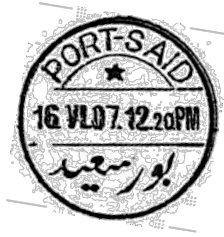


Egypt's Solid-Star & Bridge Datestamp

A Study of Nine Offices Datestamp as an Instrument of Railway Postal Handling, 1907–1915



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United Arab Emirates August 2026

1. Introduction

The solid-star & bridge datestamp has been recorded in the Egyptian philatelic literature for seventy years. Minett listed it in 1955; Vestarkis extended the record in 1968; Dacos gave it its first dedicated treatment in 1976; five contributors revised its dates between 1978 and 1980; and Heim published the current master table in 2006, revising it again in 2008. Across that literature the type is discussed almost exclusively as a matter of earliest and latest recorded dates. No published account asks why the mark was introduced, why it was issued to these nine offices and no others, or what postal work it performed. This paper addresses those questions.

That the functional question has gone unasked is, in part, an artefact of how the evidence accumulated. In the table Dacos published in 1976, the offices appear to adopt the type at intervals spread across 1907 to 1910 a pattern consistent with gradual, local adoption, and one that invites no explanation beyond local convenience. Only after three decades of correction, and principally through the work of Heim, does the true distribution emerge: eight of the nine offices record first use within seven weeks of May and June 1907. That concentration is too tight to represent independent local decisions.

This study argues that the purpose was operational timing. The datestamp reads to the hour and minute at a moment when the Egyptian State Railways network had reached the extent it would hold until the First World War, and when the travelling post office system was undergoing its most rapid single year of expansion. The nine offices are precisely those at which fixed-office counter work met railway sorting. The mark, on this reading, is the stationary counterpart of the TPO datestamp: an instrument for recording the moment at which mail passed between office and train.

Three bodies of evidence are brought to bear. The first is the device itself, whose measurements prove uniform across all nine offices. The second is the distribution of recorded strike times, which is shown to correlate with office function rather than with office size or volume. The third is rate evidence, which documents two administrative practices not otherwise documented. A concluding section examines what the seventy-year record of this type reveals about how philatelic knowledge in this field is produced and corrected.

Unless otherwise stated, all items illustrated and all strike times cited are from the author's collection.

Recorded survey figures refer to items examined by the author and are not offered as a census.

Rate periods follow Smith (1999).⁽¹¹⁾

2. The Literature, 1955–2008

2.1 First records

The earliest published notice of the type appears in *L'Orient Philatélique* No. 91 of July 1955, where C. W. Minett listed a single office, Aswan, with dates of 13 April 1910 and November 1912. Thirteen years later, in No. 119 of January to April 1968, Dr Savas Michel Vestarkis extended the record. Vestarkis is cited by Dacos as one of his two antecedents, and his contribution is embedded in the "dates known up to April 1968" column of the Dacos table discussed below. He is not cited by any later contributor to this subject. His title indicates the earliest treatment to consider Types X-1 and XI-1 together, and his disappearance from the subsequent literature is the first of several bibliographic losses noted in this study.

2.2 Dacos (1976): the foundational account

The type received its first dedicated treatment from Th. Dacos in the *Philatelic Record* of February 1976, reprinted with permission in the *Egypt Study Circle Quarterly Circular*, Whole Nos. 103–104 (September/December 1977), p. 81. Dacos made three contributions that remain sound.

First, he described the device accurately: a circular datestamp carrying a star in the space formed between the Latin town name and the date. This is the origin of the term "bridge": the typographic bar separating name from date band, not a geographical feature, a point since misunderstood.

Second, he established the design lineage. The star, he observed, appears to be a development of an earlier form current from about 1884, which showed a crescent-and-star combination in the same position later occupied by the solid star. He set this within the wider persistence of Ottoman iconography in Egyptian philately, noting the emblem in the watermark of stamps issued between 1867 and 1914, in the designs of the 1872 to 1875 issues, and in the overprint of 1922.

Third, he tabulated recorded dates for eight offices in two columns: those known to April 1968, and his own revisions of September 1975.

Two defects in the article have not previously been remarked. The first is internal. Dacos opens by stating that the type was used for about seven years, from early 1907 to late 1913, yet his own table, on the same page, records Ismailia to 1914 and Suez to 1916. The narrative and the data contradict one another. The second is an omission: Aswan is absent from his list of towns altogether, although Minett had recorded it twenty-one years earlier. Both errors passed into the subsequent literature.

Dacos himself was appropriately cautious, observing that it would be unwise to believe the new dates would remain unaltered, and anticipating that a more accurate table would eventually establish the exact period of use. The next three decades vindicated him.

2.3 Reader corrections, 1978–1980

Five contributors revised the record within thirty months of the QC reprint, all through the Circular's *Update* column, and all by reporting items from their own holdings.

Defriez (QC 107, 1978, p. 71) gave Suez at 11 July 1907, displacing the Dacos earliest by eight months; he added that he did not know whether any study of the subject was then in progress. Carew (QC 108, 1978, p. 103) gave Ismailia at 20 March 1908 and Port Said at 28 May 1907, and Ford, in the same issue, reported Port Taufik at 30 October 1908 with three Aswan strikes, noting that Aswan was not among the towns quoted.

Andrews (QC 110, 1979, p. 155) published the first consolidated revision, extending Port Taufiq to 20 August 1915 at 6.30 a.m. and bringing Aswan forward to 23 January 1908.

He also corrected Ford: Aswan had been listed by Minett in 1955, and it was Dacos who dropped it. Blomfield (QC 112, 1980, p. 220) closed the sequence with Luq̣sor at 14 December 1908 and Mansura in June 1907, the first indication that an office might have held the device by the summer of 1907.

2.4 Heim (2006, 2008): the current record

Peter Heim published the master table in QC 218 (September 2006), p. 151, extending Mansura to 21 March 1919 and Suez to March 1919, and adding a first date for the bridge of Alexandria 'A' at 14 February 1911. In QC 227 (December 2008), p. 95, he revised his Zaqạziq date from 28 September 1907 to 13 June 1907, displacing it by three and a half months and, as he noted, bringing that office into line with the others.

Table 1. Recorded earliest dates: The evolution of the record

Office	Dacos 1979	Andrews 1979	Heim 2006/08	Advanced on Dacos
Port Said	11 VI 07	28 V 07	15 V 07	27 days
Mansura	No earliest given	11 III 08	12 V 07	Not applicable
Luxor	27 III 09	27 III 09	2 NI 07	21 months
Zagazig	26 X 08	4 X 07	13 VI 07	16 months
Tanta	19 I 09	19 I 09	24 VI 07	19 months
Aswan	Office omitted	23 I 08	VI 07	Not applicable
Port Taufiq	5 VI 10	30 X 08	VIII 07	34 months
Suez	No earliest given	11 VII 07	V 07	Not applicable
Ismailia	1908	20 III 08	10 IX 07	c.12 months

2.5 What the sequence shows

Read as a body, this literature has three characteristics that bear on the present study. It is decentralised. Every substantive advance between 1978 and 1980 came from a collector examining his own material and writing to the Circular, not from systematic survey.

It is concentrated in attribution. In the current master table, a single contributor is credited with six of the nine earliest dates. The record therefore reflects the contents of a small number of collections, and the survey figures reported in the present study should be read in the same light.

Most importantly, it is cumulative in a way that changed the shape of the evidence. The Dacos table gives a of first dates across 1907 to 1910. The Heim table gives eight offices within seven weeks. The pattern this study takes as its starting point did not exist in the founding account of the subject; it emerged only as the record was corrected. That is why the question this paper asks could not have been asked before about 2008.

3. The Device

3.1 Measurements

The type is defined by four measurements, taken from strikes in the author's collection:

- I. Overall diameter 27 mm
- II. Date-and-time band 7.5 mm high
- III. Solid star c. 4 mm
- IV. Outer circle line 0.4 mm

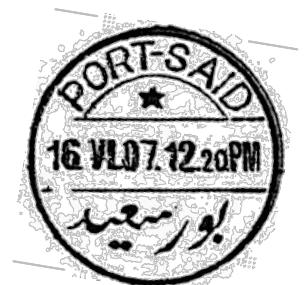


Fig. 1. Port Said,
16 June 1907, 12.20 p.m.

The band divides the circle horizontally, carrying the Latin office name above and the Arabic inscription below, with the star occupying the upper segment. Dacos described this arrangement in 1976 but published no measurements, and none appear in the subsequent literature.

3.2 A single pattern

These measurements are constant across all nine offices. No variation in diameter, band height, star size or line weight has been observed between them. That uniformity is itself evidence. Handstamps procured locally, or cut by different makers, differ in these dimensions; devices struck from a single pattern do not. Taken with the concentration of first dates in May and June 1907, the measurements indicate a single order placed centrally and distributed to nine offices at one time.

This bears directly on the question of purpose. A central issue is an administrative act, and administrative acts are made for reasons. The nine offices did not adopt a convenient local practice; they were supplied.

3.3 Relation to Type X

Dacos derived the solid star from the crescent-and-star form current from about 1884, occupying the same position in the same design. In that earlier form the crescent stands above and the star below, the canonical Ottoman arrangement. What distinguishes Type XI from Type X is therefore not the addition of the star but the removal of the crescent. The star was already present; the device of 1907 is the older design with its Ottoman element deleted. **Fig. 2** illustrates the earlier form. A registered cover from Cairo to Esfahan, Persia, franked 3pi and struck by the CAIRE-GHOURIA crescent-and-star datestamp on 31 March 1886, carried into foreign mails by Sea Post Office "B" with transit of 2 April. Rate: 2pi foreign double-weight and 1pi registration, rate period 1 April 1878 to 31 December 1887. Ghouria was a fixed sub-office of Cairo.

The date requires notice. The earliest use of the Ghouria datestamp recorded in the literature is 2 April 1890.⁽⁷⁾ The cover illustrated here precedes that by forty-nine months. The correction is incidental to the argument of this paper, since Ghouria is not among the nine offices of 1907, but it bears on the wider chronology of Type X and is recorded here for that reason.



Fig. 2. Registered cover, Cairo to Esfahan, Persia, franked 3pi and struck by CAIRE-GHOURIA Star & Crescent on 31 Mar 1886, the star below the crescent. Sea Post Office "B" transit of 2 Apr records onward foreign-mail handling. Rate: 2pi foreign double-weight + 1pi registration = 3pi; rate period 1 Apr 1878–31 Dec 1887. **Earliest recorded use of this datestamp, preceding the published earliest of 2 Apr 1890 by forty-nine months.**

3.4 The double-line bridge

Heim records a related form at Alexandria 'A', earliest 14 February 1911, described as a double-line bridge. It is excluded from the present study: it carries no star, and Alexandria is not among the nine offices supplied in 1907. It is noted here so that its exclusion is understood as deliberate.

4. The Nine Offices and the Railway Reorganisation of 1907

4.1 The offices

The type is recorded at nine offices: Port Said, Ismailia, Suez and Port Taufiq on the Suez Canal; Zagazig, Tanta and Mansura in the Delta; Luxor and Aswan in the Nile Valley.

Two absences are conspicuous. Cairo and Alexandria, the two largest offices in Egypt, did not receive the device. Neither did any of the numerous secondary offices of the Delta shown on the state railway maps. Whatever the type was for, it was not for the busiest offices, and it was not for the network at large.

4.2 The railway position of each office

Every one of the nine stands at a point where fixed-office work met railway sorting.

Port Said commanded the Mediterranean entrance to the Canal, fed by the Cairo–Port Said TPO (1900–1947) and the Alexandria–Port Said TPO (1904–1914), the latter recorded by Smith ⁽¹¹⁾ as more common as a transit mark than as a cancellation of origin.

Ismailia lay at the midpoint of the Canal, on the Suez Canal railway subsequently absorbed by the state system.

Suez stood where maritime, Canal and railway mail converged, served by the Cairo–Suez TPO from 1889 and the Ismailia–Suez TPO from 1904.

Port Taufiq was the harbour sub-office of Suez. Smith is explicit that it was never a TPO but always a sub-office, the distinction carried in the Arabic: *bor tawfiq bi sueis*, using *bi*, where a TPO route would use *wa* or *ila*. This settles a question the earlier literature left open.

Zagazig was the eastern Delta junction where the light railways met the state line, with a direct run east through Abu Hammad to Ismailia.

Tanta was the principal Delta junction, on the Cairo–Alexandria main line, with state lines radiating to Kafr el Zayat, Damanhur, Zifta, Shibin el Kom and Benha.

Mansura lay on the Bahr Saghir, its steamer TPO to Manzala replaced about 1898 by the light railway to Mataria.

Luxor and Aswan lay on the Nile Valley line, physically separate from the Delta network, the two meeting only at Cairo, so that no TPO route ran through the capital. Aswan was the southern railhead, reached in 1898 and connected onward to Sudan by the Shellal–Halfa ferry.

Fig. 3. Cover, Mansura to Zagazig, franked 5m, struck 10 August 1907, carried by the Mansura–Cairo TPO and received at Zagazig the same day. Office and railway marks appear together, fixing the point at which counter mail joined the sorting carriage.

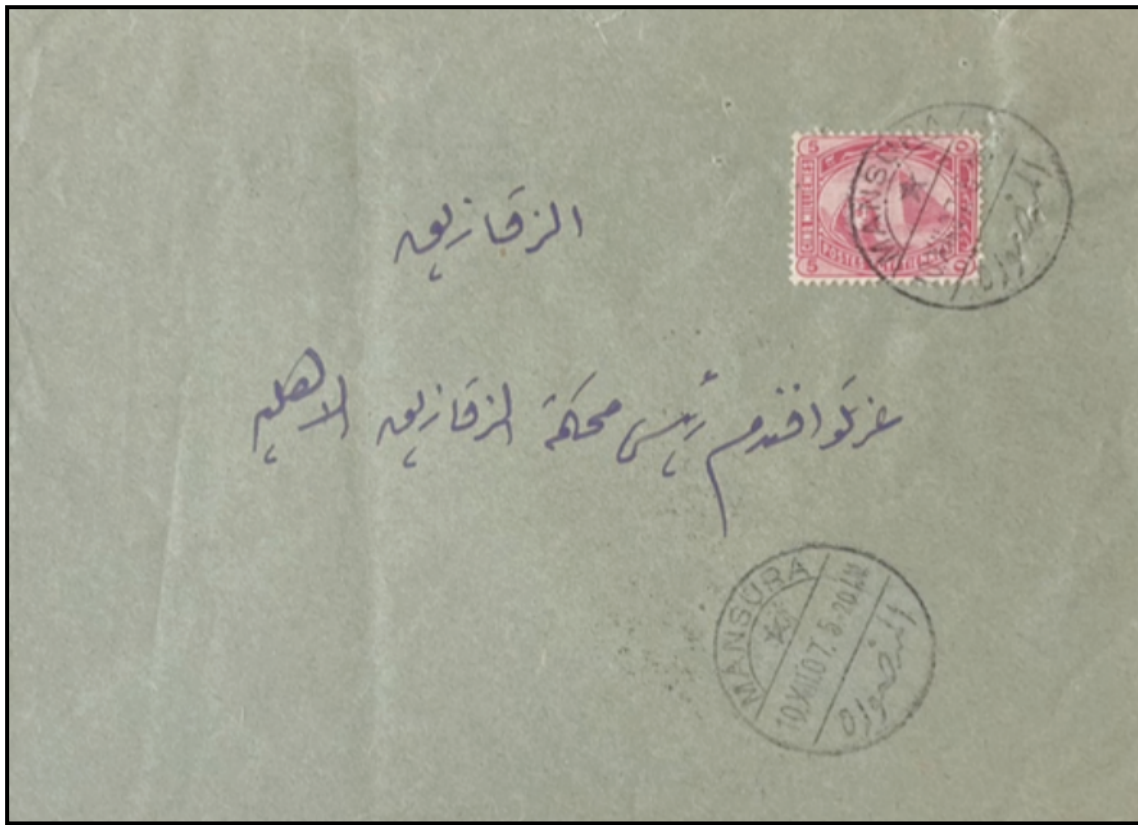


Fig.3. Cover, Mansura to Zagazig, franked 5m and cancelled by the Mansura Star & Bridge datestamp on 10 Aug 1907. Carried by the Mansura–Cairo TPO and received at Zagazig the same day, linking office dispatch with railway sorting. *Rate: 5m internal letter rate, 1 Jan 1906–31 Mar 1920.*

4.3 The 1907 expansion

Seven travelling post office routes are recorded as opening in 1907:

Route	Dates recorded
Ismailia and Port Taufiq	1907-1958
Tanta and Zagazig	1907-1946
Mansura and Zagazig	1907
Sa el Hagar and Tanta	1907-1939
Samanud and Simbellawein	1907
Minet el Gamh and Sahraget	1907-1920
Kafr Cheikh and Sidi Salem	1907-1936

Table 2. Source: Smith ⁽¹¹⁾

Five of these serve offices in the present study. The Ismailia–Port Taufiq route connects two of them directly; Tanta–Zagazig connects two more; Mansura–Zagazig connects two more again, and is recorded in 1907 only.

4.4 The argument

Three facts stand together. The nine offices received a single pattern of device. They received it within seven weeks. And in that same year the travelling post office system underwent its largest single-year expansion, five of the new routes terminating at offices in this group.

The datestamp reads to the hour and minute. Ordinary counter cancellation does not require the minute; exchange between a fixed office and a train does, because the train has a departure time. On this reading the type is the stationary counterpart of the TPO datestamp, issued to the offices where the two systems met.

The cover illustrated at **Fig. 3** makes the point directly rather than by inference: office mark and railway mark on the same item, fixing the same moment.

4.5 What the argument does not establish

No postal order authorising the issue has been traced. The Egyptian Post Office archives have not been consulted for this study, and the argument advanced here rests on the coincidence of device, date and railway expansion, not on documentary instruction. Until such an order is found, the reading offered here remains an inference, though a closely constrained one.

5. Function: The Distribution of Strike Times

5.1 The record

Eleven strike times are recorded across the items examined for this study.

They are set out in Table 3, grouped by office.

Table 3. Recorded strike times

Office	Time	Data	Function
Ismailia	1.35 a.m.	22 VII 1908	Dispatch
Suez	5.30 a.m.	21 I 1916	Dispatch (exceptional)
Suez	6.00 a.m.	4 VIII 1910	Arrival
Tanta	6.00 a.m.	17 IX 1909	Delivery (AR)
Port Taufiq	7.00 p.m.	13 VI 1907	Dispatch
Zagazig	9.30 p.m.	23 I 1908	Dispatch
Port Said	12.20 p.m.	16 VI 1907	Arrival
Suez	5.30 p.m.	8 III 1912	Dispatch
Luxor	2.25 p.m.	8 I 1911	Dispatch
Luxor	2.30 p.m.	8 I 1908	Dispatch
Aswan	9.00 a.m.	20 XI 1911	Dispatch
Aswan	10.00 a.m.	9 II 1908	Dispatch
Aswan	10.00 a.m.	16 XII 1912	Dispatch

Egyptian post offices of this period kept counter hours broadly corresponding to normal daylight business, with variation by size of office. A strike before roughly 7 a.m. or after roughly 6 p.m. is here treated as outside counter hours; strikes within that range are treated as ordinary.

5.2 The asymmetry

The record divides cleanly by office group. Six strikes fall outside counter hours: Ismailia (1.35 a.m.), Suez (5.30 a.m., 6.00 a.m.), Port Taufiq (7.00 p.m.), Zagazig (9.30 p.m.), and Tanta (6.00 a.m.). Every one of these is a Canal or Delta junction office. Five strikes fall within counter hours: Port Said, Suez (5.30 p.m.), Luxor (twice) and Aswan (twice).

The finding is not that Canal and Delta offices strike exclusively outside counter hours; Port Said and one Suez item show ordinary daytime use at these same offices. The finding is narrower and, for that reason, safer: no strike outside counter hours has been recorded at any office south of Cairo. Nile Valley use, on the present evidence, is counter-hour use throughout. Where a Canal or Delta office strikes outside those hours, it is because a train required it; where the same office strikes within them, ordinary counter business was being done. Luxor and Aswan, lying on a line that met no TPO route before Cairo, had no equivalent occasion.

This is consistent with, and adds a second body of evidence to, the argument of Section 4: the offices supplied with the device in 1907 were those at which fixed-office and railway working intersected, and the timing evidence shows that intersection in use.

5.3 Five postal functions

The type is recorded performing five distinct functions, a range wider than a simple cancelling mark requires.

Dispatch is the ordinary case: the datestamp applied at the point of posting, recorded at all nine offices.

Arrival is recorded as a backstamp. The Port Said card of 16 June 1907 (Fig. 4) was struck on receipt, not on posting, and the Suez card of 4 August 1910 was struck at 6 a.m. the morning after posting at Port Said the previous day, before the counter opened.

Transit is recorded once, without ambiguity. A postcard posted at Hihya and addressed to Cairo was struck by Zagazig on 3 December 1911 while passing through the junction; the item neither originated nor terminated there. This is the only strike in the present study that can be assigned to transit alone, and it confirms that the mark was applied to mail in motion, not only to mail beginning or ending its journey at the striking office.

Delivery is recorded on an Avis de Réception. A registered item posted at Cairo on 16 September 1909 was struck by Tanta as delivery office at 6 a.m. on 17 September (Fig. 5), before counter hours. The mark here certifies an administrative act, the confirmation of delivery, and cancels no postage.

Paired local use is recorded once. A cover of the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, posted and delivered within Tanta, carries the datestamp on both front and reverse, dated 11 October 1915: dispatch and delivery recorded by the same device inside a single town.

No other Egyptian datestamp of the period is known to the present writer to combine all five functions. That range is itself an argument against reading the type as an ordinary cancelling mark, and for reading it as a general-purpose office instrument, applied wherever the moment of handling needed to be fixed.

5.4 What the distribution does not show

The sample is small. Eleven times, drawn from items in a single collection, cannot establish that Nile Valley offices never struck outside counter hours; they establish only that none has yet been recorded. A single Luxor or Aswan item struck before 7 a.m. would not overturn the argument of Section 4, but it would remove the asymmetry reported here, and the finding is offered with that qualification.



Fig.4 Postcard, Cairo to Port Saïd, franked 2m and backstamped with the Port Saïd Star & Bridge datestamp on 16 Jun 1907. The mark is used here as an arrival datestamp, recording delivery handling at the Canal outlet. *Rate: 2m internal postcard rate; rate period 1 Jan 1907–31 Dec 1915; paid correctly.*

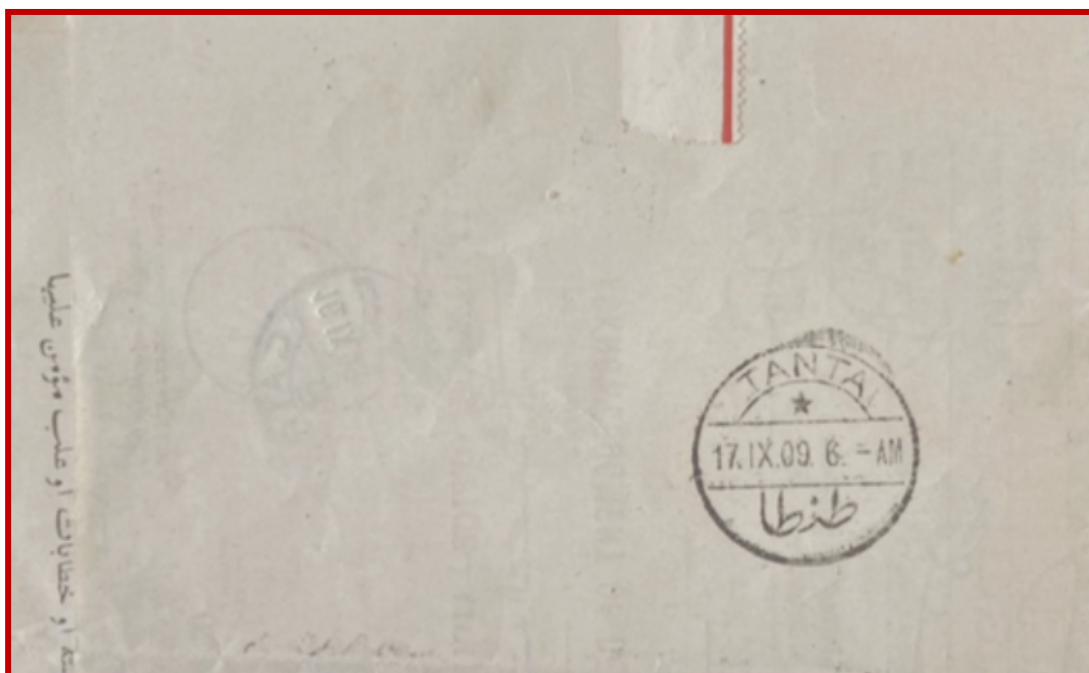


Fig. 5 Avis de Réception form for a registered item sent from Cairo on 16 Sep 1909, struck by the Tanta Star & Bridge datestamp as delivery office at 6 a.m. on 17 Sep. The early-hour strike records administrative delivery control outside normal counter hours.

The only Star & Bridge use on an Avis de Réception form so far recorded in this study.

Table 4. This study against the published record

Office	Published earliest	This study earliest	Earliest status	Published latest	This study latest	Latest status
Port Said	15 V 07	not established ¹	n/a	30 IV 18	not established ¹	n/a
Ismailia	10 IX 07	10 IX 07	confirms	15 IX 15	15 IX 15	confirms
Suez	V 07	not established ¹	n/a	III 19	21 I 16	not established ²
Port Taufiq	VIII 07	13 VI 07	extends c. 2 months	3 IX 15	19 IX 17	extends c. 2 years
Zagazig	13 VI 07	13 VI 07	confirms	4 I 13	4 I 13	confirms
Tanta	24 VI 07	7 VI 07	extends 17 days	6 I 16	6 I 16	confirms
Mansura	12 V 07	12 V 07	confirms	21 III 19	21 III 19	confirms
Luxor	4 VI 07	4 VI 07	Confirms	8 III 14	8 III 14	confirms
Aswan	VI 07	VI 07	Confirms	28 II 14	28 II 14	confirms

¹ No item in the author's holdings has been flagged as the earliest or latest recorded strike for this office; the earliest and latest illustrated items fall within, not beyond, the published range.

² The author's latest recorded Suez item, 21 January 1916, falls short of the published latest of March 1919 and is not offered as an extension.

6.2 The headline finding

Port Taufiq is extended at both ends. The earliest recorded strike advances from August 1907 to 13 June 1907, a gain of approximately two months. The latest recorded strike advances from 3 September 1915 to 19 September 1917, a gain of approximately two years. No other office in this study shows movement at both ends of its range, and no office shows a two-year extension at either end.

The two findings are not independent. Section 4.2 established that Port Taufiq was a fixed sub-office of Suez, never a travelling post office, on the evidence of its Arabic inscription. Section 5.3 recorded the 1917 item as ship mail, the office's characteristic function throughout its life. The extended range at both ends is therefore consistent with an office whose volume derived from a maritime function largely insulated from the administrative pressures, examined in Section 8, that appear to have withdrawn the device from ordinary counter use elsewhere by 1915.

6.3 Confirmations

Six of the nine offices, at one end or the other, return dates matching the published record exactly: Ismailia and Zagazig at both ends; Mansura, Luxor and Aswan at both ends; Tanta at its latest date. This is worth stating plainly. The present holdings neither contradict nor merely repeat Heim's table but sit inside it at the majority of offices, with an outright extension confined to Port Taufiq and, more modestly, to Tanta. A study built entirely on unpublished material claiming to overturn most published dates would invite scepticism; one confirming the greater part of the record and extending two points within it, on named and dated items, is the more credible shape for new evidence to take.

6.4 What is not claimed

Port Said and Suez are marked *not established* at one or both ends. This reflects a limit of the present holdings, not a finding about the offices themselves. Nothing here suggests these dates are wrong; it states only that the author's collection does not extend or contest them. The distinction matters, since a table reporting nine offices with nine findings would misrepresent the evidence: two genuine extensions are worth more, and are more easily checked, than nine claims of uneven weight.

7. Rate Evidence

7.1 The printed-matter concession

Five items in this study are foreign picture postcards franked at 2m, a rate below the standard 4m foreign postcard tariff. Each carries a manuscript or printed message of a few lines only, and none bears a tax mark indicating short payment.

Table 5. The 2m printed-matter concession

Office	Destination	Date	Rate paid
Suez	Cornwall, England	30 X 1907	2m
Tanta	London, England	7 VI 1907	2m
Luxor	La Flèche, France	8 I 1908	2m
Aswan	Vicenza, Italy	20 XI 1911	2m
Aswan	Milan, Italy	16 XII 1912	2m

The pattern spans five different offices and six years, and includes two items from the same office four years apart. A single untaxed card might be attributed to an oversight at the counter; five, from five separate offices spread across the period of this study, indicate a standing administrative practice rather than a series of local errors. Picture postcards bearing only a short greeting were evidently accepted at the printed-matter rate rather than the full foreign postcard tariff, and the concession was applied consistently wherever the type of item and message length allowed it.

This finding does not depend on any interpretation of the Star & Bridge datestamp itself; it is a rate practice that happens to be visible because the surviving items in this study are struck by that type. It is recorded here because it has not, so far as the present writer is aware, been described elsewhere in the literature on Egyptian postal rates of the period, and because it bears on how the items in Sections 4 and 5 should be read: correct postage, on these five cards, is 2m, not an underpayment of 4m.

7.2 An item charged at the letter rate

One postcard in this study departs from the postcard tariff in the opposite direction. The Port Saïd to Suez item examined in Section 5.3, struck on arrival at 6 a.m., is franked 5m, the internal letter rate, rather than the 2m internal postcard rate that would ordinarily apply.

No message on the card explains the higher payment, and no other item in this study shows the same treatment. Two explanations are available, and the evidence does not decide between them. The card may have carried an enclosure or additional matter that brought it within the weight or class of a letter, a common enough practice with cards or is possible that this represents a simple overpayment. Either way, the difference between this item's 5m and the ordinary 2m confirms that postcard-rate treatment was the rule from which this example departs, not the reverse. It is offered as the sole example so far recorded, and no wider claim is made for it.

7.3 What the rate evidence adds

The two findings sit at opposite ends of the same administrative question, whether an item was correctly rated. Section 7.1 shows a concession consistently granted; Section 7.2 shows a single instance where the standard rate was exceeded. Neither bears directly on the argument of Section 4, that the type was issued for operational timing rather than ordinary cancellation, but both illustrate that the offices in this study performed the full range of ordinary counter functions, rate assessment among them, and that the timed and exceptional uses examined elsewhere in this paper sit alongside routine, correctly conducted business.

8. The End of Use and the Exceptional Strikes

8.1 The closing date

The main period of use, established across Sections 4 through 7, runs from May 1907 to 1915. Within that window the type performs the full range of functions examined in this study: dispatch, arrival, transit, delivery, and paired local use, at all nine offices, under ordinary rate conditions.

Two items in this study fall outside that window, both from Canal offices, both after 1915: the Suez card of 21 January 1916 (**Fig. 6**), examined in Section 5.3, and the Port Taufiq card of 19 September 1917 (**Fig. 7**), examined in Sections 5.3 and 6.2.

Fig. 6. Unstamped postcard, Suez, endorsed "On active service," struck at 5.30 a.m. on 21 January 1916. The only recorded strike of the type on active-service mail.

Fig. 7. Postcard written aboard ship in transit through the Canal, struck at Port Taufiq on 19 September 1917 with Port Saïd transit the same day. The latest recorded strike of the type in this study.

8.2 Reading the two exceptions

Two items are not a pattern, and the discussion that follows should be read with that limit in view. But two items sharing three features are more informative than two items sharing none, and Figs. 6 and 7 share office type, mail type, and hour.

Both strikes occur at Canal offices, the same class of office identified in Section 5.2 as the location of every recorded out-of-hours strike in the main period. Both are struck on military or ship mail: the Suez card is endorsed "On active service," and the Port Taufiq card was written aboard a ship transiting the Canal. And both are struck at unusual hours, 5.30 a.m. at Suez and within a same-day transit noted on the Port Taufiq item, consistent with the timing behaviour documented throughout this study rather than with an office reverting to ordinary counter use.

A wartime context for both items is independently supported. From 1916 the Canal carried the growing traffic of the Palestine campaign, with a military railhead established at Kantara and military travelling post offices recorded on the Cairo–Kantara–Port Said and Kantara–Rafah–Lod routes from that year. Suez and Port Taufiq, at the opposite end of the same waterway, lay within the zone of that traffic. Figs. 6 and 7 are consistent with a device, withdrawn from ordinary service by 1915 on the evidence of Section 8.1, being returned to occasional use at exactly the offices and under exactly the conditions that wartime Canal traffic would produce: military mail, at Canal offices, in years when ordinary civilian use of the type is not recorded.

8.3 What this does not establish

The reading offered in Section 8.2 is a consistency, not a proof. Two items cannot establish that the device was formally reissued, informally retained, or simply not yet replaced at these two offices when an unusual item required it. No administrative order withdrawing or reinstating the type has been traced, and none is claimed to exist. The argument rests on the coincidence of office, mail type and date with an independently documented wartime context, in the same manner, and subject to the same limits, as the argument of Section 4.

What can be stated without qualification is narrower and more secure: ordinary civilian use of the type, at ordinary rates, for ordinary correspondence, is not recorded in this study after 1915. Figs. 6 and 7 are both exceptional in kind as well as in date.



Fig. 6. Unstamped postcard to Newcastle upon Tyne, England, endorsed "On active service" and struck by the Suez Star & Bridge datestamp at 5:30 a.m. on 21 Jan 1916. The early-hour strike records residual wartime use after the main 1907–1915 period; **no other On Active Service use of the mark has yet been recorded.** Rate: unfranked active-service mail; no civilian postcard rate paid.



Fig. 7. Postcard written aboard ship, franked 4m and struck by the Port Taufiq Star & Bridge datestamp on 19 Sep 1917, with Port Saïd transit the same day. **An exceptional residual use after the main 1907–1915 period, and the latest Port Taufiq Star & Bridge date so far recorded in this study.**

9. Methodological Discussion

9.1 A field advanced by individual holdings

Section 2.5 characterised the literature on this type as decentralised: every substantive advance between 1978 and 1980 came from a collector reporting items from his own holdings, not from systematic survey. The present study extends that pattern rather than departing from it. Table 4 records two extensions to the published record, at Port Taufiq and Tanta, both resting on individual items in one collection, examined and reported in the same manner as Defriez's Suez date of 1978 or Blomfield's Mansura date of 1980; nothing in the method of this paper differs from the method that has advanced this subject since Minett's note of 1955. This is worth stating explicitly, since a two-month extension at one office and a seventeen-day extension at another are modest gains, reported as such, yet the history traced in Section 2 shows that gains of exactly this size, accumulated one collection at a time over seven decades, produced the distribution identified in Section 1 as the starting point for this study's central argument: the concentration of first dates in May and June 1907 was not visible in the founding account of the subject, and emerged only because contributors kept reporting individual items after Dacos, each correction small, the cumulative effect large. The present paper's two extensions belong to the same slow process, not to a different one.

9.2 Concentration in attribution

Table 1 shows a single contributor, Heim, credited with the earliest recorded date at six of the nine offices in the current master table. This concentration is not evidence of error; Heim's dates have not been contradicted by the present study except at Port Taufiq and Tanta, and at every other office this study's holdings confirm his figures exactly, as recorded in Section 6.3. The concentration instead reflects a structural feature of how the record is built: a large private holding, systematically examined, will out-report a literature otherwise composed of scattered individual notes, and the master table will come to reflect the contents of that holding more than any other single source.

The implication for the present study is direct. The survey figures reported throughout this paper, the seven, eight, ten, or twelve items recorded per office in Sections 4 and 5, describe one further private holding, not a census of the type. Where this study extends the record, as at Port Taufiq, the extension should be read as an addition to a still-incomplete picture, in the same spirit as Heim's own caution, noted in Section 2.4, that his 2008 correction brought Zaqaq "into line with the others" rather than closing the question.

9.3 Why the functional question was not asked

The introduction to this paper observed that no published account of this type asks what it was for. Section 1.2 offered a partial explanation: the pattern on which the present argument depends was not visible until the record had been corrected for three decades. A second, complementary explanation follows from Sections 9.1 and 9.2. A literature built from individual reports of individual items, each contributor working from his own holdings and correcting one or two dates at a time, is well suited to establishing when a type was used. It is poorly suited to establishing why, since that question requires comparing offices against each other and against an independent body of evidence, in this case the railway and travelling post office record, rather than comparing one collection's dates against another's.

The functional argument advanced in this paper became possible only when three conditions were met together: a corrected chronological record revealing the true concentration of first dates, a published account of the travelling post office network detailed enough to test the offices against it, and a willingness to treat the datestamp's minute-level precision as data rather than as an incidental feature of the design. The first two conditions were supplied by others over seven decades; only the third is new.

10. Conclusion and Research Agenda

10.1 Summary

This paper has argued that Egypt's solid-star & bridge datestamp was issued in 1907 as a timed operational instrument, the fixed-office counterpart to a travelling post office system then undergoing its most rapid single year of expansion, rather than as an ordinary cancelling mark. Four bodies of evidence were brought to that argument. The device itself is uniform across all nine offices, indicating a single central issue rather than local procurement (Section 3). The nine offices are precisely those at which fixed-office counter work met railway sorting, and five of seven travelling post office routes opened in 1907 served offices in this study (Section 4). Recorded strike times divide cleanly by office class: every strike outside counter hours occurs at a Canal or Delta junction, while Nile Valley offices record counter-hour use exclusively, and the type is shown performing five distinct postal functions, a range wider than simple cancellation requires (Section 5). And the two items recorded after the main period's close in 1915 are both military or ship mail at Canal offices, consistent with a withdrawn device returned to occasional service under wartime Canal traffic rather than with continued ordinary use (Section 8).

Alongside this argument, the paper has reported two extensions to the published chronological record, at Port Taufiq and Tanta (Section 6), a printed-matter rate concession applied consistently across five offices and six years (Section 7), and a bibliographic reassessment identifying an internal contradiction in Dacos (1976), his omission of Aswan, and the disappearance of Vestarkis (1968) from all subsequent literature on this type (Section 2).

10.2 The limits of what has been shown

The limits placed on each finding as it was made should not be restated in full here, but their cumulative effect is worth noting. The functional argument of Section 4 rests on coincidence of date, device and railway expansion, not on a documentary instruction; no postal order has been traced. The timing evidence of Section 5 rests on eleven recorded strikes; a single Nile Valley item struck outside counter hours would remove the asymmetry reported there. The chronological extensions of Section 6 leave Port Said and Suez unaddressed at one or both ends. The wartime reading of Section 8 rests on two items. None of these limits undermines the case made; together they describe a study that has established a functional argument on strong but not exhaustive grounds, and that expects to be corrected in the manner every contributor since Minnett has been corrected.

10.3 Research agenda

Three gaps identified in this study define the work that would most usefully follow it.

The disappearance of Vestarkis from the literature after 1976 is a bibliographic loss rather than a settled absence. His 1968 paper, cited by Dacos as a source for dates known before that year but not consulted directly for the present study, may contain material bearing on the earlier history of the type or on Type X, and locating a copy would close a gap in the record that has stood for nearly six decades.

The most recent comprehensive treatment of the related Star and Crescent type, Boulad (1952) and Blomfield's subsequent notes, predates the present study by over seventy years, and no systematic update comparable to Heim's work on Type XI-1 has been published for Type X. Since Section 3.3 identifies design continuity between the two types as evidence for the reading advanced in this paper, a comparable revision of the earlier type's record would strengthen or qualify that connection directly.

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