

Cairo to Boston by US diplomatic pouch, 1950

Adam Hafez (ESC 747)

Egyptian stamps tied by Washington postmarks, no Egyptian marking of any kind, no United States postage, and no charge raised on a cover franked at nine millièmes below the required rate. The item illustrated belongs to a familiar and not uncommon class, but its franking makes it useful evidence for a point not previously made within the literature: the regulation governing the franking of American pouch mail carried no means of enforcement at either end of the route.

The cover

Envelope, unregistered, with no airmail label and no manuscript air endorsement. Franked with the 1 m brown, 2 m red and 10 m violet of the Farouk Maréchal definitives of 1944 to 1950, a total of 13 millièmes, each tied by a bar killer incorporating the numeral 8. Two strikes of a WASHINGTON D.C. circular datestamp, JAN 16, 11.30 PM, 1950. A two-line handstamp in magenta reads "**This article originally mailed / in country indicated by postage**". Return address: E. Campbell, Cairo, Dept. of State, Washington 25, D.C. Addressed to Mr Charles C. Hewitt, Boit, Dalton & Church, 89 Broad Street, Boston, Massachusetts, and endorsed "Personal" at lower left. There are no Egyptian markings, no United States adhesives, and no accountancy or postage due markings.

The return address is the standard administrative form used by staff of American missions: post, department, and the Department of State postal zone at Washington. The same construction is recorded on other mission mail from Cairo, including that of the United States Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3, and it identifies the origin of the cover independently of the postmarks.



*Cairo to Boston by US diplomatic pouch, cancelled Washington D.C., 16 January 1950. Farouk "Marechal" 1 m, 2 m and 10 m, total 13 millièmes, against a required rate of 22 millièmes.
(Author's collection).*

The procedure

The American arrangement, begun in some countries in about 1906, was not adopted in Egypt until the Second World War, prompted by the transition of transatlantic air mail, by considerations of security, and by freedom from local censorship. Personal mail was accepted in the pouch provided that stamps of the country of origin were affixed at the prevailing rate. The pouches travelled to Washington as air cargo. No postal marking was applied outside the United States, since such items were handled by no postal official other than American ones. On arrival the mail was passed to the Washington City post office, where the stamps were cancelled and the magenta handstamp applied so that clerks handling the item onward would not misread it. Internal air transmission, where required, had to be prepaid separately in US stamps or stationery. This cover bears none, and travelled to Boston as ordinary surface mail.

The rate

The requirement is stated precisely in the literature: postage of the country of origin, that is Egypt, at the prevailing surface rate of 22 milliemes, with an express correction of the assertion that the air mail rate applied. Recorded covers confirm the figure, among them one franked 2 x 10 m plus 2 m for surface postage with United States stationery added for onward internal air transmission, and a registered example franked with a single 22 m Farouk.

Service	Rate
Foreign surface letter, first 20 g	22 m
Each additional 20 g step	13 m
Foreign postcard (1 Nov 1931 to 30 Oct 1951)	13 m
Inland letter	6 m
Franking on the cover illustrated	13 m

In January 1950 the value 13 milliemes had no letter application whatever. It was the foreign postcard rate, current from 1 November 1931 until 30 October 1951, and it was also the value of one additional weight step. The item is a sealed letter, and is therefore short paid by at least nine milliemes. The combination 1 + 2 + 10 suggests values to hand rather than a considered purchase.

Why nothing was collected

Deficiency is normally detected at one of three points. The office of posting was not engaged, because the cover was never presented to an Egyptian post office; there was no clerk, no scale and no datestamp. The office of exchange on arrival was not engaged either, because the item entered the American mails at Washington as domestic matter, and Egyptian adhesives have no standing in the American accounts. The delivery office was neutralised by the auxiliary handstamp, whose purpose was precisely to stop a clerk seeing foreign stamps and treating the cover as short paid foreign mail.

A marking devised to protect a correctly franked cover from a mistaken charge has here shielded an underfranked one from a correct charge. The compliance of the sender was the only control in the system. It is suggestive that on the recorded registered pouch covers from Egypt, where the registration fee was in fact collected from the addressee as postage due, the handstamp is absent. The correlation deserves testing against a larger sample.

Two conflicts in the literature

The published accounts do not agree. One gives the requirement as the international air mail rate from the country of origin to the United States; another gives the surface rate and rejects the air mail reading. The second is to be preferred, since covers franked at precisely 22 milliemes are on record, one of them with a single adhesive of that value, whereas the first is a reply in a query column citing an American paper of 1968 at second hand. The cover illustrated is short paid on either reading. The same two accounts differ over the reclassification of pouch mail as domestic United States mail, 1 October 1966 against 1 October 1968, though both agree that the rules changed on 2 July 1964.

Status and a request

This is not a rare cover. Such items are described in the literature as readily available if somewhat uncommon, and the two-line handstamp is recorded from the early 1920s until 1962, when a slogan canceller of the same wording replaced it. Nor is it an early Egyptian usage in absolute terms, since the practice is recorded in Egypt from 1944. Its interest is evidential rather than material: a documented instance, from the first decade of the system in Egypt, of the regulation failing in practice.

Members are asked to record, for pouch covers from Egypt, the date and time of the Washington datestamp, the total franking, the rate then current, the presence or absence of the auxiliary handstamp, and any accountancy markings. If short payment proves common, a single cover becomes a pattern. Two subsidiary questions remain open: the precise date on which the foreign letter rate rose from 20 to 22 milliemmes, somewhere between August 1940 and 1950; and the identity of E. Campbell, which the Foreign Service List for January 1950 should supply.

References

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