

OPENED BUT UNCENSORED: Difficult times for the censors with the Maltese language at hand

by
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A most interesting cover addressed to Malta by a Maltese in India was offered on Ebay at the closing of the year 2010, which at first raised more questions than answers. The cover showed the well known blue/white Egyptian resealing label, but this time with a red overprint OPENED BUT UNCENSORED, and was offered at an

asking price of \$245 and remained unsold. This type of re-sealing label had never been reported (Little 2000) before so most collectors likely believed it concerned a forgery in which the red overprint was added later on. After it remained unsold we had some correspondence on this item and MP decided to acquire the item as it still looked to be genuine. Accordingly the seller was contacted, even he was surprised it had

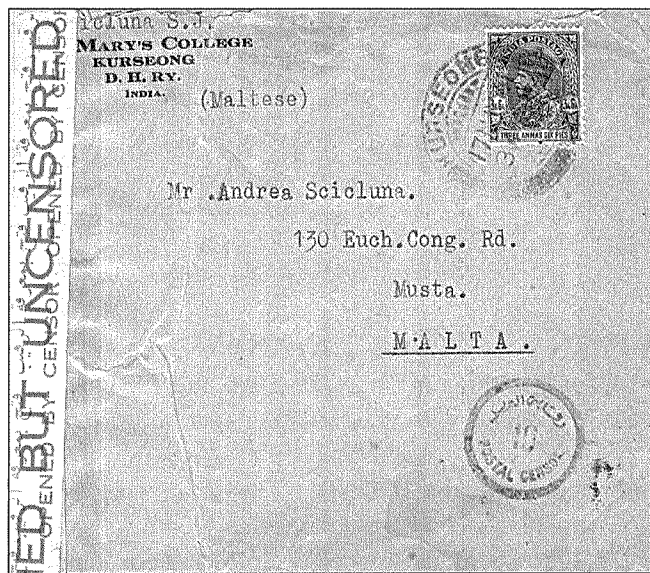


Fig. 1a

remained unsold, so the item was acquired.

Let us now have a closer look at this cover which was franked by an Indian 3a6p stamp and cancelled Kurseong 17 MAY 1941 (Fig. 1). Kurseong forms the southern terminus for the steam-powered trains of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. The cover was written by the Maltese Scicluna residing at St. Mary's College founded in 1889, which concerns a Theological College training

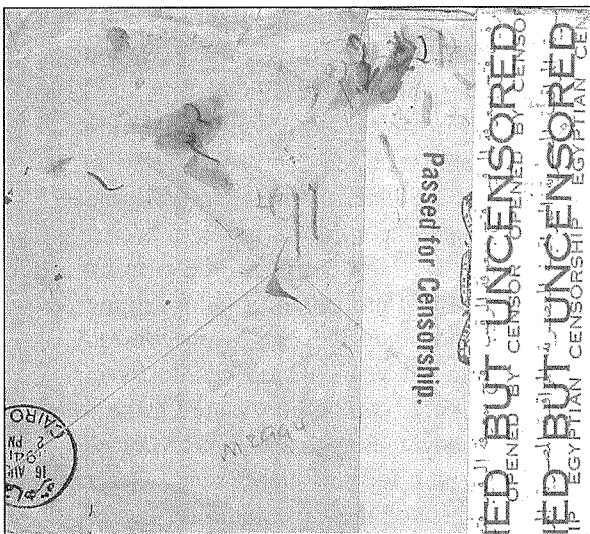


Fig. 1b

Jesuit seminarians to the priesthood. It is not surprising to find a Maltese here, as Maltese Jesuits were trained in Italy too when the war broke out (Galea 2002).

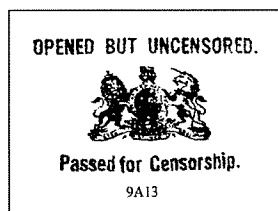


Fig. 2

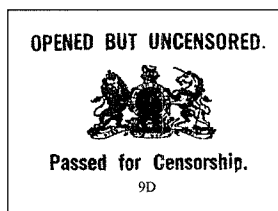


Fig. 3

as was also noted on the front of the cover. The Indian label should be either type 9A13 (Fig. 2) which is known from Calcutta or 9D (Fig. 3) which censor station is still unknown (Morenweiser 2007). So this cover passed through censorship in India uncensored not having a censor mastering this language. Next the letter was forwarded to Malta over Egypt where it arrived three months later in August of that year as the backstamp Cairo 16 AUG 1941 proves. Here the same problem occurred since after opening the cover once more, none of the censors could read the Maltese language. Accordingly the so far unreported blue /white Egyptian resealing label with red overprint OPENED BUT UNCENSORED was applied. Censorship was left over to the Malta censors, but obviously it was no longer opened at Malta. So the application of these labels might have to do with the usage of an unusual language which could not be read in India nor in Egypt.

While checking pages from file DEFE 1/227 of the National Archives, an official

record of this mysterious Egyptian resealing label was found. Specimens of both the normal blue/white Egyptian resealing label and the overprinted blue/white Egyptian resealing label with red overprint OPENED BUT UNCENSORED were presented and signed by the Officer in Charge on 18 March 1941 (Fig. 4). This confirms the official introduction of this resealing label around that date and since it never was reported before in the 70 years which passed by in the meantime, it can be considered to be a great rarity. Most likely thanks to the Maltese language which formed such a rarity that it passed unchecked the censorship offices of India and Egypt while nobody was bothered anymore at arrival in Malta.

Galea, Anthony T. (2002). Maltese Jesuits interned in Italy WWII. *Melita* 15(8): 239-245.

Little, D.J. (2000). British Empire Civil Censorship Devices, World War II: Colonies and Occupied Territories - Africa, Section 1. UK: Civil Censorship Study Group.

Morenweiser, Konrad (2007). British Empire Civil Censorship Devices World War II: Colonies and Occupied Territories - British Asia, Section 4. Fifth and revised edition. UK: Civil Censorship Study Group.

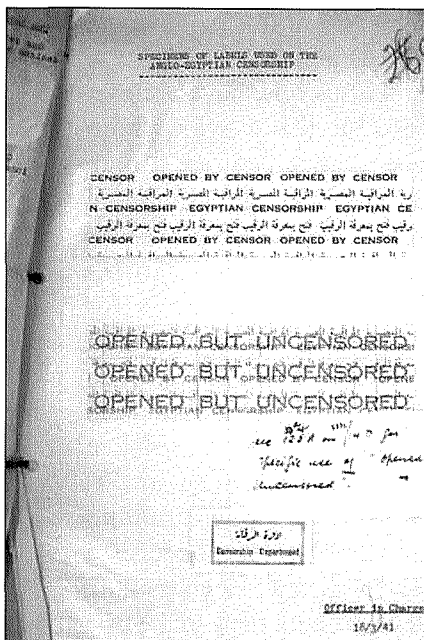


Fig. 4

MALTEX 2011

will be held on

20-23 October 2011

Inform Mr H Wood

52 St Dominic Str Sliema SLM 1405

of your participation by end of August 2011