

THE BRANCH AND SUB POST OFFICES OF MALTA AND GOZO

by Dr. Anthony J. Abela Medici

The Malta Study Circle's Study Paper with the above title submitted that the first post offices to be established in the Maltese Islands were the Sub Post Offices of Rabato and Migiarrò in Gozo (page 184). It was also submitted that Victoria was the first post office to be opened as a Sub Post Office in Gozo on the 1st December 1885 at 5 De Soldanis Street. The first recorded cancellation using the RABATO cds is **31 MY 86**. (page 188). The Migiarrò Sub Post Office is also "officially recorded" as being opened on the 1st December 1885 probably situated on private premises but operated by a Detached Post Officer. The paper records the first known cancellation on the MIGIARRO cds as being **4 NO 86**. It is stated that "prior to late 1886 it is likely that the datestamp was applied to the envelope with the postage stamp being cancelled at the GPO Valletta" (page 207).

I have recorded a copy of a letter sent On Her Majesty's Service to Captain Payner, Infantry Brigade Signal Officer at Floriana which was redirected to 12 Sda. Marina Sliema. This letter may have been sent from Gozo since it was backstamped with MIG-1 dated "A/JU 22/86". It was sent to the General Post Office in Malta where it was cancelled front and back with MAL-12 dated "A/JU 24/86". On the front there is a handwritten message "Received 25.6.86 at 3 p.m."

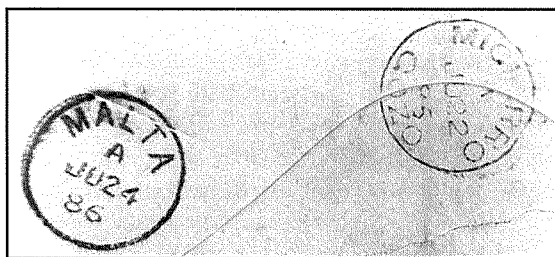
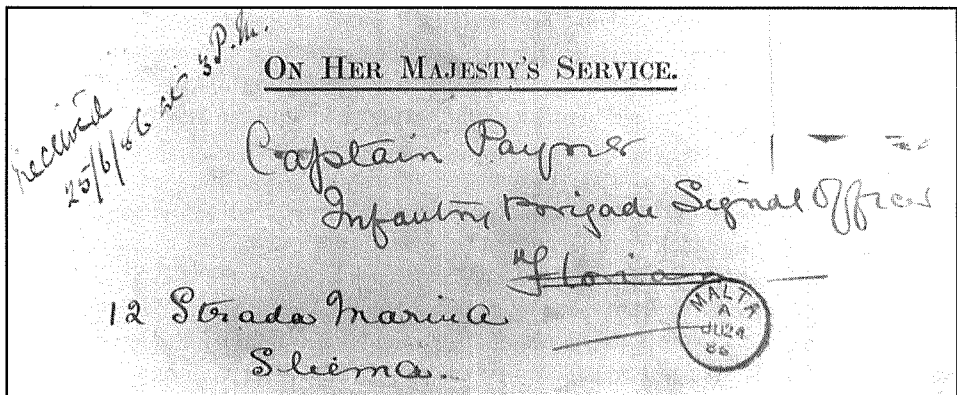
Lately I have discovered a $\frac{1}{2}$ d green (SG20) stamp with a MIG-1 cancellation dated: "A/NO 11/85"



Firstly, I have never seen in any Study Papers or Newsletters any reference to any documentation supporting the claim that the Sub Post Offices of Rabato and Migiarrò in Gozo were opened on 1st December 1885. It may well be that this information was transmitted down verbally from possible relatives of persons involved and eventually became enshrined as "official" recording. Such verbal communications must be very carefully assessed before they are taken as facts. Regardless of the above claim, it is very clear that the Migiarrò canceller had been in use at least in November 1885 – one month before the claimed official opening of the Migiarrò Sub Post Office. Secondly while the official mail sent to Captain Payner was backstamped with the Migiarrò cds in June 22, 1886, some other mail must have had their postage stamp cancelled with

the Migiarrò c.d.s. in November 1885.

I have carefully examined the Chief Secretary to Government's documents pertaining to the period 1884 to 1886 and I have found two very interesting documents which I reproduce in part below:



CSG/01/3728/Police dated 22nd June 1885 entitled: *Conveyance of Mails between Malta and Gozo:*

Minute 1 of said file states:

“After the 30th inst the Gozo Mails will be conveyed by the S.S. Gleneagles. The question arises as to the Postal Service to S. Paul’s Bay and Melleha, which Saliba offers to continue for £70 a year. The amount of the correspondence is trifling, but it is presumed that communication must be kept up with that part of the Island, whether by arrangement with Saliba or by the Gleneagles dropping and picking up pouches at St. Paul’s Bay, (The Melleha pouch is to be conveyed by a Fast ????.) where I understand Mr Gollcher is laying down moorings.”

And in a letter to Mr Paolo Saliba dated 30th June 1885 it stated: “I am desired to inform you that, beginning with tomorrow, your omnibus may continue to carry the mails to and from St. Paul’s Bay and Melleha for one month, daily, except on Sundays at the rate of £70 a year, the hours of departure and arrival being the same as at present. This is a provisional measure pending further arrangements in regard to the Island Posts. You may be paid up to today at the rate specified in your Gozo contract which expired on the 31st ultimo.”

CSG/01/5085/1885 Post Office entitled “*Mails from Migiarrro & Rabato*” – *Reports that Gleneagles failed to bring.*”

Minute 4 dated 30.10.85 and signed “V. M.” states that:

“The occurrence herein reported is due to the fact that on the day mentioned the notice that the Gleneagles was going to Marsalforn was given by Mr Calamatta to the Telegraph Clerks here, and so the Police at Mjar did not know in time that they had to send the mail

there – the instructions contained on 5084/Minute will however obviate similar occurrences in future – The Messenger who takes the mail from Rabat to Mjar will not be able to call at the latter place when the Steamer goes to Marsalforn. – **The Sub P. Master at Mjar will therefore have to be authorized to incur a small expense to send the mail to Marsalforn on such occasions.**”

Furthermore CSG/01/5261/1885 Post Office “*Transport Expenses to enable the Mjar Sub-Postmaster to obtain and distribute correspondence without delay. Recommends sanction of.*” A report enclosed states:

“Now that there is a detachment at Chambray it is necessary that the Mjar Mail be landed soon on the Steamer’s arrival and the outward mail taken on board a little before her departure to afford them the convenience of answering letters on the same day - Could not a small expense for transport be paid temporarily so that the Mjar Mail may be received and despatched independently of the Rabato Mail? I should think that service could be done for 5 or 6/- a month”.

In reply Roger Duke, Postmaster, wrote a letter dated **6th November 1885** to the Lieut. Governor and Chief Secretary to Government wherein he stated:

“With reference to the annexed extract from a letter from the Assistant Secretary to Government for Gozo, I presume His Excellency will be pleased to authorize the small additional expenditure for transport, to enable “**the Migiarro Sub-Postmaster** to obtain and distribute the correspondence for his district without delay instead of its being kept on board the “Gleneagles” until the outgoing Mails are being embarked.”

Finally CSG/01/5759/1885 dated 22nd December 1885 entitled “*Credit Stock of Stamps for Sub-Postmasters & remuneration to Post Runners. Forwards letter from Asst. Sec. Gozo respecting, with observation*”

Letter from Assistant Secretary’s Office, Gozo (R. Micallef) dated 18th December 1885 stated:

“I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 16th Instant accompanying £1 worth of Post Cards which I have passed to the **Sub Postmasters of Rabat and Mjar** whose Receipts I send herewith, and 12 Letter Boxes to be put up in the Police Stations of the several Casals.....I remit by bearer £5 value of postage stamps supplied to me on 22nd October last. **The Sub-Postmasters can now**, I believe, send receipts for a small stock to be supplied to them on credit.”

Minute 2: sent by F. V. Inglott to Postmaster dated 25 Feb 1886.:

The Detached Post Officers at Gozo are at present supplied with a small credit stock of stamps, upon their own Receipts.”

From the above references it is very clear that the Sub Postmasters at Rabat and Mjar had been appointed as Detached Post Officers at Gozo some time after June 1885 and more likely towards October 1885 when the arrangements regarding the Inland Posts had started to be implemented. It is very clear that the post of Sub Postmaster at Mjar had already been filled by the 30th October 1885 and just after the 6th November 1885 the Migiarro Sub-Postmaster was authorized to obtain and distribute the correspondence for his district without delay mainly as a direct result of the detachment of troops at Fort Chambray, Migiarro a few days earlier. In this capacity he would have cancelled the mail in his district with the Migiarro MIG-1 canceller thus producing the above cancellation dated November 11, 1885.