

## THE POSTAL HISTORY OF THURN AND TAXIS

Some 500 years ago, the family of Thurn & Taxis, or de Tour et Tassis, as they were known then, originated the postal services of Western Europe. The seat of their organisation was in Brussels, then the Capital of the Southern Netherlands, whence Francois de Tassis established a network of postal services to many towns in the Western European Countries.

Francois de Tassis had been commissioned by Philippe le Beaux of Spain as Captain and Master of the Post in the Low Countries to ensure the speedy and safe delivery of his messages for a fixed sum of money. As the Royal Treasury was often short of money and this payment could not always be made, Francois obtained permission from the King to carry private mail and extract a fee therefrom. In this manner he made enormous profits, whilst establishing a permanent and dependable postal service.

In 1512 Emperor Maximilian of Austria made the dignity of Postmaster General an hereditary privilege in recognition of these excellent services. In this manner a real Postal Dynasty came into being which ended only on the 30th of June in 1867.

In 1516 the following postal services were in operation:

Brussels — Paris: 36 hours (summer); 40 hours (winter).

— Lyon: 3½ days (summer); 4 days (winter).

— Burgos, Spain: 7 days (summer); 8 days (winter).

— Innsbruck, Germany: 5 days (summer); 6 days (winter).

— Rome, via Germany: 10½ days (summer); 12 days (winter).

— Naples: 14 days (winter).

Francois de Tassis (1450-1517) was succeeded by the following members of the Thurn & Taxis Family:

Johann Baptista de la Tour et Tassis (1476-1541)

Leonhard I de Tassis (1523-1612)

Lamoral de Tassis (1567-1624).

Leonhard Francis de la Tour et Tassis (1594-1628)

Lamoral Claude Fernande la Tour et Tassis (1621-1676).

Eugene Alexander de la Tour et Tassis (1652-1714)

Anselm Francis de la Tour et Tassis (1681-1739)

Alexander Ferdinand de Tassis (1704-1773)

Carol Anselm de la Tour et Tassis (1733-1805)

Carol Alexander de Tassis (1770-1827)

The French Revolution deprived the Thurn & Taxis Family of the postal benefits from the Netherlands, France, Spain and those German States on the left bank of the Rhine. The further wars of the First Reich so dislocated the postal services that Austria, Baden, Bavaria, Brunswick, Hannover, Luxembourg, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Oldenburg, Prussia and Saxony withdrew or purchased their freedom, and formed their own postal administrations. The postal services of the House of Thurn & Taxis were

then confined to those parts of Northern Germany comprised:

The Protectorate of Hessen

The Grand Duchy of Saxon-Weimar

The Duchies of Saxon-Gotha

The Principalities of Reuss

„ „ of Schwarzburg-Sondershausen

„ „ of Lippe-Detmold

„ „ of Lippe-Schaumburg

The Grand Duchy of Meclenburg-Sterlitz

and the Hanseatic Towns of Hamburg, Bremen, and Lubeck, in each of which there was an office.

In Southern Germany, its monopoly extended to:

The Grand Duchy of Hessen-Darmstadt

The Duchy of Nassau

The Landgraviat of Hessen-Homburg

The Duchies of Saxon-Meiningen, Saxon-Coburg,

The Principalities of Schwarzberg-Rudelstadt, Hohenzollern-Hechingen, and Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, and the Freestadt Frankfort A/Main,

On the 1st of January, 1852, the first adhesive stamps were made and issued by Thurn & Taxis as a member of the German-Austrian Post Treaty.

The currency for the Northern States was in Silbergrosschen, 30 of which 1 Thaler, approximately equal to 3 shillings. The currency for the Southern States was in Florins and Kreuzer, 60 Kreuzer being 1 Florin, or about 1/8d.

The general headquarters was in Frankfort a/M.

But the days of the great Old Postmasters were numbered. The unifying tendency of the Prussians could not tolerate, in the midst of the German Confederated States, this independent Sovereignty without a country; a real unicum in the postal history of the world.

On the 28th of January, 1867, Prince Maximilian Charles of Thurn & Taxis relinquished all rights to the privilege of the postal services in all countries for himself and all his dependents. As compensation they were awarded 3 million Thalers, about £450,000 Sterling. The stamps of Thurn & Taxis were withdrawn and ceased to be issued on the 30th June, 1867.

So ended a postal regime which had organised the postal services in Europe for over 400 years. The task, considering the difficulties of communication in early days, was a gigantic one, and the accomplishment of it proved how important a part the members of the house of de Tour et Tassis, or Thurn & Taxis, had played in the postal history over the preceding 400 years.

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Sources of information: "Memorial Philatelique" by Octave le Maire; "Die Poste" by Major H. van Rudolphi; "Oosthoek's Encyclopedie"; W.A.S. Westoby in "Postage Stamp".