



The Royal Philatelic Society London

PERSIA POSTAL HISTORY

BJÖRN SOHRNE FRPSL

Display at the

The Royal Philatelic Society London

27 October 2011



Persia Postal History

Early periods up to the 1930's

This display tells the story of an area of postal history, although huge and important, which is still vastly unexplored with the exception of the postage stamps of the famous first Lion issues. The main reason for this neglect is probably that Persia was never a colony like almost all other non-European countries more than 100 years ago. So collectors did not pay great interest as they normally did to their own country's colonies. Also, as most of us of older generations know, the Persian stamps in our schoolboy albums were not always genuine, so Persian stamps suffered from this as well as the language barrier.

But how wrong we have all been all along. Seriously, almost no other area known to me can in any way be compared with the fascinating and intriguing Postal History of Persia. An area that is still very much a virgin territory and where much research lies ahead for the enthusiasts!

The display shows four different international exhibits, three of which are Postal History and the fourth Postal Stationery. They are all related to Persia and its geopolitical and strategic situation, squeezed between the two super powers, GB (India) and Russia, players of the so called "Great Game"!

The exhibits are:

- Persia postal history (last displayed at INDIPEX 2011. First showed at Stockholmia 1986)
- Russia and Persia postal relations during the 19th & 20th Century (London 2010)
- India and Persia postal relations 1864 to 1930's (last displayed at INDIPEX 2011). Incl. all the Indian Post Offices in Persia
- Persia postal stationery. The Qajar period. (Last exhibited in Rumania 2008)

There is some very interesting and rare material for the connoisseurs and the advanced collectors of each of the above mentioned area. It highlights rates, routes (incl about 25 rare destinations), scarce postal markings, and not least the constitutional crisis, the WWI period and Coup d'Etats that eventually led to the establishment of a new dynasty, the Pahlavi.

Of particular interest is the Great War, WWI, period incl the period from the Persian revolution all the way until the end of the Qajar period in 1925, with all its military and civil censors and related marks of the warrior countries (GB and India, Russia, Turkey, Germany, as well as those of the Persian government, opposition groups, rebellions, etc). Persia played a major strategic role in the war theatre because of its geopolitical situation. This particular period is covered by the exhibit "Russia and Persia postal relations across two centuries".

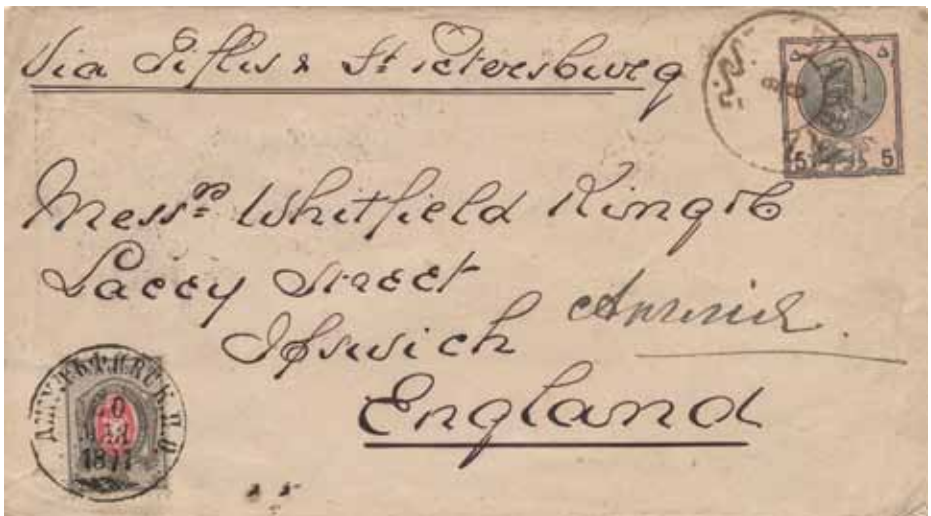
By order of the British, the Indian postal system created Indian post offices all along the coast on both sides of the Persian Gulf. In the case of Persia, the Indian postal services played a significant role in the development of trade and commerce in particular in southern Persia. It started its services in 1864 in Bushire, actually 13 years before a modernized postal system was organized with assistance of Austrian postal managers. The Indian postal services had a great impact on the development of its Persian counterpart's postal services but hard politics made them competitors as well as rivals. See further under the title "Indian and Persian postal relations"

An important aspect of Persia philately is the usage of postal stationery in the form of embossed stamps on envelopes, post cards and wrappers. This is shown in the last display.

Shown are also more than 10 different Persian stamps used on covers or other postal documents, each being the only example recorded on commercial mail.

Pre-UPU Combination mail 1877

Combination covers can only be found with the famous "Lion"-issues and with this 5-chahi envelope



Before Persia joined the UPU (GPU), mail to foreign destinations also had to have Russian stamps to pay for the transit to Europe. The Persian stamps were only valid to the border

Registered cover to USA in 1879



ORDOU. The Shah's Camp



LAR Rebellion in 1909



Air Mail 1922

Teheran overland to Bagdad. From Bagdad to Cairo by air



Russia and Persia postal relations during the 19th and the 20th Century

An uneasy relationship until the late 1920's

Russian postal relations with Persia started in the 1850s/60s when a Russian consular Post Office was opened to provide Russian and other companies in Persia with efficient postal communications with Russia. This office closed in 1877 when Persia joined GPU (UPU) and a Russian/Persian postal agreement was signed. This and other postal relations are shown here in the first display titled Persia Postal History. Russia played a significant role as a transit country for mails originating from Persia.. A number of exchange post offices were established between 1878 and 1903 along the border. On the other hand Russian presence in the north hampered a normal development of Persia postal services.

Interestingly enough, some of the Russian shipping companies operating at ports on the Caspian Sea handled postal services at least from the 19th century and between 1912 and 1918 used postmarks on mail to/from Russia and Persian ports.

This display covers mainly the period from 1907 leading up to WWI, WWI, and the period immediately after till about 1930. This period of instability forced Russia to invade North Western Persia (Azarbadjan) in 1911. However, special Russian Missions were set up already as a result of the Persian revolution after 1907 and the sacking of the very conservative Ali Mohammed Shah supported by Russia.

At the outbreak of the Great War (WWI) in 1914, Germany aimed at reaching India, the Jewel of the Empire, with the hope of forcing Great Britain to divert troops from the European war fronts to India. For Germany, Persia became a cornerstone of this policy. It started with Turkish military presence into western Persia, and with German assistance stirring up trouble among anti-government tribes and providing financial and military support to opposition groups called the "Democrats." As a result Persia became a crucial battlefield. The Entente troops from GB and Russia were fighting the Central Powers' troops and anti-government tribal groups. The Young Turks who took over the power of Turkey after the fall of the Ottoman empire at the end of the WWI continued fighting to reconquer old Ottoman territories in the Trans-Caucasus also with the aim of getting a hold of the world's largest oil resources in Baku.

This historic background is essential because the magnitude of the developments was such that it greatly affected the postal services. Due to the turbulent years under examination the postal history from early 1900s to late 1920s in Persia and Trans-Caucasus is very intricate. Few countries have seen so many different political and military movements from different superpowers in such a short period as Persia did between 1914 and 1927.

Russian Consular Postal Service 1860's - 1877

Pre-UPU (GPU) post office



Entire letter sent to Tiflis, Georgia in 1867. Russian 10 kopek stamp used for foreign rate. Probably cancelled at Russian Julfa border station. Three letters known

Russian State Post Office at Gumbet-i-Kabuz. 1914



1904 Parcel Postal Agreement. Enzeli - Baku Exchange P O



Russian Consular Post Office at Tabriz 1916 to Switzerland



NORPERFORCE British policing force. With censor 1919
Replaced Russian troops due to Bolshevik revolution. Insured letter



India and Persia postal relations 1864 to 1923

The increasing geo-political and mercantile value of the Persian Gulf and its peripheral areas became more apparent with the creation of a regular line of mail steamers between Bombay, the Mekran coast and the main ports in the Gulf in 1862. Another reason was also to police the piracy activities, which had been rather bothersome for a long time. These together led to the establishment of regular post offices in the Gulf in Bushire, Persia, and Muscat, both in 1864..

It was followed by Linga and Bandar Abbas in 1867, Jask in 1880 and Mohammerah 1892. The early post offices opened under the Bombay Postal Circle. In 1869 they were transferred to the Sind jurisdiction (Karachi) and in 1879 they all reverted to Bombay.

Initially, the local governors in Persia littoral were in favor of the IPOs because they promoted trade. Persia introduced a modernized postal system in 1875. All Indian post offices used postage stamps of East India and India, therefore the only way to distinguish one office from the other is by the postmarks. India inland rates applied.

Only in 1877 did Persia join GPU (UPU). In the meantime, from 1862 – 1877 India operated postal services from the three ports of Bushire, Bandar-Abbas and Linga connecting them with Bombay and Karachi. Probably private arrangements were made to forward incoming mail to the interior of Persia when necessary. Gradually Persia established its own POs along the coast as gleaned from 1877 postal agreement with India for exchange of mail.

In total, India opened 13 regular post offices in Persia including six that were both regular and exchange post offices. Those in Eastern Persia were strictly exchange offices. The Indian postal system had a great impact on the development of the Persian postal system -- some positive and others negative. Cooperation and rivalry were the basic ingredients of the rapport between the two postal administrations.

During the Great War three POs were opened as Field POs in Arabestan (Kuzestan) by the British troops stationed there for the protection of the oil wells. In 1920 the Mesopotamian military authorities handed over those post offices including Mohammerah to the Mesopotamian civil administration that continued to administer them until their closure in 1923.

All Indian regular and exchange post offices closed on 30 March 1923 as a result of the 1922 agreement in Bushire with the exception of Duzdab and Mirjawa exchange post offices in eastern Persia which continued to function on Iranian soil for a few more years.

Bushire INSUFFICIENT + 1 AN(NA). Postage due 1873

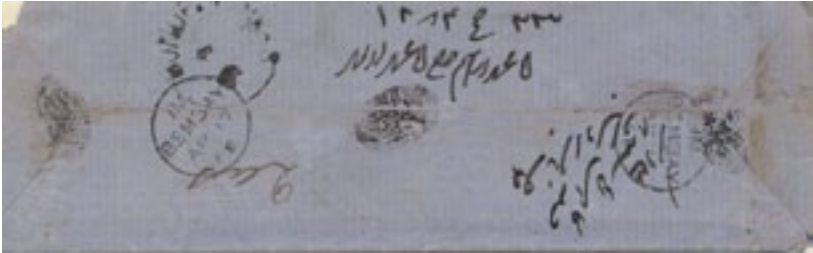


Endorsed via Bombay to Calcutta
1 1/2 annas + 1 ANNA = postage due

Map of the Gulf Indian Post Offices



Bandar Abass Experimental period 1868



No franking. Sent to Bombay. Only the date indicates the experimental period before the opening as a regular post office

Bushire “Service” cover to Bombay 1870

Duplex Bushire + “308”



**Cover from Basrah via MOHAMMERAH to Bushire in 1892,
the year of opening**



**Overprint BAHRAIN on Indian stamps caused Persian outcry 1933
Postage due demanded by Persian authorities**



Postal Stationery. The Qajar period

Postal stationery takes various formats: a stamped envelope, letter sheet, postal card, letter card, aerogram or wrapper, with an imprinted stamp or inscription indicating that a specific rate of postage or related service has been prepaid.

The first postal stationery postcard was prepared by Mr. Stahl, the postal director of Azerbaijan province in northwestern Persia on his own initiative in early 1878. Some European and other countries, which had already introduced post cards, influenced him. The rate set by the General Postal Union (UPU) was at least 40% of that of a normal letter 1st weight class. Stahl settled for 2 ½ chahis.

Initially Stahl, without approval from higher authorities, used Russian formula cards purchased from Tiflis. As there were no ½ ch stamps printed, Stahl decided to use a 2 ch stamp and a 1 ch stamp and cut the latter into half, diagonally.

After few months Stahl created a new design reading “Carte-Correspondance de PERSANA” using the same rate, 2ch + 1ch cut in half. He also cut the 5ch stamp into different shaped halves. A hand stamp in blue or red reading 2½ was equally introduced and put on top of the stamps, probably as a security measure.

A year later, in 1878, the Persian postal authorities finally adopted Mr. Stahl’s idea officially. When the first official post card was ordered from Austria, the nominal value was 2 ½ chahi!

Of special interest are the Official post cards of the same design, PERSANA-design, but without adhesives. Instead they had “Service” overprinted. These were delivered free of charge and had different colors. They are very scarce used.

Various designs of post cards were issued and/or surcharged till the end of the Qajar period.

In 1876, an order for a 5ch postal envelope was given to the Austrian Government Printing Office. The design was Nasr-ed Din Shah, with the Lion and the Sun emblem. The 5ch envelope never became popular and finally the Postal authorities allowed the imprinted stamp to be cut out and sold as regular postage stamps. Seen used from 1877 i.e. before Persia joined the GPU. Thus for foreign destinations a Russian postage stamp of 8 kopek had to be added as Persian stamps were only valid within Persia.

A new design based on the famous Lion issue, called the 1888 Coat of Arms, printed in Paris, was issued for the 6 and 12 chahis values. Here also the stamps were allowed to be cut out and used as adhesives. A new Coat of Arms design was issued in 1894 and 1897 with different values.

Between 1899 and 1902 various control marks were introduced to control the farmers revenues. They were used on all three types of postal stationery, postal cards, envelopes and wrappers.

Wrappers used as banderols for newspapers and printed matters were introduced in 1888. Commercially used Persian wrappers are very scarce and Registered examples are very rare, in particular if found with complete newspapers intact.

This is hitherto the most complete Persian postal stationery collection ever put together covering the Qajar period. There are about 20 rare destinations.

5-chahi Envelope with 1899 Control Mark in Violet



1-ch stamp replaced the registration label that was also charged 1 chahi

1-chahi wrapper of 1894 used registered to Hungary



Gilan Movement/ SSRI

Mirza Kuchek Khan



Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran (SSRI) 1921

During three months they issued their own stamps. Three covers known