

# Stamps of the Suez Canal Company

The French entrepreneur Ferdinand de Lesseps started construction of the Suez Canal in April, 1858 and completed the 101 mile channel in November, 1869. He worked for the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Maritime de Suez or the Universal Suez Ship Canal Company.

The first Suez Canal was built around the 20<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century B.C. by Xerxes I but was only half the length of the current canal. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., the canal closed due to neglect. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Napoleon Bonaparte attempted to rebuild and expand the canal to the Red Sea but the project was dropped because of a miscalculation: the difference in sea level between the Mediterranean and Red seas was too great for the project to succeed. The project lingered for many years because of the lack of enthusiasm of Mohammed Ali of Egypt and British complaints. With the help of Emperor Napoleon III work was started and the canal was finally completed. The Suez Canal Company (SCC) was the canal's primary operator. SCC was owned by the French and the Ottoman Empire. By the mid 1870s, the British government purchased the Egyptian shares and became the largest shareholder. By the Convention of Constantinople of 1888, all countries were guaranteed safe passage through the canal in times of peace and war. Great Britain was the guarantor of the neutrality and complete management was placed in the hands of the Suez Canal Company until 1956 when Abdul Nassar and Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal.

Due to various economic and political events, the Suez Canal Company was forced into operating its own postal system. The SSC carried mail for free from Port Said to the Port of Suez until July 1868 when the company started charging for this service. Knowing the charge for service was about to happen, SCC, in April 1868, ordered a set of four stamps from Paris. The stamps finally arrived in July, 1868 and were

placed into service. The stamps were recognized by the French consulates at the two ports but not by the Egyptian government. The service lasted no more than 40 days at which time the Egyptian Government terminated the Company's authority to issue and use stamps for the purpose of carrying mail through the Suez Canal.

Below is an image of the 4 stamps issued in 1c, 5c, 20c and 40c (centimes) format. I have certified these stamps as genuine because they meet all the criteria listed herein. If these stamps were used, then further expertizing would be required since genuine used Suez Canal stamps command premium prices ranging from \$200-\$800US. Genuine mint issues are valued from \$20-\$150US.



If you are a collector of France and French colonies and possessions, you might want to consider the Suez issues because of French involvement. They were designed and printed in Paris and were issued on joint agreement of France and Egypt. But, the stamps truly are part of Egyptian philately because Egypt reserved the right, with agreement from France, to sanction and control the stamps and the cancellations which occurred at the ports of Port Said, El-Gisir, Ismailia, Serapeum, Chantier VI on the Canal, and the Port of Suez. In philatelic terms, there are no known Canal date stamp cancellations because the date stamps arrived just before the Egyptian government stopped the mail service. Only 21 covers recorded mostly with pen cancellations or the 5129 cancellation grid of French Port Said on Company stamps. (NOTE: do not bid online or pay for a used Suez Canal Company stamp unless it has


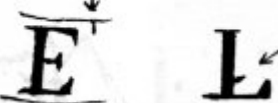






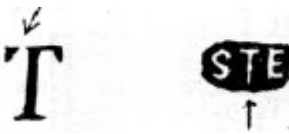

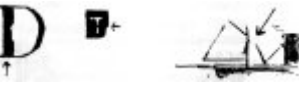

been certified. Most of the used SCC stamps on the market are forgeries.)

Covers that have mixed franking SCC/Egypt or SCC/France usually have the cancellation covering the country stamp and not touching the SCC stamp.

The next image is a set of Suez Canal forgeries. It is not hard to determine forgeries for the 1c, 5c and 40c issues. There are four types of plate expressions for each of these values. If the stamp does not meet one of the four types, then it can be considered a forgery. When it comes to the 20c stamp, there are 120 plate varieties and a meticulous set of parameters is necessary to determine if it is genuine.



While the above stamps look exactly like the genuine ones, each fails to meet the plate type criteria listed below. The chart shows the four types of plates varieties for the 1c, 5c and 40c issues. These varieties are known to be very consistent among the issues. It is also known that very few of the many forgeries matched the plate types but there were some.

TYPE A	TYPE B	TYPE C	TYPE D
***** <u>ONE CENT</u> *****			
			
<p>Dot over the 'S' of "SUEZ". Low dot before the 'C' of "CANAL". Two dots over second 'A' of "CANAL"</p>	<p>Small line after 'E' of "DE". Spike protruding from the 'L' of "CANAL"</p>	<p>Spike protruding into 'D' of "DE". Damaged crossbar in first 'A' of "CANAL"</p>	<p>High dot before the 'C' of "CANAL". Broadened centre line of 'E' in "MARITIME"</p>
***** <u>FIVE CENTS</u> *****			
			
<p>Two lines, in front of and into the 'R' of "MARITIME". Dot on centre line of 'E' of "MARITIME".</p>	<p>Break in line going up to aft-mast on ship.</p>	<p>Dot on downward line of second 'A' and on right-most serif of 'L' in "CANAL". High dot before 'D' of "DE"</p>	<p>Diagonal line from right-most serif of 'N' of "CANAL". Dot in horizontal line under 'P' OF "POSTES".</p>
***** <u>FORTY CENTS</u> *****			
			
<p>Broken crossbar in 'T' OF "MARITIME". Long 'T' in "POSTES".</p>	<p>Dot above 'E' of "SUEZ" and between the lines below the 'E' of "MARITIME". Dot between ropes at front of ship.</p>	<p>Thickened 'D' in "DE". Broken 'T' in "POSTES". broken line up to aft-mast on ship.</p>	<p>Thickened vertical in 'E' of "SUEZ".</p>

The 1c, 5c and 40c genuine stamps shown in the first image of this presentation are as follows: 1c is Type A, 5c is Type D and the 40c is Type D. For the 1c, Type A:



dots on each side  
above the second  
“A”



dot above the “S” but  
touching the “S”

The Robson Lowe Encyclopedia of British Empire Stamps (1949 ed.) lists some of the major areas that determine if a Suez Canal stamp is genuine or a forgery:

1. Area between “DE SUEZ” and “POSTES” has several oblique (slanted) lines crossing the vertical lines.
2. Smokestack funnel should be slanted toward the rear (stern) of the ship. The funnel is often solid in color but shaded with vertical line(s) on the front (aft) side of the funnel. There should be a vertical band slightly below the top of the stack. This band is more visible on the aft portion of the funnel.
3. No passenger should be shown on the deck to the rear of the funnel.
4. Only one passenger should be shown at the bow of the ship.
5. Both flags are single-pointed and, for the most part are in outline format and not solid.
6. Clouds are light, very light or can be absent when printed with worn plates.

The French author Jean Boulard (L'OP 61, Jan. 1948) not only lists the requirement for oblique lines between "DE SUEZ" and "POSTES" but that the last "S" of "POSTES" will most likely have its top flattened and slanted downward from left to right.

There are other tests that can be applied to all four issues to help determine if the stamp is genuine.

1. On the ship there is only one passenger in the bow, two between the fore and main mast, and one behind the main



mast.

2. If there is a passenger near the funnel the stamp is a forgery.
3. Just to the right of the point where the lines of rigging join the rail behind the funnel, there is a spot of color. The extreme stern of the ship also contains two spots of color. Do not confuse these spots for passengers. (see image in Item 1 above.)
4. The appendage on each side of the upper circles containing the value of the stamp should have either a dot or dash in the circle of the appendage if the stamp is 20c.
5. Be skeptical of heavy clouds in the sky.
6. The smoke from the funnel never touches the left frame line and generally never goes past the stern of the ship.
7. Directly above the floral appendages attached to the lower circle of value are two comma-shaped ornaments where the one on the left is un-shaded and larger than the one on the right.

The gum on mint issues is almost always cracked and varies in shade. The forged stamps have smooth white gum. On the so-called “Reprint Forgeries” the gum is always white instead of yellow. These reprints were made from the genuine stone used to print the 40c stamp and new values were inserted. If you have a 1c or 5c stamp with the plate characteristics of the genuine 40c, then you have forgeries. Again, all these forgeries will have white non-cracked gum.

Do not depend on the color of the stamp when determining its genuine nature. The 1c is black to pale gray; 5c from yellowish-green to pale green; 20c from deep indigo to pale dull blue; and 40c from carmine to dull vermilion (the French version of vermilion.)

To spot one of the Fournier forgeries, simply look for a better designed stamp image and incorrect ornaments below the sun spots within the inner ring surrounding the ship on each side.

The most common value, the 20 centime was the default value for a letter traveling through the Canal. The original plates were made of stone for the 20c. Then, blocks of 4 were modified for each of the other values. The Reprint Forgeries, since there were no official reprints, came from the “borrowed” 40c stone block.