



ARAB KINGDOM

by Ian McQueen



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Lawrence of Arabia, in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, refers to the Liberation of Damascus in 1918 in one of the most vivid and exciting passages in a vivid and exciting book. It was the first day of October, a day of action, victory and long awaited freedom, preceding a night which "would see such carnival as the town had not held for six hundred years". A few pages later, now in calmer mood, Lawrence proclaims the political objective: "Our aim was an Arab Government, with foundations large and native enough to employ the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice of the rebellion, translated into terms of peace. We had to save some of the old prophetic personality upon a superstructure to carry that ninety per cent of the population who had been too solid to rebel, and on whose solidity the new State must rest." Faisal at this stage was Arab army commander and acting head of the new independent state. Establishment of efficient communications was just one of the many needs which all required urgent attention at once. The telegraph was restored, but, as Lawrence recorded, "the post could wait a day or two". Two days later Lawrence found Allenby, who "gave his approval to my having impertinently imposed Arab Governments, here (in Damascus) and at Deraa, upon the chaos of victory".

Thus was the state created, though the formal election of Faisal as king of Syria was delayed until 1920. By then, however, the lofty League of Nations principle of self-determination (which the Arabs wanted and had been promised) was being questioned, especially by the French, who favoured the exercise of control by Mandate. And, as we know from both the *Encyclopaedia* and the stamp catalogues, the French had their way, imposing their rule by force of arms, ejecting Faisal (who was later to become king of Iraq instead) and persuading the League to approve the submission of Syria; all a very sad result, and in a sense we are still paying the price of it today. Transjordan, which had been administered by the Arab Government, came under British Mandate in 1920.

So, how should stamp collectors approach the philatelic aspects of the Arab State? They are looking at the period from the liberation of Damascus (1 October 1918) until the French occupation (25 July 1920). Turkish postage stamps and fiscals

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must have been available, but it was the EEF series which was mainly used. These are identifiable by their cancellations, the old Turkish datestamps remaining in use. The Damascus example (Fig.1) is from a cover of 5 February 1919, and there



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was similar usage at other Syrian cities, including Aleppo (Fig.2), this copy being datestamped 11 March 1919. It seems very unlikely that Turkish stamps were used, for a report from Damascus, published in *Stamp Collecting* magazine on 23 August 1919, reveals that postal customers had a choice between buying the EEF or current Egyptian issues, for both were on sale at the same counter.

Contemporary journals also recorded that a cachet was sometimes handstamped on Damascus mail, looking, it was said, rather like a stained glass window! This is the Arab Government marking (Fig.3), which I have copied as well as I can from the reverse of a letter from Damascus to America in February 1919. Grylls, in his article in *The Philatelist*, shows the same marking used similarly during January. He points out that the central portion contains the same characters as were to be used for the 1919-20 seal-type overprints: *The Arab Government*. The cachet itself seems to have originated at the government printing works, and it was generally impressed on mail which passed through the Arab Kingdom civil post office at Damascus in early 1919. In the case of both covers, the postage stamp used for franking the letter was the EEF 1 piastre blue.

During this Arab independence period, so we are told by Tabitha Petran (*Syria*, Ernest Benn, 1972), "a national Arab government exercised authority in internal Syria behind the facade of a military administration". It aimed at establishing a modern state, and its officials were practically all Syrian, who had been trained either in the Ottoman civil service or in the British administration in Egypt. But not everything was peaceful. The European powers, which had cut Syria off from her normal outlets on the Mediterranean, were not unnaturally distrusted. There were some violent demonstrations in

Properly so-called, the Arab *Kingdom* must relate only to the



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دروم نسو اغانی الحوضه سوی حاد المندم
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M A N C H E S T E R

Anglaterra

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period when Faisal was king, but *Kingdom*, for the purposes of the stamp catalogues, covers the whole period of the Arab civil administration in Syria. What is strange is that, if we look at the catalogues, we find that a state which came into existence in 1918 failed to issue a stamp of its own until 1920. Grylls was not prepared to accept this: "It seems quite unlikely," he wrote, "that a period of over twelve months elapsed before the new State put any of its own stamps on sale. In fact, there is evidence that the provisionals on Turkish issues were in use in 1919 although the catalogues give the date as 1920. This provisional issue was made by overprinting many of the stamps of Turkey with an Arab device"; this is the overprint illustrated in the catalogues, and Grylls understood that the seal-type legend, which may be translated as *The Arab Government*, was handstamped on each stamp separately. The catalogue date for this issue is 1920, and Grylls tenders some evidence (persuasive, though not conclusive) that these provisionals on Turkish issues were made and put into use during 1919. Grylls also believed that the triangle surcharges on Turkish fiscals, like the one shown here with the Turkish language portion of a Damascus datestamp (Fig. 4), may have been made in 1919. The catalogue can be rather confusing here, because the 5 paras fiscal, which was overprinted for the Arab Kingdom in several different ways, is illustrated in the Cilicia listing; though of course it is not a Cilicia stamp as such, but a Turkish one, and the Cilicia area at this time was held firmly under the rule of the French military occupation.

The dating aspects of the provisional surcharges are of great interest, if only because most of the Arab Kingdom stamps which have clear datestamps seem to have been used between the French occupation in July 1920 and the formal establishment of the French Mandate which came later. Grylls founds much of his argument upon Arab Kingdom overprints on Turkey which are dated at Damascus "910", which he suggests could be an error for "919" or an unclear impression. However, the Damascus "910" is more likely to have been an inten-

Damascus
R. N° 989



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O. M. F.
Syrie
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PIASTRE



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tional usage for "920" in a Turkish datestamp for which the correct year slug was never provided. See, for instance, a cover to Manchester dated "21-4-910", bearing a pair of the 20 paras *Martyrs Column* with the triangular overprint (Fig.5); April 1919 must be far too early for the use of that issue, but April 1920 is absolutely right for it.

Nevertheless, 1919 is a correct dating for the first overprints; if not on postage stamps, then certainly on postal stationery. A 10 paras Turkish wrapper, overprinted for *The Arab Government* and surcharged 4 m/m (Fig.6) is clearly used from Damascus on "9-12-19". Addressed to Beyrouth, it was backstamped there on 19 December. The earliest cover I have with an unmistakable dated cancel on an Arab Kingdom stamp is from Aleppo on 23 January 1920. The basic stamp is the Turkish one piastre from the G.P.O. *Constantinople* set of 1916, perf.13; and *The Arab Government* overprint has been struck in violet (Fig.7).

Turkish postal markings, not only datestamps but also tax and registration handstamps, continued in use throughout the Arab Kingdom period, and thence for several years into the French occupation and mandate periods as well. Sometimes the registration mark can be found entirely in manuscript. The example shown (Fig.8) was written on a surcharged postal stationery envelope which was used, with additional surcharged adhesive stamps, from Damascus on 9 February 1920. It went to Alexandria and was backstamped there for arrival five days later.

There is also a style of registration etiquette which seems to be of a distinctly *Arab Kingdom* type. It does not conform to the normal Turkish or French patterns and was presumably printed locally in Damascus; this has red printing on white paper, perforated on three sides, and has the serial number handwritten in purple ink (Fig.9). It was used in Damascus in December 1921, long after the French had taken control.

The earliest usage of an Arab Kingdom *definitive* which I have in my small collection is dated 16 May 1920, on an envelope from Aleppo to Cairo which took five days in transit.

These definitive stamps continued in use under the French in the Damascus area until, very much later, they were overprinted and surcharged for the *Occupation Militaire Francaise, Syrie* with new values in *centiemes* or *piastres* (Fig.10). Arab Kingdom postage due labels were similarly treated, though with the addition of the words *Chiffre Taxe*. These surcharges belong appropriately enough to be included in a collection of Arab Kingdom, though they were not issued by the French authorities until 1921. They were kept in use at Damascus until at least December of that year. As with the surcharges on France, they are *fertile* with varieties (as *Yvert* so engagingly expresses it); for instance, the missing stop after 0 on the 25c on 1 millieme brown (Fig.11).

Arab Kingdom usage in the northern areas of Syria, centred upon Aleppo, ceased much sooner, for from September 1920 the French set up a separate administration for that region, and the Arab stamps were quickly replaced by the French

occupation surcharges on *Blanc*, *Semeuse* and *Merson* types. The latest cover I have from Aleppo with Arab Kingdom definitives is dated 18 August 1920. By the November of 1920, and continuing into 1921, the stamps in general use at Aleppo were the O.M.F. issues additionally overprinted with a tiny rosette fleuron in black or red.

Thus, at different times, in different ways, and for different reasons (the unifying cause being the determination of the French, supported by the British and the League, to exercise their own control rather than allow Arab independence) the Arab Kingdom stamps were phased out. It is a period, for both historians and philatelists, that is interesting, short, and sad.

The British philatelic society which specialises in Turkey and the successor states of the former Ottoman Empire is OPAL. Meetings are held at 107 Charterhouse Street, and also at provincial centres in the Bristol, Nottingham and Bournemouth areas. It publishes regular journals and newsletters; and, if I can say so as its president, is a very friendly group of collectors of all standards. It is, perhaps, one of the few forums today in which ordinary folk, Arab and Jew, Turk and Greek, Englishman, Frenchman and Egyptian, can meet in harmony and mutual trust, bonded by their common interest in things philatelic. Those interested in joining, parting with the very modest subscription of £6, and participating in some very enjoyable aspects of study and collecting, should write to Jack Cousins, Flat 2, 2 Blenheim Road, Westbury Park, Bristol, BS6 7JW.

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Revenues of Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey

Just this month, the result of over a year's effort among American Ottoman fiscal collectors has been issued, thanks to herculean efforts of William McDonald, who did most of the work himself, along with Bill Ittel and the collection of Martin Doring. The result is **REVENUES OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND REPUBLIC OF TURKEY** by William T. McDonald, 253 pages of meticulous and detailed cataloging with illustrations. The price is \$ 22.00 postpaid in USA.