An interesting letter from Malta to India, 1835

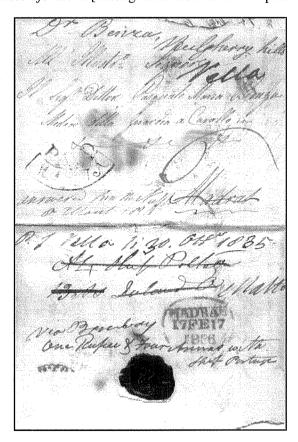
by L. De Zanche

Dated 30 October 1835 and addressed to Dr Pasquale Maria Benza, this letter was sent from Malta to Madras and from there forwarded to Neilgherry (now Nilgiris) Hills. The sender paid the postage (6d) as far as Alexandria (black impression of the marking PAID MALTA type MSP - 1c).

In his recent book 'Admiralty Mediterranean Steam Packets', C. Tabeart writes that "despite a careful search of the known records, no British postage rate has been found for mails carried by British packets between places within the Mediterranean until the Act of 1 Victoria c34", dated 1 August 1837. He quotes also the Act 1 and 2 Victoria c97 (14 August 1838), which reads: "... for every single letter (not having been first brought or conveyed from the United Kingdom, or not being intended to be conveyed to the United Kingdom) transmitted between any of the Ports or Islands or Places aforesaid [among them those situated upon

the Mediterranean Sea, therefore also Malta] and any port or Place in the East Indies by way of the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf, in addition to any other rates of postage, which may be payable in respect of such last mentioned Letters, the sum of Sixpence". The fact that my 1835 letter was charged 6d suggests that the provisions were merely a restatement of what was already in existence.

C. Tabeart has kindly commented my letter in this way: "Your letter left Malta on the Confiance, arriving Alexandria 26 October. The letter probably took 3 or 4 days to get to Suez, but there it waited many weeks. The East India Company Steamers were extremely poor at keeping any sort of timetable.



The next one of their ships to leave Suez that I know of was the Hugh Lindsay: she left Suez on 4 January 1836, arriving Bombay after an incredibly slow journey on 10 February. This would seem to fit quite well with your Madras date of 17 February".

The remaining postage, to be paid by the addressee, appears on the back of the letter: A[nnas] 4 Ship Postage [+] 13 A[nna]s Inland; via Bombay One rupee & four Annas with Ship Postage.

The letter shows some discoloration and signs of scorching: in 1835 cholera had reached Italy, but not Malta. Two are the possible places where the letter was submitted to disinfection by exposure to heat: Alexandria or, more probably, the locality of arrival in India. I am inclined to believe that the sanitary treatment was privately performed by the addressee.