

Early Stamped Mail from French Post Office in Shanghai

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After the closure of the French Military Post Office on 23 March 1862, the French Concession in Shanghai was left with no postal service of its own. Finally, after repeated petition from the local community, Post Office Department in France issued Bulletin des Postes No. 87 (Nov. 1862) circular No. 270 stating that as of 12 October 1862, a "Direction de Poste Francaise de Shanghai" be formed.

The first Postmaster was Monsieur M. Champanhet who arrived in Shanghai on 19 December 1862 bringing with him a "5104" obliterator, a circular Shanghai datestamp but apparently no French stamps. It is thought that stamps were brought in by the French mailboat *MI Hydaspes* on 12 February 1863.

Postal circular No.270 of Nov. 1862 stated a postage rate of 70 centimes per 7½ gms. for letters to France by either French or British Packet and at the same time, the sender had the option of sending letters unpaid to France at a rate of 90 centimes (9 decimes) per 7½ gms.

The 70 centimes rate was fairly short-lived since three years later, another postal circular; No. 431 of November 1865 announced that from 1 January 1866, prepaid letter from French Post Office Shanghai to France would be increased to 80 centimes per 10gms prepaid and 1F per 10gms. unpaid. These rates lasted until 30 June 1871.

Stamped letters from the French Post Office in Shanghai during the 70 centimes period are not in abundance even though volume of commercial mail must have been quite considerable at the time; this is because most letters were sent as unpaid by merchants. Stamped letters sent by French Packet would logically be even less common as the Messageries Imperiales only operated a monthly service from Shanghai vs. the bi-monthly service of the P&O at that time.

Figure 1 shows a letter from the Meynard Cousin correspondence prepaid 70 centimes with 10, 20 and 40 ctm. 1862 Empire perforated issue cancelled 5104 sub-type 1 and datestamped 3 September 64. It was sent by the first (of two) homeward sailing of the British P&O Packet service from Shanghai in September.



MAIL STEAMER
SHANGHAI
HONG KONG
GALLE
EGYPT
MARSEILLE

MAIL STEAMER	SHANGHAI	HONG KONG	GALLE	EGYPT	MARSEILLE
<i>P&O Orissa</i>	4.9	8.9			
<i>P&O Orissa</i>		11.9	28.9		
<i>P&O Mooltan</i>			30.9	14.10	
<i>P&O Baroda</i>				18.10	24.10

Upon arrival, the mail bags were opened and Salles Fig. 1.880 PAQ. AN. V. SUEZ / AMB. MARS. 2, 24 OCT. 64 (recorded by Salles from 1863 - 1867 for mail from Shanghai and Yokohama) was stuck in red. PAQ. AN. stands for *Paquebot Anglais* i.e. British Packet and the AMB. stands for *ambulant* i.e. mail sorting coach of the Marseilles - Paris line. There is also a faint framed PD in red indicating prepaid to destination. Total transit time was 21 days.

Figure 2 shows the outer wrapper of an 1864 letter from Shanghai to St. Etienne. This is a letter weighing between 7½ gms. to 15 gms. therefore franked 140 centimes (14 decimes or 1.40 F) paid by 10 ctm x6 and 40 ctm. x2 1862 Empire perforated issue cancelled 5104 sub-type 1 and datestamped 17 September 64. It was sent between the two P&O sailings in September by monthly homeward sailing of the French Packet. Total transit time was 20 days.



The itinerary of this cover is shown below quoted from Lee Scamp's new book on French mail from the Orient (soon to be published).

**MAIL STEAMER
SHANGHAI
HONG KONG
EGYPT
MARSEILLE
NOTES
FIG.**

MAIL STEAMER	SHANGHAI	HONG KONG	EGYPT	MARSEILLE	NOTES	FIG.
<i>Hydaspe</i>	17.9	21.9				
<i>Cambodge</i>		24.9	30.10*		10	11,12
<i>Peluse</i>			1.11*	7.11		

"The *MI Cambodge* did not reach Suez until 30.10, according to M. Salles, three days later than the scheduled arrival listed in Figure MI-3 (ref. Note 10 above). Her late arrival in Egypt, likely due to heavy monsoon head winds....."

As the letter was carried in closed mail by French Packet from Shanghai to France, no special arrival marking was needed (vs. mail carried by British Packets). On reverse is a Marseilles to Lyon railway mark struck on board railway sorting coach and a St. Etienne arrival of 8 November. The black framed PD would be applied by the railway sorter clerk when he backstamped the letter.

Further Comments are most welcome; kindly contact me by mail or email.