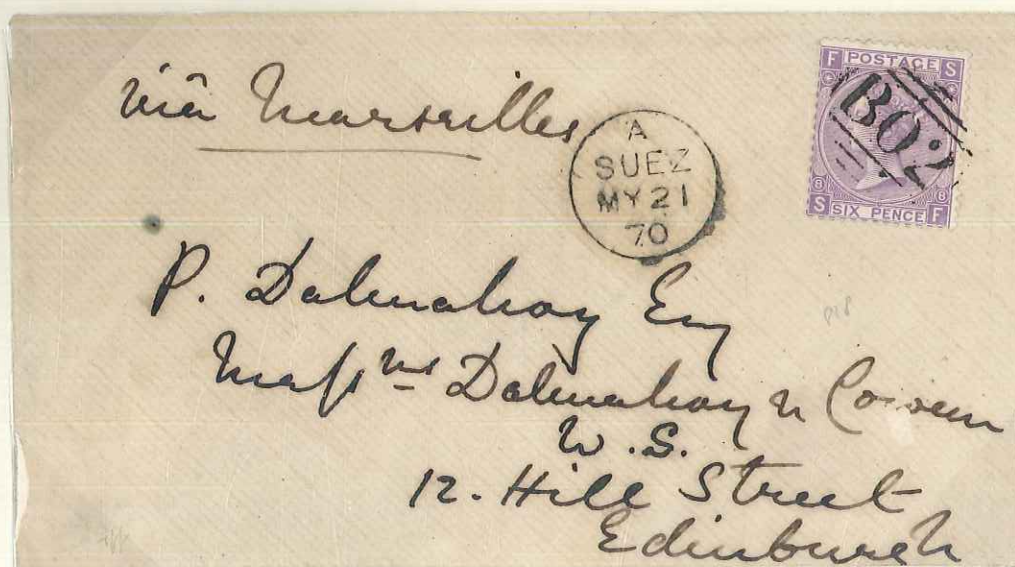


The Suez Canal opened in 1869, but as a result of infighting between the Post Office and P&O (who had invested in the rail links across Egypt) the farcical situation arose whereby British mail did not use the canal until a new treaty was signed between the two feuding parties in July 1874, by which time, as shown later in the exhibit, the use of book post was already in decline. During the late 1860's and early 1870's however, the British continued to be deeply involved in building up the routes to the south, and the ports of Aden (founded as a major coaling station) and Suez (a major port for keeping the British profile high in the face of French interest in the canal) played important roles in this.



'Via Marseille' 11th February 1869, Ludlow to Aden. Franked 6 x 1d red-brown, m/s "7", plus 'INSUFFICIENT POSTAGE, EXC ? OZ, BRITISH SHARE OF FINE : 3' (The 7 could be the deficiency on the single rate letter rate of 1/1d, although book post rates to overseas destinations varied considerably.



'Via Marseille': 21st May 1870, Suez to Edinburgh, 6d lilac cancelled by the B 02 of the British Post Office in Suez.

Further improvements in the trans-Egyptian part of the overland route, in particular further work on the rail link Cairo and Suez, again reduced the transit time between Britain and India,



'Via Marseille': 26th June 1865 – Manchester to Calcutta: 1/- green + 6d lilac + 2d blue paying the (triple) $\frac{3}{4}$ oz rate, plus 1d paying the late fee. London transit 26th June, Calcutta arrival 28th July, total transit 32 days.

The Marseille route was now sufficiently well established to have its own stationary :



'Via Marseille': 20th March 1865 Masulipatam to Edinburgh, 4 annas grey-black + 2 annas orange + 9 pies, Hyderabad transit 23rd March, Bombay transit 26th March, Edinburgh arrival 22nd April, total transit 31 days.

By the 1860s and 1870s the speed of mail going through Marseille and joining the expanding and frequent packet routes had cut the transit time for correspondence with North Africa to barely a week.



'Via Marseille': 29th September 1864, Birmingham to Mostaganem, Algeria. London transit 30th September, thence via Calais, Paris, Lyon and Marseille. Mostaganem arrival 6th October. 2 x 1858 2d blue paying 1/4oz rate (Algeria were treated as part of Metropolitan France for rate purposes)

Following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, Tunisia was re-established as a province of the Ottoman empire in 1871, and remained thus until the invasion and occupation by France in 1881. Postal rates in this period are fraught with confusion..the single rate to most Ottoman destinations via Marseille was 6d, but France would have been reluctant to challenge anything which implied Tunisia was anything other than under French influence.



'Via Marseille' 'per French packet': 11th December 1876, London via Paris, Lyon and Marseille to Tunis, franked 1876 4d vermilion. Single rate to France rather than the 6d required to Ottoman Empire. 7 (or 15?) decimes charge raised in Tunis?

IA MARSEILLE': BRITISH MEDITERRANEAN POST OFFICES: ALEXANDRIA

The French opened a post office in Alexandria in 1830, while the British Post Office in Alexandria dates back to 1859. Alexandria was a prime example of reciprocal use of packet lines to and from Marseilles.



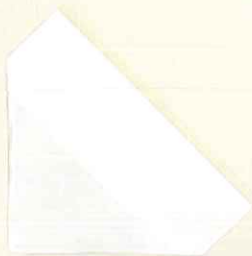
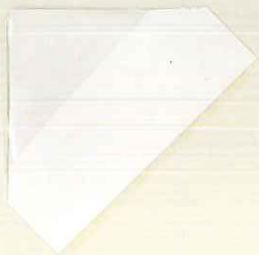
'Bateau francais' (French packet) via Marseille:
21st August 1869,
Alexandria to London,
2 x 6d lilac cancelled B 01
of British Post Office
Alexandria, London arrival
30th August 1869

No arrangements were made for the processing and cancellation of each other's mail but exceptions did occur – this pair cancelled by the grand chiffre **GC 5080** of the French Post Office and bearing the French Post Office handstamp:



1864 1d
rose-
red,
1869 2d
blue

A French example of the use of a British packet from Marseille:



'Steamer anglais' (British packet) from Marseille: 10th February 1858, Marseille to Alexandria. 10c yellow + 40c orange cancelled by the petite chiffre **PC 1896** of Marseilles. Alexandria arrival 18th February 1858

VIA MARSEILLE: SUEZ AND BEYOND

AUSTRALASIA

The route to Australasia via Marseille and the Mediteranean, although more expensive than the Long Sea Route the Cape, and that via Panama, was clearly faster , and was soon rivalling the early times to India;



Overland 'Via Marseille' 26th July 1867, London to Ross, Tasmania , franked 4d red and 6d lilac paying the 10d single ½oz rate. Verso: Tasman 'SHIP LETTER INWARD FREE', 12th September, total transit 49 days.



12th September 1857, Alexandria to Amsterdam via Marseille, 20c + 80c Napoleon imperf cancelled PC 3704 of Alexandria, specifically endorsed "British steamer via Marseille", thus handstamped **PAQ.ANGL. MARSEILLE**

'VIA MARSEILLE': 'FOREIGN BUSINESS'

ITALY AND GREECE

British trading partners in the Mediterranean quickly started to use both overland and sea routes via Marseilles. This letter travelled through France to Marseille, thence north-east again to Milan before going south again to Bologna:



'Via Marseille': 7th August 1846, Manchester to Bologna, unpaid, via London, Boulogne, Marseille and Milan (VIA DI UNINGA) charged 31 decimes by the French. Bologna arrival 26th August.

In 1849, going further afield to Greece offered four routes: Packet from Southampton, via France and Austria (Trieste), British packet via Marseilles and Malta (closed mail) or a French packet direct from Marseille. This latter was the most expensive, and going by the example below, perhaps the slowest!



'Via Marseille' 'Paquebot francais' (French packet): 28th July 1849, London via Boulogne and Marseille to Athens. 1/5d paying ¼oz rate via Marseille. Athens arrival 27th August.

MARSEILLE'S DECLINE

The most desirable factor in mail movement is almost always speed. The speed of transmission through France to Marseille, as against the slower route through the Straits of Gibraltar, was one of the major factors which led to the pre-eminence of Marseille as a Mediterranean hub.

Until 1871, the overland route from the north to the Italian states involved crossing the alps, but on 13th September 1871 the 13.7km Mount Cenis Tunnel was opened. This dramatically shortened the time taken to reach Brindisi, from which shipping reached the eastern Mediterranean in general, and Suez in particular, more rapidly. Marseille went into decline.



'Via Brindisi': 11th April 1872, Crieff to Toondla, India. 1/- green paying the single ½ oz rate via Brindisi, verso: Arrival Toondla, 3rd May: total transit time 23 days

With the increase in speed and volume of Transatlantic mail, a new option opened up for mail to the antipodes which was cheaper than the route via Marseille. The route via Brindisi and that via San Francisco became the norm. The Marseille route to Australia and New Zealand was withdrawn in October 1870. Overall, Marseille's role had, by the 1880s, been substantially reduced.



"Via San Francisco" 9th August 1883, Perth to Timaru, New Zealand, 6d on 6d lilac paying the single ¼ oz rate via San Francisco. Timaru arrival 18th October 1882.

RECIPROCAL PACKET USAGE

The Mediterranean co-operation already discussed was implicit the Anglo-French conventions, and the mutual assistance which came with this naturally extended to the world-wide shipping routes operated by both countries. The following is a short look at a very wide subject, but it to give some examples to show how and where this wider reciprocity extended – often on similar or identical routes.

FRANCE TO MEXICO BY BRITISH PACKET:

31st July 1857, Paris to
Vera Cruz, Mexico. Paris
lozenges cancelling 2x
1853 80c deep carmine.

Recto: Paris receiver cds
31st July, London transit
PAID 1st August. Verso:
Paris to Calais rail cds
31st July

Annotated:

"Per steamer
of 2nd August
from Liverpool"

BRITAIN TO MEXICO BY FRENCH PACKET:



17th August 1874,
Manchester to Vera Cruz,
Mexico. Manchester 498
duplex cancelling 1873 1/-
green plate 9

Recto: Calais transit 19th
August, Verso :

LIGNE B PAQ
FR No 1
20th Aug 74



Annotated:

"Per French Packet"

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