Divided-Back Post Cards. A Clarification

by Chev. Dr. Giovanni Bonello. LLD. KM.

To the best of my knowledge, collectors and historians believed that, in Malta, it was only in March 1906 that the postal authorities started allowing a written message, besides the address, on the back of picture postcards. Before that, the back of the postcard could only be used for the address; any other message or communication would have to be crammed on the picture side. If the sender wrote anything else on the back, besides the address, the postcard would be charged at the full letter rate. This restriction explains why, at the turn of the century, postcards did not have a dividing line printed on the back.

On March 2, 1906, a notice in the *Malta Government Gazette* officially relaxed this rule (*Fig. 1*). Postcards mailed in Malta and addressed overseas could hence forth be sent prepaid at the postcard rate, even if a message was written on the left hand side of the card's back. This rule applied to cards sent from Malta to many overseas countries, but not all. The Postmaster General warned specifically that the USA and Japan did not allow this, and would tax such cards as 'insufficiently paid letters'. The Government notice listed those countries that accepted 'divided-backs'.

The same notice also allowed postcards mailed in Malta for local delivery, to have both the message (on the left hand side) and the address (on the right). Finally the divided-back acquired legitimacy.

It has already been noted elsewhere that the prolific photographer Saverio Lorenzo Cassar had, since 1905, started marketing postcards printed with a divided back, probably sensing the reform in the air. But those seen used before 1906 went through the mail as normal undivided-backs (not with standing the printed central line), i.e. the address was written across the whole card, disregarding the central line, and no message was included (*Fig. 2*). These Cassar postcards have, on the top of the left hand segment, the inscription "For Inland Postage only, this space may be used for communication". Despite Cassar's premature instructions, the official government notice allowing this use, had not yet been formally enacted.

Similarly Malta cards by Raphael Tuck & Sons printed in the U.K. had divided backs possibly as early as 1902; but, again, those known postally used in Malta before 1906 are known only with the address handwritten on the back, over the (by then still useless) central line.

Recently, in a private collection, I came across an S.L. Cassar item, fully and properly used as a divided-back postcard (message on the left, address on the right). It is posted in Valletta and addressed to Sliema. Though the stamp has unfortunately been removed (it was cancelled by a Valletta cancellor), two very clear circular

date-stamps applied in Sliema, show conclusively that this card was, for all intents and purpose, used as a full "divided-back" as early as the end of May 1905 (*Fig. 3*). The final delivery, for some unknown reason, only occurred on June 8, 1905. Maybe the puzzled postman waited for instructions from head office.

This is the only card I know of used as divided-back a full ten months before the revolutionary Government notice of March 2, 1906.

The Malta Govern	ment Gazette	Leave developments	2nd March, 1900
NOTICE.		AVVISO.	
T is hereby notified that Pictorial Cards addressed to places abroad and bearing a communication on the left-hand half of the address side will henceforth be allowed to pass at the post-card rate, provided that they are otherwise in conformity with the regulations.		SI fa noto col presente che le cartoline illustrate, sulla metà a sinistra del lato destinato nil'indirizzo, saranno, d'ora inpanzi, ammesse alla rata di postaggio delle cartoline, purchè siano per ogni altro riguardo in conformità al regolamenti.	
Asimilar concession has been made by the Post Offices of the following Countries, viz:-		Una simile concessione è stata fatta dalle Ammini- strazioni Postali dei seguenti Paesi	
Algeria	Madagascar	Algeria	Madagascar
Austria	Martinique	Austria	Martinica Metsico
Belgium	Mexico	Belgio	Montenegro
Brazil	Montenegra	Brazile Bulgaria	Naova Caledonia
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- Costa Rica	Norway Portugal	Curanan	n men an galak Shumbur ng ng ka
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India (French)	Tabiti	i toda e Prazenterio. Utoda	Laipoli - Africa
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Macao	Urugaay	Juit to the	3 The Cally
			richer, elemente al anicertaise
The concession is not, however, universally accepted, and no garannee on at present begins that such cards will be allowed to pass at the posto and rate in Countries other than those monitoned. In Japan and the Univel S ares of America, earby of the kind describer the not allowed to pass as post- cards, and any such cards solve to pass as post- cards, and any such cards solve to be tassaftion as insufficiently paid Letters, unless prepaid at the letter rate. No such contingents values in treat the letter.		mente, no si può dure presentensi ne alcuna avecara- cione cue tubi cartellore incanto corso alla rata di postoggio delle cartellore in alti. L'assi oltre i sopia menzionati, Nei Grappico e mgli Stati Uniti d'Autorea le cartellare delle que le oppa descrita, noi sone amensore come gatoline pestale e tarcartoline spodite aco da, quei l'assi, scaturo sougi tu, come per di possato, al essere tavote come lettere insufficiente- mente francale, antinencolte gio chem attraneae col possato delle lettere. L'évolutitati di tale supra-	
for the United Kiegdam and the British Colordes and Possessions to which the Penny rate of postage applies for both Letters and Post Cards, nor to cards propaid one halt penny and posted in Malta for local delivery.		Instaggio turi certificarsi per riggardo alle cartoline dirette al Regno Units of a quelle. Colonie e Posses- sioni Britamiche alle quell'è oppleadule la rata di postaggio di un soldo tanto per le lettere che per le cartoline, ne per riggardo alle cartoline affrancate di un mezzo soldo e inpostate is Malta per essere conse- gnate localmente.	
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GENERAL POST OFFICE,		Cepreto GESER-L' DELL	e Poste, A
Malta, 2nd March, 1506.		Malta, 2 marzo, 1606.	
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Fig. 1.

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Fig. 2. Divided-back postcard used in 1905 as undivided back (author's collection)

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Fig. 3. Divided-back postcard used in 1905 (private collection, Malta)