

Mail from Marseille – Malta ;

Messageries / Nationales – Imperiales

1853 - 1874

Chev. Dr. Alfred Bonnici

MESSAGERIES NATIONALES – 28th February 1851

MARITIMES des MESSAGERIES NATIONALES – 19th January 1853

MARITIMES IMPERIALES – 3rd November 1853

MESSAGERIES MARITIMES (MM) – 1871

With the advent of steam, on the 2nd July 1835, the French Government set up a State owned steamship service - “**SERVICE DES PAQUEBOTS A VAPEUR DE LA MEDITERRANEE**”, inaugurated on the 7th April 1837, to operate between **Marseille and the Levant, calling en route at Malta.**

On the 7th April 1837, a notice was issued containing the following information.

“A regular paquebots ship service would start as from the 1st of May 1837, between Marseille and ports in the Levant.

The departure and return would be every ten days without interruption, departing from Marseilles on the 1st, 11th, 21st, and return from Constantinople every 6th, 16th, 26th, every month, stopping at:

*Livourne, Civita-Vecchia, Naples, **MALTHE**, Syra, Smyrne, and returning by the same route”.*

The notice continues giving details for Alexandria, Constantinople, departures, and passenger accommodation rates.

Ten steamers, were ordered and were operated by the French Navy’s Marine Corps. Initially, each was armed with canon, and was officially classed as a “ship of war”. Their commanders were classed as *Lieutenants de Vaisseau de Premiere Classe* and had 42 marines on board. The ships were to be used **to carry mail** and passengers. Letters were endorsed in manuscript “**Col Pachetto a vapore de Guerra Francese**”. (Figure 3)

The ships were: **RHAMISES, MENTOR, LEONIDAS, TANCREDE, DANTE, LYCURGUE, MINOS, SCAMANDRE, EUROTAS, SESOSTRIS.** R.Salles, La Poste Maritime Francaise.

The **LEONIDAS, MENTOR, TANCREDE, LYCURGUE, EUROTAS,**

SCAMANDER were transferred in October 1851 to “**Messageries Nationales**”.

In 1848, six more ships were added named:

CAIRE, ALEXANDRE, EGYPTUS, OSIRIS, NIL, LOUQSOR, and they were transferred to the “**Messageries Nationales**” in October 1851 (R. Salles p11, D. Haws p.2, H. Tristant p.20)

At this time in France, road communications were in the hands of a State operated concern known as: “**MESSAGERIES NATIONALES**”, carrying post by stage coach, but the growth of the private railway network was replacing this, and because of their postal experience, it was decided that the steamship postal services should be handed to them.

So, on the 28th Feb 1851, the first postal convention for a postal service in the Mediterranean, was signed between the **Ministry of Finance and Messageries Nationales**, ratified on the 8th July 1851, as law No 3,057.

The service consisted of:

Three voyages per month between **MARSEILLE** and **MALTA**, (calling at ports along the coast of Italy), so picking up mail from the Italian ports. This was called “**LIGNE INDIRECT D'ITALIE**” and remained in force up to August 1864. (Figures 1, 1a & 2)

Three voyages per month between **MARSEILLE** and **CONSTANTINOPLE**, via **SYRA, ATHENS** – **PIREUS**

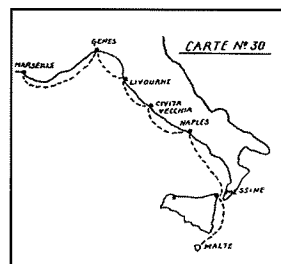


Figure 1.

Two voyages per month between **MARSEILLE** and **ALEXANDRIA**.

During September 1851 the Company acquired from Messrs Cie Rostand three paquebots, namely;

HELLESPONT, BOSPHORE, and ORONTE, and during October 1851 to February 1852 the Company acquired another thirteen paquebots, namely;

LEONIDAS, NIL(1), TANCREDE, ALEXANDRIA, SCAMANDRE(1), MENTO, THLEMAQUE, EGYPTUS, LYCURGUE, OSIRIS, CAIRE, LOUQSOR(1), EUROTAS.

On the 19th January 1853 the Company separated their road activities from their shipping ones and the; “**Compagnie des Services MARITIMES des MESSAGERIES NATIONALES**” was formed, **SESTORIS** being returned to the Navy. (Figure 3)

As these ships because of their size, poor cargo capacity, and navy type engines, were uneconomical, the company decided to buy the Louis Benet yard at La Ciotat, where the future Company fleet was to be built, the first vessel delivered on the 12th July 1852, being the **PERICLES**, followed more or less at yearly intervals by **THABOR Oct 53, SINAI June 54, CARMEL Jan 55, Danube I Dec 55, CYNDUS**

Dec 56, PHASE May 58, NEVA March 59.

In 1853 Napoleon III converted his Presidency into a Monarchy, and as the “*Compagnie des Services Maritimes des Messageries Nationales*” had Royal patronage, it changed its name on the 3rd November 1853 to:

“**Compagnie des Services Maritimes Imperiales**”, also known as “Royal Mail Company”. (Figures 4 & 5)

On the 13th April 1854 an agreement was signed with the Greek Government permitting calls at designated Greek ports – principally **Pireus**. The Company was also awarded a mail contract for the **Marseille - Algeria, Marseille – Bone- La Gollette, Tunis and Marseille - Oran routes**.

The departure time for these routes being 15.00 hrs every third day.

In 1854 to meet these new needs, fourteen new ships were ordered for delivery over an eighteen month period, and **EUPHRATE (I), GANGES (I), and INDUS (I)**, were bought from the bankrupt Australasian Pacific Mail Steam Packet Co, which on the outbreak of the Crimean war in October were used as troop transports to Constantinople and the Crimea. D.Haws.

The other ships being:

HYDASPE Dec 54, CLYDE Jan 55, TAMISE Jan 55, SIMOIS Mar 55, JOURDAIN July 55, MITIDJAH Aug 55, CHELIFF Sep 55, BORRYSTHENE Jan 56, MEANDRE Mar 56, MERSEY Mar 56.

In 1857 the fleet now numbered fifty seven ships, and on the 29th May 1857 being State owned, the mail contracts for the Levant were renewed, with the Black Sea destination added.

On the 4th September 1870 the Third French Republic was formed and all Royal titles were abolished, so the Company, in 1871, changed its name to: “**Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes.**” (MM), and continued to be the French State’s chosen carrier for the Indian Ocean and Asiatic seaboard, and Islands of the Pacific from Japan down to New Zealand.

Postal rates.

Between 1851 and 1856 the postal rate was **10 decimes (1Franc) per 7 1/2 grammes** – (1/4 ounce) if paid on departure, double rate if paid on arrival at destination. The rate being written in ink, on the front of the entire. (Figure 6)

On the 24th September 1856, a new Postal Convention had been concluded between, the G.P.O. London and the French Post Office, which stipulated a reduced rate of **8 decimes for 40. grs**, from 1st January 1857, (Figure 7) so Mr F. Hill of the London GPO, wrote on the 3rd December 1856, to the Malta Packet Agent, informing him about this new convention, stating;

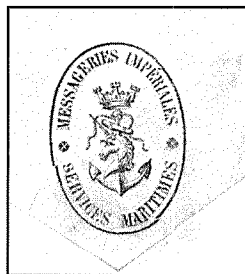


Figure 4.

“The total combined rate of postage upon letters posted in France or Algeria addressed to Malta, or posted in Malta addressed to France or Algeria, will be the same, (4d per ¼ ounce for prepaid letters, and 8d per ¼ ounce for unpaid letters) whether these letters are conveyed by a British or French Packet”

“The principle of charging a higher rate for unpaid letters received, than for paid letters despatched, will apply not only to letters between Malta and France, but also to letters conveyed by French packets between Malta and other places in Turkey, Syria, or Egypt, at which France maintains Post Offices, and, upon this last class of letters, the British Office will in future be entitled to be credited with a British rate both upon paid letters sent to Malta and upon unpaid letters sent from Malta, the postage upon which letters will be collected by the French Office”

“The rates to be accounted for to France by your office are as follows:

*Paid letters addressed to France or Algeria..... 1f.20c
per ounce.*

*Unpaid letters despatched from France addressed to Malta..... 3fs.40c.
per ounce.*

Paid letters addressed to Foreign Countries the correspondence of which shall be transmitted through France, or unpaid letters from those countries addressed to Malta, see the rates as set forth in Table H.

Paid letters conveyed by French Packet addressed to the French Offices in Turkey, Syria, or Egypt.....1f.10c per ounce.

Memo; The same rate is to be accounted for on letters for Salonica – at which France does not maintain a Post Office.

Unpaid letters received by French Packet from the French offices in Turkey Syria, or Egypt addressed to Malta.....1f.50c per ounce.

Memo: The same rate is to be accounted for on letters received from Salonica.

*Paid letters forwarded by French Packet to the Ports of Italy, or Greece...60c
per ounce*

Memo: Upon letters brought to Malta from Ports of Italy or Greece no rate will be accounted for to France by the British Office, as the French Post Office will have received payment of its postage from the despatching office”.

*“As only the French rate, however, will have been received and France will not, therefore account to the British Office, for any postage on such letters, a British rate of **one** penny per ¼ ounce, must in future be collected, on the delivery of the letters sent from Malta to the Ports of Italy or Greece.”*

Hand Stamps used

According to the convention of the 28th February 1851, “*Agents des Postes*” on board “**MESSAGERIES IMPERIALES paquebots**” (figure 8a), were



Figure 1a. "LIGNE INDIRECT D'ITALIE" – Marseille – Genes – Livorno – Cività Vecchia – Napoli – Messine – Malte.

M.I. ORONTE picked up this entire at Livorno on 21/02/54 – Malte 25/02/1854



Figure 2. "LIGNE INDIRECT D'ITALIE" – Marseille – Genes – Livorno – Cività Vecchia – Napoli – Messine – Malte.

M.I. HELLESPONT picked up this entire at Livorno on 21/02/54 – Malte 25/02/1854



Figure 3.

E.L. to Livorno from French Post Office at Alexandria on the 8th December 1849 by French ship SESOSTRIS endorsed "Col Vapore di Guerra Francese" in manuscript, calling at Malta, endorsed with 24mm Lazzaretto h.s., on to Livorno (Via Di Mare) arriving 21 December 1849.

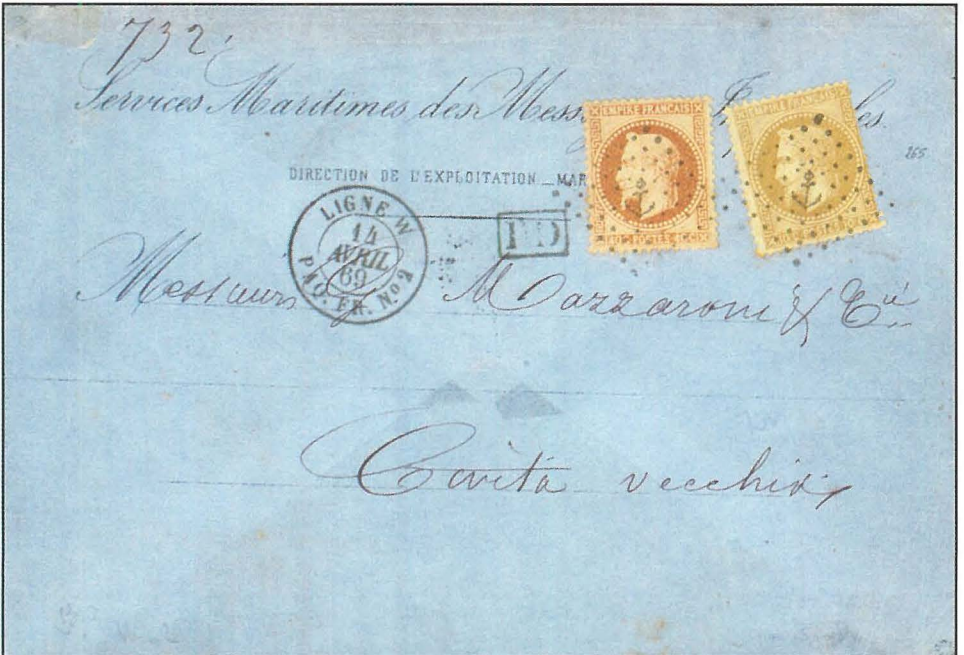


Figure 5. Services Maritimes des Messageries Impériales official printed stationery.



Figure 6. "10" decimes, (1 Franc) per 7½ grams (¼ ounce).



Figure 7. New rate as of 1st Jan 1857 "8" decimes, per 7½ grams (¼ ounce).

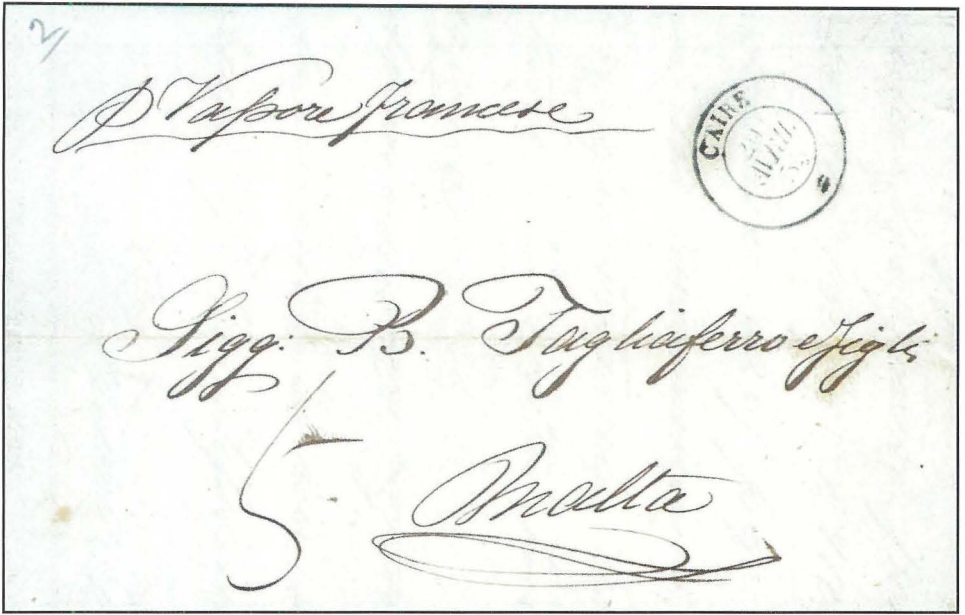


Figure 8. M.I. CAIRE (sh:p's name applied by postal agent).

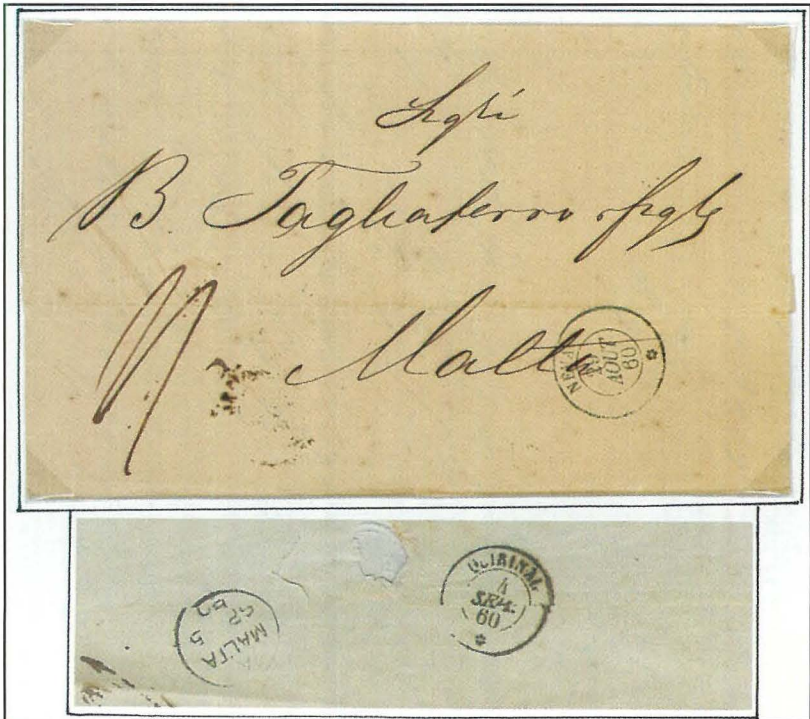


Figure 9. Double ship hand stamp endorsement - NIL, & QUIRINAL

N^o 64
Etat Nominatif du Personnel du Vatican

Paquebot
Le Vatican

Pelliot Emile cap^{me}
Groupe Martin suid
Pellegrin Joseph S^t
Ollivier Louis dentier
Bouvard Charles mecan
Drozzi Charles mecan
Dreuzis Andre m^{tr} d'eq
Pascal Jean m^{tr}
Herminie Jules "
Mouillon J^{ms} "
Gastin Etienne "
Duc Joseph "
Pellegrin Salomon "
Bidebender Henri "
Stablier Felix "
Flamencq Octave "
Moral Antoni "
Novaro Pascal "
Pouyat Pierre "
Philippe Victor "
Denoit Pierre "
Orsellini Joseph "
Campiglia Laurent

Leur Desire chauffeur
Léon Louis "
Didot Charles "
Peyroulan Blaise "
Verrier Joseph "
Weymier Bernard "
Vourette Joffroy "
Lancini Bartholomy "
Fature Antoine "
Mosty Francis J^{ms}
Baty Alixandre "
Emery Daniel "
Pistella Gastino "
Ragho Michel "
Foussier Eugene "
Ossier Pizanne J^{ms} ch.
Joubert Jean restaurateur
Faurcau Leon Cambrier
Duroc Luyse cuisinier
Woin Eugene "
Desgats Joseph "
Dubomgné agent des
Postes

Arrivé à Malte le 3 Février 1859

J^{ms} Pellegrin

45

Figure 8a. Manifest of M.I. VATICAN showing name of Postal Agent on board – Dubomgné



Figure 10. Lozenge of dots and 'Petits Chiffres 1896'.



Figure 11. Lozenge of dots and 'Gros Chiffres 2240'.



Figure 12. INDUS (Ship hand stamp together with 'lozenge of dots and anchor' obliterating the stamps).

responsible in collecting, taking care and transferring mail which had to be endorsed by a 22mm black double ring hand stamp which bore the " **name of the ship and date**", (R.Salles.p 54) (Figure 8)

When mail was transferred to another paquebot, the entire was also endorsed with the handstamp bearing the name of the second paquebot. However this was not always observed. (Figure 9)

Entires franked by the Imperforate Louis - Napoleon, Empire Franc stamp during 1853-60, were hand stamped with the - lozenge diamond of dots with the 'Petits Chiffres 1896' (Marseille) in the middle. (Figure 10)

The earliest recorded entire to Malta by me being, 21st January 1857.

In 1862 entires with the perforated Louis - Napoleon EMPIRE FRANC stamp (1862), were hand stamped with the - lozenge diamond 'Gross Chiffres 2240' (Marseille) in the middle. (Figures 11)

The earliest recorded entire to Malta by me, being 5th January 1864.

From June 1863 the black doubling, 22mm hand stamp, bearing the name of the ship and date, was used together with another hand stamp in the form of a " **lozenge of dots with an anchor in the middle** "to frank the 1862 perforated Louis - Napoleon EMPIRE FRANC French stamp. (Figures 12)

The earliest recorded entire to Malta by me being 6th June 1863 AMERIQUE.