

1923 - 1926 First Portrait Issue Retouches and Flaws

Ibrahim Chaftar (ESC No. 42)

Continued from Volume VIII - page 61.

Harrison and Sons printed also the 192326 First Portrait Issue in booklets by this new process: Collograve (their trade name for photogravure).

It is known that a 5 milliemmes booklet containing four panes of six stamps 5 milliemmes-each (120 milliemmes); and a composite booklet containing two panes of six stamps of the 5 milliemmes, one pane of the 10 milliemmes and one pane of the 15 milliemmes, were issued. The dates when these booklets were put on sale in Egypt seems not to have been recorded.

Mr. A.J.Revell wrote to Harrison and Sons who replied that they were unable to give any information regarding the dates of issue, quantities printed or make up of the printing sheets. We know that the first previous booklet delivered by these printers to the Egyptian General Post Office, issued 12th June 1921, was of the 5 milliemmes lake. Information given by letter from E.C. Ehrmann to Mr. Revell (August 1964) quotes that the Egyptian booklets printed by Harrisons followed the British style formation as the contemporary booklets of Great Britain:

'The lay out of the sheet from which these British booklets pages were cut was 12 stamps wide with gutter margin of half stamp width in the centre to provide selvages and the stamps are in groups of three tete-beche.

Vertically, the sheet measures 20 rows and from these 12 x 20 stamps, forty booklet panes would be cut. The arrangement has not been altered during the Egyptian period, but there will be some difference in the marginal printing.'

All the panes of six seen by Revell (lake, pink, pink crown over-print, and Fuad) bear normal watermarks. Although he has in his collection three used single stamps pink, without doubt from booklets owing to the clipped perforation - one with normal watermark and two with inverted watermarks. He states that this would bear out that they were printed tete-beche.

I have, as pink 5 milliemmes stamps originating from booklets: a complete mint pane of six, two used blocks of four, a used horizontal strip of three top pane, a used horizontal pair bottom edge; four used bottom right edge, and three top right edge. All are with normal watermarks and from panes left binding. Besides I have thirteen used stamps, ten from top and three from bottom panes, also only two singles top pane with inverted watermarks. Which makes 39 stamps normal watermarks against two only inverted.

The First Portrait Issue booklets (No. 7 and 8) are scarce and it seems that practically nothing has been collected in Egypt. The Koubbeh Palace sale did not specify any lot including any of these booklets. Revell has seen an unused pane of six 5 milliemmes and he has in his collection three pairs and a strip of three all used and all with normal watermarks.

In my collection I have, as stamp booklet No.7, a complete mint pane of six, and a complete mint 120 milliemmes booklet containing four panes of six stamps. All these stamps are with normal watermarks, left binding. Besides I have 159 used stamps originating from booklets which include a horizontal bottom pair. All these are with normal watermarks.

Fortunately the Dr. Byam sale included twelve booklets in two lots:

Lot 738 A selection of booklets (6) with four panes of six stamps of 5 milliemmes (2), two panes of six stamps of 5 milliemmes a pane of 10 milliemmes and a pane of 15 milliemmes - the last two exploded and

incomplete with three panes of six stamps of 5 millimetres, one of the last booklets with inverted watermarks. (132 stamps).

Lot 739 Four 12) millimetres booklets with pink covers containing four panes of six 5 millimetres dark red brown with the various flaws annotated on the back of the booklet(96 stamps).

All these twelve booklets were with normal watermarks except the one incomplete booklet of 5 millimetres with inverted watermarks. There is no indication as to whether the binding is on the left or right.

If the general lines of the lay-out indicated by Mr. E.C. Ehrmann were followed half of the booklets (Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) printed would have inverted watermarks.

This has not been the case of the known booklet stamps which have been described above (except the incomplete booklet from the Byam sale lot 73a).

Lately I read a very interesting article by Mr. Tony Wisemann in the '*Stamp Lover*' of March/April 1970. A detailed description of the lay-out of the printing sheet intended for booklets (Great Britain) attracted my attention and I find it useful to quote its description here:

'Because the panes must be bound on the left, the ordinary sheet of stamps presents problems because only the left hand margin can be used for this purpose. In order to make use of the width of the special paper on which stamps are printed, therefore, it is necessary to make suitable plates. Any of the standard works of reference describe one method of laying out stamps on each row, first a binding margin then three stamps printed the right way up, then immediately adjacent three stamps printed upside down. This means that the third and fourth stamps of the row are what is known as *tete-beche*.....

After the first six stamps of the row is a gutter margin sufficient to take two booklet bindings, this is followed by a further six stamps, the first three of which are the right way up and the second three of which are again upside down. On the right side there is a further booklet binding margin. There are, therefore, on any row exactly six stamps the right way up and six stamps upside down. The stamps which are upside down when looked at the right way up have inverted watermarks.*

The lay-out described above certainly means that exactly half the booklets printed from these plates have the watermark inverted. It should here be noted that the make-up as described for Great Britain also ensured the 'Crown' watermark(Edward VII) being centrally placed on each stamp. With the Egyptian stamps of this period the paper used had a multiple (Star and crescent) watermark which made any such centring unnecessary.

From a quantity of 8,000 used stamps 5 millimetres Fuad 1923-26 I sorted out 159 stamps, doubtless from booklets owing to the clipped perforations. All were with normal watermark except four only with inverted watermark.

The result was a surprise to me. I remembered the same fact for the 1920-22 issue: from a lot of 2,600 used 5 millimetres pink I sorted out only nine stamps with inverted watermarks, two of them from booklets. I suspected that the make-up of the plates to print the stamps intended for booklets could perhaps have been different from what has so far been indicated.

I looked again more carefully to the 159 booklet stamps Fuad 1923-26 and I was astonished to find that the same varieties of the normal sheet C/23 and the 'No Control' sheet were reproduced on some of these stamps. I show a photograph of twelve stamps, six of them from booklets and above them the same six varieties from normal sheets.

*Stamp booklets - Great Britain. A Make-Up Mystery by Tony Wiseman. '*The Stamp Lover*'. March/April 1970.

5 millimetres First Portrait Issue 1923-26 Varieties on Booklet Stamps

1. Inclined coloured dash right to left on the white edge of the right label containing Arabic characters, nearly at its lower end. I have this variety on two vertical strips of three and one of them with upper margin. The variety is on the third row-of a sheet.
2. Protruding colour under the first Arabic letter in the white edge of the right label containing Arabic characters. I have this variety in a block of 3 x 3 and in a vertical block of ten, 2 x 5 variety imperforate watermark IX with bottom margin. The variety is in the ninth row of a sheet.
3. Coloured dash 2 mms. long on the right bud. I have this variety on two vertical strips of three.
4. This is the famous variety Dr. Byam described in his article quoting that it is the only attempt to retouch the Arabic writing he has seen. The Arabic word in the left hand label, the letters under which there are two dots, have been roughly re-shaped by three (scratched) lines. Byam had this variety on a used block of eight. Some years before he had also seen a single stamp with this variety.
5. Additional white dash on the last Arabic letter of the same word as variety I have this variety on the top stamp of a vertical strip of three. Also in a block of four from a used booklet pane. The variety is on the second row from a pane, normal watermark, and left opening.
6. This is the famous variety described by Douglas MacNeille and Dr. Byam 'Tuft of hairs in the ear'. This is stamp No. 35 in two different Control C/23 and a sheet No Control. I have this variety on an upper vertical block of ten 2 x 5 with margin attached, imperf rate, watermark IX. The variety No. 35 is in the fourth row.

The booklet stamps originate without doubt from the same multi-positive as used for the normal sheets, because these varieties appear in blocks or vertical strips which indicate that they are essentially from post office sheets and not from booklets.

How can booklets be cut from normal post office sheets which do not provide enough selvedge for binding? If special cylinders have been used, with the necessary selvedge for the booklets, from a carbon tissue from a multipositive intended for normal post office sheet, how could the carbon tissue be used to prepare a cylinder?

In the article on 'Egyptian booklets printed in Great Britain' the authors Jean Boulad and John Revell suggest that the make-up of the plate for booklets was on the basis of tete-beche disposition, so that all the booklets could have left binding notwithstanding; that there would be stamps with inverted watermarks.

How can an available multi-positive be used to fulfil such conditions?

The easy way, in my opinion; is to build up a new special multi-positive for the booklets, but certainly, then, the flaws of the previous multi-positive will not be repeated.

Besides, in my opinion, the tete-beche disposition is not imperative for this issue as the new watermarked paper adopted during the Harrison contract (the small multiple treble crescent and star) allows shifting in all directions for every stamp on the sheet to bear the watermark or parts of it.

In 1945 looking through the G.P.O., Cairo, records I came across a letter and its answer relative to proofs of the London Crown Overprint 1923. I took an exact copy of these two documents and I remained 27. years hesitating publication fearing that I had failed to copy them correctly. '

In this letter, dated 12.1.1923, a Director of Harrison and Sons Ltd. informs:-

'In accordance with your instructions of the 27 Nov. 1922 we beg to submit proofs consisting of:-

One sheet of 5 milliemes)
Two sheets of 1 millieme) all 240 set
Two sheets of 15 milliemes)

showing the overprint from the plates which we have prepared for the smaller size.

As the colour of the 1 and 15 milliemes renders the overprint rather indistinct in black, we are submitting alternative proofs surcharged in red for these values.

We will arrange to proceed with the overprinting immediately we receive your instructions.'

In reply., the postmaster General, Cairo, wrote on the 6th February 1923:-

'Gentlemen, With reference to your letter BGH/BK of January 12/23 I have to inform you that the printing of the surcharge is considered to be satisfactory. It is suggested, however, that the printing should be slightly heavier especially over the darker coloured stamps. Surcharge should be printed exclusively in black and not in red.'

These documents remained to me a puzzle from that time, till lately when I was thinking about the plate make-up for the Egyptian Booklets for that period.

I was puzzled by the 240 units in a sheet of the 5 milliemes stamp knowing that Harrisons printed the ordinary stamps in a post office sheet composed of two panes of 100 (10 x 10) one on top of the other.

Now that the 1920-22 booklets issue is suggested to have come from a printing plate of 240 units the matter makes sense, this explains why the stamps with the black London Crown overprint formed a sheet of 240 units for the 5 milliemes. It was a stand-by plate then used for printing stamp booklets.

In typographic printing it is easy to arrange stereotypes to provide proper selvages for a special post office sheet from which could be obtained 40 booklet panes of six stamps each, watermark falling in the same direction or disposed in such a way as to be *tete-beche*. Also the selvages (gutters) can be disposed in several manners allowing binding at left for all the booklets, giving half the quantity inverted watermarks or not, and disposing the stamps the head of the sphinx right way up or not - all these dispositions depending on the paper size in hand, or to be provided. The watermark appearing on every stamp has been assured by the multiple treble crescent and star watermark.

A plate of 240 units for the 5 millieme being on hand in January 1923, Harrisons used it as the order had been fulfilled for the booklets, to pull a sheet overprinted in black as proof for the crown overprint.

If the sheet had had a *tete-beche* make-up, this sheet or part of it would surely have survived with the red overprints of the 1 and 15 milliemes - the people manipulating the stamps in that period in the General Post Office were high experts!

This for the 5 milliemes sheet, but for the two sheets of the 1 and 15 milliemes I suppose that Harrisons sent two split sheets of 120 for each of these values (to complete the 240 set) - one sheet overprinted in black and the other of same size and formation overprinted in red. The plates of the overprint being arranged to suit the split sheets. Those split sheets of 120 each must have been a complete upper pane (control attached) and 20 stamps (2 rows of 10) from the lower pane with the gutter between the panes untouched.

Dr. Byam had in his collection (lot No. 682 in the Byam sale catalogue) the control block of four of the 1 millieme and a similar block for the 15 milliemes B/25 overprinted in red. Mme. Wissa showed at the First Cairo Exhibition 1946 the left bottom block of four with the variety of no dots on stamp no. 100 and the broken frame variety on stamp no. 90 overprinted in red for the 1 millieme.

We do not know of any other control block of four, or left bottom corner block top pane overprinted in red.

The remaining stamps overprinted in red are spread about the whole world amongst collectors and specialists of Egypt. From early times it had been known that only one pane of each value (1 and 15 milliemes) was overprinted in red. But nobody had come across or knew about the existence of a 5 millieme tete-beche crown overprint in black. The 5 millieme sheet of 240 was overprinted in black and if it had a tete-beche it would certainly have been retained by the very clever people who scattered the overprints. The black overprint of the 1, 5 and 15 mills. were very common when the issue was on sale and they have not attracted attention.

Certainly Harrisons arranged their ex-booklet plate of 240 units of the 5 milliemes to receive the crown overprint in a normal way. How thrilling it would have been if that sheet had been kept and reached the philatelists.

I have in these lines put forward this 'make-up mystery' and I hope that the explanation will give good satisfaction to that query: what was the make-up of the plates for the Harrison booklets Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8; and more especially for the First Portrait Issue booklets Nos. 7 and 8, bearing in mind the ad hoc multipositive difficulty?