Office, essays, express mail, De La Rue etc are mentioned among others.

The *Handbook* is offered in two volumes in a conventional 24.5x17x2.5cm format which is weighty enough at 6kg with a total of 1350 pages. I don't think the division between Vol.I and II should be given any significance. The sections are quite logical: postage stamps (definitives and postage due), commemorative stamps, postal stationery, unissued stamps, essays etc. There are chapters dedicated to control numbers and Royal printings, both giving clarity to these specialised forms of collecting.

The book is profusely illustrated, completely in colour, which brings an extra and welcome dimension to the work, and it would appear that every small variety is illustrated alongside the original stamp. For those collectors who revel in varieties this *Handbook* must be the main point of reference; the rest of us are now challenged to find new varieties not illustrated by our resourceful colleague.

One could pick on many chapters that are a delight to read, but each must find his or her own particular delight. That on the Third Issue gives beautifully illustrated pages on distinguishing the 1872 and 1874-1875 printings, for instance. I particularly relished the treatment of the post-monarchy issues and in next year's meeting on the subject I was going to pose some questions. But most of the answers I have found here.

I have spotted the odd typo and small errors, but far fewer than in the average *QC*, so I should stop throwing stones on that account. In the colour department, like the *QC*, the new laser colour (type) printing can at times be notably different from the original. Dark hues and blacks can be a problem: see, under commemoratives, the 2009 PUPU and FIFA issues. But this detracts little from this magnificent work.

If I have any issues they are personal ones, one of them being the treatment of airmails, a subject I keep meaning to write about in the *QC*, and especially the separation of the miniature sheets from the set of stamps with which they are issued. On the other hand, showing pane arrangements is brilliant.

As expected from a stamp catalogue, prices are given in US dollars, which is a sensible currency to use, based "*on actual retail prices for all items*". I personally, however, treat all such pricing with a certain degree of latitude. I have not yet studied these in full, having had the book only a week, but have made a quick comparison with Balian and *The Nile Post* not by actual prices but by ratio, taking the 5pa of the First Issue as a unit price, and calculating the factor of another price for each stamps. For the 5pi First Issue Balian gives a factor of 6.9, *NP* 10 and the new *Handbook* 12. For the overprint error Balian 27.7, *NP* 32 and *HB* 40. For the Boy Scouts sheets, Balian 16.7, *NP* 24 and *HB* 48. Make of it what you will. No doubt a more detailed study of the *Handbook* pricing may throw up some surprises. One of interest to me (see *QC* September 2008) is the

2004 150th Anniversary of Telecom Egypt, for which no premium is given over other commemorative stamps of the time.

All in all, however, a fantastic work that should grace the philatelic library of any serious Egyptian collector especially as Magdi has kindly offered ESC members a discount as well as generously giving a copy to our library. Below a few snippets from the book that sadly do not do justice the great depth of detail found. **Editor**

King Fouad second portrait issue (French), 1927 - 1937



Small format type I (frame size 18 x 22.5 mm.).⁽¹⁾

106	1 m. Pale Orange.	A/26	☐	20.00
107	2 m. Pale Black.	A/26	☐	60.00
108	3 m. Bistre-Brown.	A/26	☐	20.00
109	4 m. Pale Yellow-Green.	A/26	☐	450.00
110	5 m. Deep Red-Brown (frame size 18 x 22.75 mm.).	A/25	☐	40.00

From the chapter on control numbers.

1872 printing

Figure "5" placed correctly in the four corners in the four corners.



5 Paras

1874-1875 printing

Figure "5" inverted in the four corners.



Third issue printings.

Colour Reddish Violet or dull Lilac.



10 Paras

Colour Pale or deep Slate.



Colour Prussian Blue, pale Blue or Indigo.



20 Paras

Colour Slate-Blue to Grey-Blue, Azure.



500 m. Border Photogravure



500 m. Border Lithograph

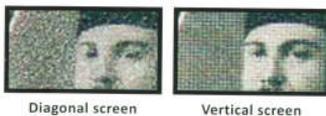


1 L.E. Border Photogravure

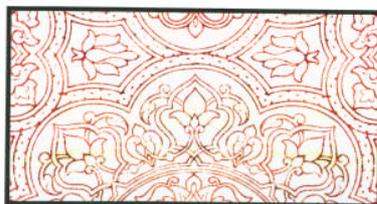


1 L.E. Border Lithograph

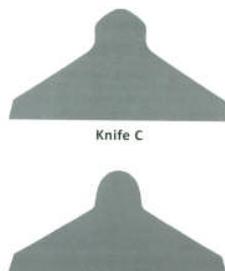
King Fouad second portrait issue



Diagonal screen Vertical screen



Inside filigree (F1) actual size



Knife C

Knife D



760 Pane arrangement



759



Postal stationery



Pane layout.

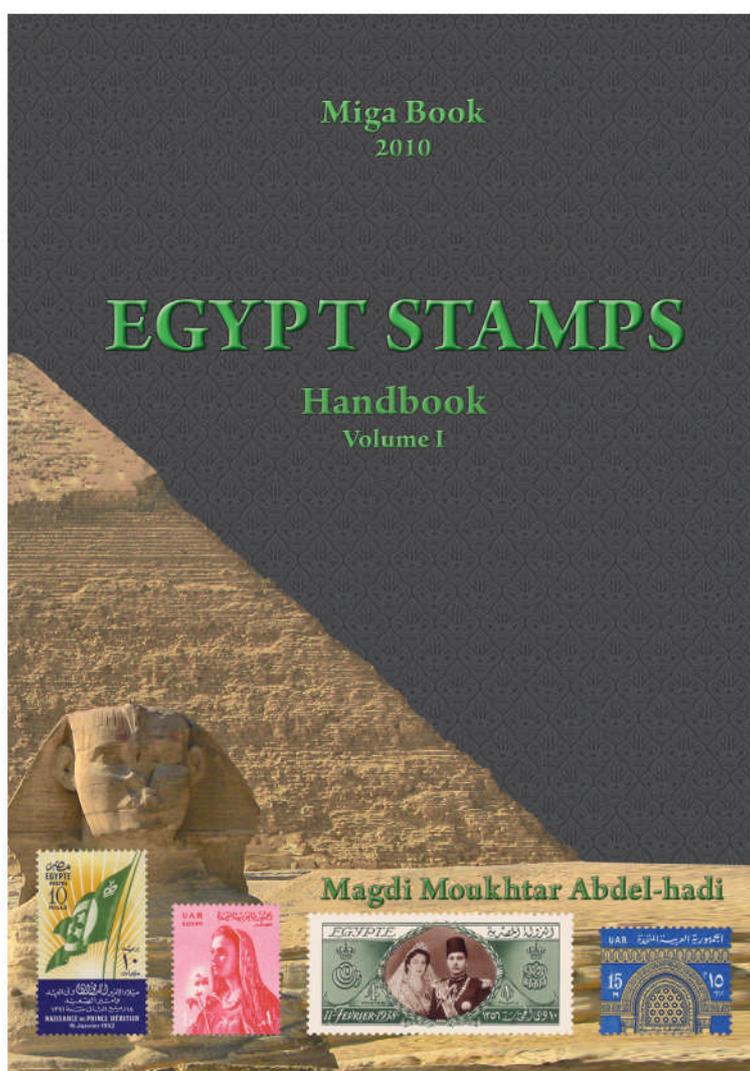
The long awaited

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