

RATES OF POSTAGE IN MALTA 1815-1819

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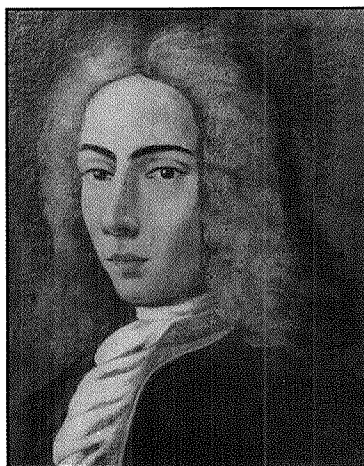
In the early days of British rule when Malta was a trade emporium, it was hit by a widespread plague epidemic which carried away 4,572 persons – not as bad as that of 1675-76 which left more than double that figure as victims. Towards the end of July 1813 there was a slight decrease in the incidence of cases, which improved in the following month with life getting back to normal.

On August 20th 1813 the *Ufficio della Posta* was housed in the Treasury at 247 Strada Reale (now Republic Street), Valletta, (since 1852, now the premises of the prestigious club Casino Maltese,¹) where it remained until 1849.

Around 1805 Domenico Montanaro² was appointed *Direttore della Posta* in succession to Gio Antonio Micallef (1781-1841), and he was in charge of both inland and overseas mail.³ He served until 31 December 1816. On 20 August 1813 he issued in Italian a tariff which covered the local charges on both Inland and Foreign Letters. It is being reproduced herewith.⁴ (Fig. 2)

According to this Tariff:

- a. each letter handed to the messenger of the respective districts was to be charged One Tari;
- b. each letter sent from the Post Office would be charged Ten Grani on delivery;



Portrait of Domenico Montanaro (1759-1839). Author's collection

¹ A. Ganado, 'The Officina della Posta and its functionaries', *The PSM* (Philatelic Society of Malta) *Magazine*, xii (3), 1983, fn. 9.

² Domenico Montanaro was born in Valletta on 25 June 1759. He was probably the son of Severio and Anna Bonanno who were married at St Paul's Collegiate Church on 13 February 1744. In 1815 his yearly salary was 100 *scudi*, at the rate of 12 *scudi* to the pound sterling. He lived at 27 Strada San Domenico, Valletta. Died on 13 May 1839. His portrait was published in the monograph listed in the next footnote.

³ A. Ganado, 'The growth of the Malta General Post Office 1802-1806', *The PSM Magazine*, xv (3), 1986, 10, (with his portrait).

⁴ An English translation of this Notice was published in *Malta – The stamps and postal history 1576-1960*, (The Malta Study Circle), ed. R. E. Martin, London, 1980, 73. A copy of the original, printed in Italian, is in the author's collection.

- c. letters from abroad would be charged Two Tari on delivery;
- d. letters addressed to persons on board ships, in the country, or in Gozo would be charged One Tari Ten Grani, except that in Gozo there is free delivery;
- e. letters for Sicily or any other parts beyond Malta and Gozo would be charged Two Tari.⁵

In 1817 the British merchants in Malta considered far too high the rates of postage then obtaining and they opined that the rates, both inwards and outwards, which they considered fully adequate should be One Tari for a single letter, Two Tari for any other letter weighing less than an ounce, and Three Tari per ounce for all the other letters.⁶ The memorandum of the British merchants was dated 29 January 1817 during the governorship of Sir Thomas Maitland. It dealt with the state of the Trade of Malta, some of the causes of its decline and the means of reviving it in some degree.

The postal service was severely criticized. The charge of postage was a great burden on the merchants. The delay in delivering letters from on board vessels in quarantine had long been prejudicial without any remedy being taken. The timing of advertising the day of departure or clearing vessels was inadequate. It was at all times essential to the merchants to know by what vessels their letters go. Whenever the mail is not closed at the time appointed it would be useful to have notice thereof.

By a Notice dated 20 May 1819 the rates were increased. Single letters Two Tari, all other letters under one ounce Three Tari, one ounce and other two ounces Six Tari, two ounces One Scudo, above two ounces Six Tari per ounce or any part thereof. The rates were slightly higher for letters fumigated in the Quarantine Office.

New rates in British currency were introduced on 25 August 1825.⁷

I owe a debt of gratitude to Joseph Schirò for typing this article.

⁵ The currency in Malta was still that operating during the rule of the Order of St John, namely, the scudo was equivalent to 12 Tari, each Tari consisting of 20 Grani. A scudo was generally equivalent to 1s. 8d.

⁶ Michela D'Angelo, *Mercanti inglesi a Malta 1800-1825*, Milan, 1990, 269-270. On Maitland's conflict with the merchants see also Patrick Staines, *Essays on Governing Malta II (1813-1835)*, Malta, 2015, 163-176, but no reference to the postal service was made.

⁷ See R. E. Martin's book (fn. 4 above), loc. cit.

UFFICIO DELLA POSTA

PIAZZA TESORERIA.

TARIFFA

	Tan	Gran
Per ogni Lettera che sarà consegnata alli Messaggieri dei rispettivi Distretti, si pagherà - - - - -	1	—
Per ogni Lettera che sarà mandata dall' Ufficio della Posta si pagherà nella Consegna - - - - -	—	10
Per quelle Lettere indirizzate a Persone abbordo dei Bastimenti, in Campagna, od al Gozo, [<i>le quali si congeneranno Gratis,</i>] si pagherà - - - - -	1	10
Per le Lettere indirizzate per Sicilia, ed altre parti fuori dell' Isola, si pagherà - - - - -	2	—
Per le Lettere provenienti da fuori dell' Isola, si pagherà nella Consegna - - - - -	2	—

Nessuna Lettera sarà ricevuta per Malta, e Gozo, che conterra più di due foglj di carta ; e quelle lettere indirizzate per Sicilia od altre parti fuori di quest' Isole, bisogna che siano d' un semplice foglio.

Valletta, 20. Agosto 1813.

Figure 2: The original printed document fixing the rates of postage on 20 August 1813. Author's collection