

# Fabulous Firsts:

## Persia

(From Mekeel's Weekly, March 22, 1919 with images added)

(This article can be viewed in color in our Online edition. JFD.)

The stamps of the Orientals always have a fascination for the collector just as their lands have for the traveller, their art for the artist, their literature for the student. This is partly due to differences in method, in viewpoint, in thought, just as Kipling says:

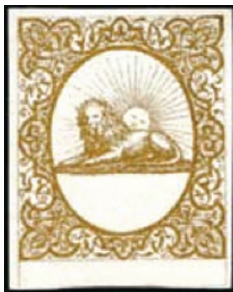
*"For East is East and West is West, And never the two shall meet."*

It is also partly due to a certain mysticism, romance and symbolism which usually attaches to Oriental things in contradistinction to those of the prosaic Occident. So much that is strange and unusual from designs to inscriptions is found on Oriental stamps that they never become monotonous to one who is willing to study them for themselves.

While Oriental lands were the first to institute what we now know as "The Post," yet they were the last to adopt the improvement that made possible the great success of "The Post" today namely, the humble postage stamp. China claims to have instituted the first post—then a government courier service only—nearly three thousand years ago. Xenophon tells us that Cyrus the Great of Persia instituted a similar post nearly twenty-five hundred years ago; and allowing for more uncertainty in the Chinese annals it may be that the two systems are not so far apart in age after all.

But while Persia was progressive according to the times twenty-five centuries ago, she has hardly been very progressive in recent times according to present-day standards. Her post has been "farmed out" to contractors who have "squeezed" what they could out of it and rendered as little in return as possible.

A deputation of Persians visited Paris in 1868 and interviewed the Ministry of Posts concerning the establishment of a European postal system. They brought back with them sixteen copper dies, or cliches representing four different values for printing stamps, but these were not used until 1870, when a local printer of Teheran was ordered to print a supply which he did by hand, sometimes singly, sometimes in strips of four.



1868 essay, Recumbent Lion in gold on cream paper, by A. Martin Reister of Paris.



1870 1sh Deep Violet, Sc. 1

These were of the well known design listed in the catalog as issued in "1868," [now listed as issued in 1870. JFD.] showing the arms of Persia, a lion "passant gardant" holding a scimitar in his right paw and with the sun in splendor rising over his back. There were no inscriptions and only the Persian figures of value in the corner circles. These stamps were used in a desultory way on the post route from Teheran to Tabriz, but the administration at last awoke to the fact that no cancellation had been provided for and the stamps were being used more than once; they also found that the printer had printed a large surplus stock for his own benefit, so the use of the stamps was finally stopped early in 1871.

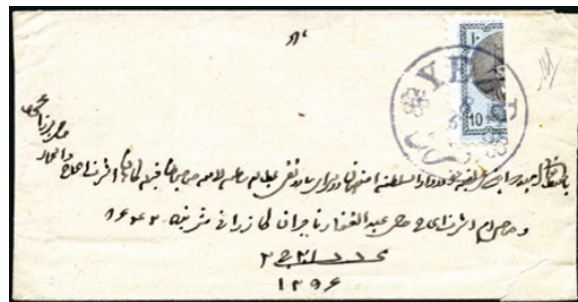


1875 8s, rouletted, Sc. 14

In 1875; another attempt was made to reorganize the post and Mr. Riederer, an Austrian postal official, was called to Teheran. He was given the old dies to make a new issue from, but he took the precaution to destroy the remainder of the previous issue still on hand and also to cut corresponding Arabic numerals of value under the belly of the lion to distinguish the new prints from any old ones still outstanding. As these numerals were all inserted by hand, there are of course four varieties for each value. The denomination was in "shahis," a coin then worth about a cent American money. The impressions were rough and unsatisfactory and Mr. Riederer naturally turned to Vienna to get something better for his uses. The result was the stamps with the Shah's portrait issued in August, 1876. These stamps were made at the Austrian State Printing office and it is stated the design was suggested by the Shah, who at that time was Nasr-ed-Din.



1875 Unissued 1k Yellow, neat c.t.o. as always with used examples. Originally printed in sheets of four; the entire quantity of 500 was never issued and taken to Europe with most having been destroyed.



Above, 1876 10sh Blue & Black, perf 11, vertical bisect tied by ornamented YEZD cds to cover dated 8 June 1879; Left, 1876 1s, Sc. 27



The need of stamps of higher values became apparent in the latter part of 1878 and pending the receipt of a new supply the old dies were again made use of at Teheran for stamps of 1, 4 and 5 krans and 1 toman (page 19). The kran, nominally the same as the French franc, was of 20 shahis and the toman was 10 krans. The old "1" dies used for the new kran and toman stamps, being somewhat worn, had a broad white circle cut around the numerals in the four cor-





1878 1Kr Grey Lilac shade, Sc. 33 variety, the only one known in this color printed from the re-engraved cliches.

ners, and the “8” dies were altered to make “5” instead for the 5 kran stamps.

In February, 1879, the 1 and 5 kran stamps with the Shah’s head arrived from Vienna and were issued. They were printed from the plates used for



1878 1 Toman red bronze on blue unused variety on thin tissue paper

French money at the bottom, it is translated into Persian money in the upper corner circles.

The return to Persian money was signaled in November, 1882, by the appearance of the green stamp (previously 25 centimes) with a colored figure 5 on a white ground, thus corresponding to the Persian inscription “5 shahi” in the left upper circle and Panj (“five”) in the right upper circle. There are two varieties of the stamp, one having but two instead of three dots at the right end of the scroll bearing the Persian inscription. The lack of a dot makes the first Persian word (reading to the left) yosta instead of posta, the former being meaningless (photo, bottom of previous column). At the same time the former 50 centimes appeared with “10” substituted in a white circle, thus corresponding with the Persian “10 shahi” in the left upper corner and DAH (“ten”) at the right.



Iran 56; see below for 10fr, Sc. 59

the 1 and 5 shahi stamps, but were distinguished by a heavy colored border. In January, 1880, the four shahi values were changed to correspond, having a heavy colored border but being changed to new colors as well.

New designs were now desired and these were gotten up in Paris but the stamps were printed as before in Vienna. Being in a hurry for them, a small supply of the three lowest values was lithographed and forwarded to Teheran the latter part of 1881—about 10,000 each of the 5 and 10 centimes and 5,000 of the 25 centimes.



1881 25c lithographed issue, Sc. 49

The change in currency was due to the desire of the Shah to bring the Persian post office more in harmony with the European post offices, and being an admirer of France, which had considerable commercial interest in Persia, he tried to have the French currency adopted. As the kran was nominally a franc, the 5, 10 and 25 centime stamps simply replaced the 1, 2 and 5 shahi stamps.

The experiment did not succeed, however, and brought forth so much opposition that the next issue returned to Persian currency. The lithographs were followed in January, 1882, by the same stamps engraved on copper. They are readily distinguished, the engraved being finer and clearer impressions and having the Arabic figures of value on a ground of horizontal lines, while the lithographs are coarser in appearance and the figures are on a solid ground.

This design is one of the prettiest known to the writer, and thoroughly Persian. The beautiful arch of the five lobed or cinquefoil type with its



The 1882 5sh engraved, Paris printing for collectors, Type 1 with three dots, pointer

Arabesque decorations gives a glimpse of the sun in splendor, reminiscent of the ancient fire-worship of the Persians, the sun being its symbol.



1882 10fr, Sc. 59

In March, 1885, a new series of small stamps, again designed in Paris and lithographed in Vienna, was issued in two designs, the three higher values being a reduced copy of the



Nov. 6, 1882 Registered cover, Teheran to USA (“America”) with 1882 5s, Sc. 53, Teheran to USA, franked on reverse, with “Via Germany” (registration label on front).



1885 2c, Sc. 61

large portrait stamps of the previous set. It is to be noticed that the denomination is now rendered chahi which is simply the French spelling of the coin, the English rendering being shahi or shahy.



The batch of provisionals issued from 1885 to 1887 bear the word "OFFICIEL", but were not intended for Service stamps. The word signifies that the new values were officially authorized, but the stamps are regular postage stamps.

In November, 1889, a new series lithographed this time in Paris made its appearance, to be followed just two years later by another lithographed again in Vienna; 1894 saw a much better series which was typographed by Messrs. Enschede of Haarlem, Holland, who have since produced Persia's stamps. (Front cover, 1894 50k, Sc. 100.)



1898, Sc. 119



1902 surcharge, Sc. 257



1885, Sc. 59A

Per Scott, "No. 59A [lithograph printed] was issued because of an urgent need for 5c stamps, pending the arrival of No. 62 in July. No 59A has 88 sunrays insetad of the 124 sunrays on the typographical stamp No. 62."



1885-86, Sc. 62



1889, Sc. 75



1899 10k orange with arabesque control overprint, Sc. 134

Another new set from Holland appeared in 1903, only to be followed by a new series of surcharges as before. [Per Scott, under Nos. 222-228, "Monsieur Victor Castaigne, the Belgian director of posts and customs in the province of Khorassan... prepared a set of provisional stamps to meet the shortage of low-denomination stamps. These stamps were printed individually from two cliches, one for the frame and one for the vignette...]

[his] initials taken from his ring. Printed stamps were initialed by the director in red ink for the shahis (ch) denominations and in violet ink for the 1k."]



1907, Sc. 445



1911, Sc. 483B



1915 Crown, Sc. 567

the door-frame of the Hall of a Hundred Columns at Persepolis, the ancient capital. The toman values show the gateway of the Palace of Darius at Persepolis as



1902 2 ch, Sc. 223

In 1907 Mohammed Ali became Shah, and in 1908 a new set bearing his portrait appeared. The 50 kran stamp is interesting as showing him wearing the great crown of the "Kajars," as the ruling family of Persia is called. But Mohammed Ali was driven into exile in 1909 and was succeeded by his young son, Sultan Ahmed Mirza, whose portrait is found on a new issue in 1911, an issue showing only the arms having taken place meanwhile in 1909.



1909 Arms, Sc. 454

More surcharges have followed as usual in which the specialist will find interest, but the ordinary collector will be much more interested in the only commemorative issue of Persia which appeared in 1915 to celebrate the coronation of little Shah Ahmed Mirza on July 21, 1914! The crown is here shown again on the low values. The kran values give a representation of King Darius seated upon his throne, this being from a bas-relief on



1915 Darius, Sc. 572