



The Eye of Horus - beginners' corner - with David Ogden. Welcome back to our new column intended to give newcomers to Egypt collecting an insight into the country and its wondrous philatelic history. Today, we look at the all-important Suez Canal. Please let us know what you think of our new venture

The Suez Canal – key link between two oceans

The Suez Canal is a man-made sea-level waterway connecting the Mediterranean and the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez and dividing Africa and Asia (and of course, the Sinai Peninsula from the rest of Egypt). The 120-mile canal is a key trade route between Europe and Asia. It is not the oldest such canal, however - ancient sources suggest that Pharaoh Senusret III built an early canal linking the Red Sea and the Nile River around 1850 BCE.

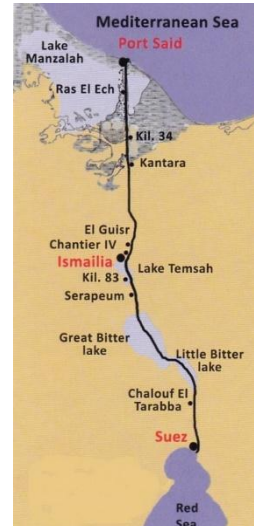
The French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps formed the Compagnie de Suez in 1858 for the express purpose of building the canal. Construction work took from 1859 to



1869, and the canal officially opened on 17 November 1869. It was the property of the Egyptian government, but European

shareholders - mostly British and French - owned the concessionary company which operated the canal until July 1956, when President Nasser nationalised it - an event which

led to the Suez Crisis of October-November 1956. Egypt closed the canal at the start of the Six-Day War on 5 June 1967, and it stayed closed for eight years, until 5 June 1975.



Suez Canal Company stamps: In 1859 the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez set up its own postal system to convey administrative mail between its work sites and its offices in Alexandria, Port Said, Ismailia and Suez. In 1860 it formed an agreement with the Posta Europea for carrying its mail to the nearest Posta Europea office: Damietta, Suez or Zagazig.



This arrangement ran until 1865, when the Posta Europea was taken over by the government, after which the company resumed operation of its own postal system. It was decided to make a charge for the carriage of private mail, to take effect in July 1868. As a result, the company headquarters in Paris placed an order locally for postage stamps with values of 1, 5, 20 and 40 centimes. All had the same design except for denomination and colour. They were imperforate and printed from four lithographic stones.

The stamps were sent to Egypt in June 1868, but did not arrive in Ismailia until perhaps July 8 or 9, just over a week too late for the introduction of the postage fees. The Canal Company stamps were in use for less than 40 days, making genuinely used examples extremely rare with only a few covers known. Genuine copies are hard to find and expensive, but forgeries are readily available as space fillers. The real stamps show a distinctive “crackling” of the gum. Many of the forgeries have smooth gum.



Egypt stamps: Some stunning designs have featured on commemorative stamps featuring the Canal. In 1956, after nationalisation, a 10 mills stamp included a ship and map of the canal. Unfortunately, it shows the canal linking with Lake Manzala. In fact, it does not! This was followed later that year by another 10 mills stamp featuring the defence of Port Said. In 1957 an overprinted version of the defence stamp celebrated the evacuation of UK and French troops.



Online resource: The [Egypt Study Circle Facebook page](#) is a tremendous resource for seeking advice from expert Egypt stamp collectors and members who can read the Arabic markings.