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Kuwait Paquebot Mail Service¹

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SusanaEngland, *Le Paquebot*²

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¹ An abridged version of this article was published in: *Arabian Gulf Postal History Quarterly*, No. 5, Autumn 2001.

² A romantic spirit, England utilizes her rich eye for color and her love of mementos from times past to evoke the nostalgia of travel in each of her collage paintings. Currently, however, England devotes her time to designing hand made greeting cards from her studio in Oakland, California. See: <http://www.michaels.com/art/artprints/artistbio?artistid=5241> .

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This contribution attempts to shed some light on the 'Paquetbot' mail service in Kuwait. This area of postal history did not receive the proper recognition it actually merits. Unfortunately, this remark is not exclusive to Kuwait; it is also true for other Arabian Gulf States.

Literally, 'Paquebot' is a French term derived from 'packet boat'. Philatelically, it refers to a mail boat. Both the term and service have been adopted and recognized by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) to denote loose letters collected on board merchant ships in most major seaports and subsequently taken ashore to be deposited in a port post office for inward transmission (Paquepot mail is usually handed to an officer of the ship, usually the purser. He is then responsible for passing such mail to a shore-based post office).³

It was in 1891 that the UPU decreed that mail posted on the high seas might be prepaid "by means of the postage stamps and according to the tariff of the country to which the vessel belongs, or by which it maintained". If the mailing took place in territorial waters or in port, then the stamps and tariff of the territory would apply. In 1894, the UPU issued a supplementary regulation to the effect that letters so treated should, in addition to the date stamp of the receiving office, be endorsed with the word 'Paquebot', whether as a hand stamp or in manuscript. Thus, it is a practice that letters originating on board ship at sea and to be posted at the next port of call may bear stamps of either the country where the ship is registered or the country of the last port of call. Such stamps are to be cancelled either by a date stamp incorporating the word 'PAQUEBOT', or by the word 'PAQUEBOT' with the local date stamp struck alongside. The purpose of the Paquetbot endorsement is twofold; to justify a cancellation that is foreign to the postage stamp used, and to explain the delay between the writing of a letter and its subsequent entry into the postal system.⁴

³ Roger Hosking, Ship to Shore, *Stamp Magazine*, March 2002, P.71.

⁴ Roger Hosking, 'Ship to Shore', *Stamp Magazine*, March 2002, p.68.

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With regard to the function of this service in Kuwait, the little available information covers the period from 1948 to 1967 only, alas. It is presumed that paquebot letters mainly originated from crew of oil tankers calling at *Mina Al-Ahmadi* port.

On board ship, and prior to arrival at a port, mail was collected by the chief steward a few hours before arrival, and he would sort out the postage required for sending to the UK. On arrival and after clearance from the authorities, the Shipping Agent visited the ship to take care of whatever business was required. On leaving, he would take the mail. In the case of British oil tankers, crewmembers were charged the equivalent amount in pounds sterling (or whatever the local currency is according to ship's nationality), and that amount was deducted from their pay. Crewmembers' mail was franked with Kuwait stamps (a few years later when franking machines were introduced stamps were no longer used). Loading was fast, ships were turned around in 24 hours, which means crewmembers had no shore leave, they were not permitted to go onshore with the exception for Medical or Dental treatment (even then escorted to the Doctor or Dentist and delivered back to the ship). It was the late sixties before even any staff were allowed to crew change in Kuwait. This procedure was used in many countries in the Gulf region.⁵

Letters would initially be handed in to the post office either at *Mina Al-Ahmadi* (1953-1961)⁶ or at *Ahmadi* city (1 May 1950 onwards).⁷ However, it is not known where the 'PAQUEBOT' cancellation was applied. It appears that the normal

⁵ David C Richmond, Larry Crowley and Gordon Gill ('S.S. Zaphon' oil tanker crewmembers), personal communication, 12 August 2005.

⁶ *Mina al Ahmadi*, just north of *Shuaiba*, is Kuwait's main port for the export of crude oil.

⁷ Oil was first discovered in Kuwait in 1938 but oil exports only started in 1946. As oil exports increased Ahmadi, named after the then ruler of Kuwait, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jabir, was created as township near the oil fields for Oil Company personnel.

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practice was to frank those letters at the rate that would apply to a letter sent in the opposite direction (*eg* from Kuwait to the UK at the UK to Kuwait rate).⁸

Of note is the following:


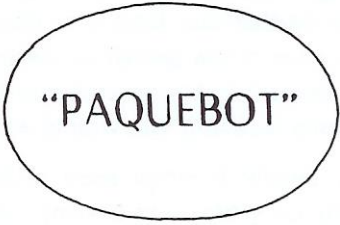


1. Kuwait paquebot mail is usually identified from the use of foreign stamps. The ‘PAQUEBOT’ cancellation was not always applied.
2. A common practice with regard to Kuwait paquebot mail was that the ‘PAQUEBOT’ cancellation was often wrongly applied on the stamp, rather than alongside it.

As per the types of paquebot cancellations used in Kuwait, Hosking’s work seems to be the authoritative and most comprehensive title on this subject.⁹ According to Hosking, four types of paquebot cancellations have been used in Kuwait:

⁸ Neil Donaldson, personal communication, 11 May 2001.

⁹ Roger Hosking, *Paquebot Cancellations of the World*, Cavendish, London. 3rd edition, 2000.

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Type	Date	Scarcity Rating*	Scan
Hosking 2989	1952-56	C	
Hosking 2990 (Dimensions: 27)	1952-79	B	
Hosking 2991 (no serifs)	1965	C	
Hosking 2992 (Dimensions: 28)	1964-89	B	

* legend - Scarcity scale keys:

AA = very common;

A = common;

B = less common;

C = reasonably scarce;

D = rare;

DD = very rare.

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However, it should not be deduced from the above that all paquebot mail originating from Kuwait represented a proper usage of this service. Indeed, the service could not be investigated without raising the question of covers philatelically ‘manufactured’ by collectors. On this, one could not do better than quote Hosking here in his passage about the philatelic abuse of the paquebot system:

“This process was begun in the inter-war period by a small number of British collectors, some of whose output is now well appreciated. At the same period much larger operations were afoot in the USA, including some on a commercial scale and using specially-printed envelopes. Such measures did not cross the Atlantic, and even up to the 1960s it was still a relatively simple matter to find non-philatelic paquebot covers. Since then, however, the production of ‘made-to-order’ covers has proliferated, and commercial items are mainly confined to aerogrammes from the crew of tankers and container ships and [tourists] ... It’s a moot point how long the paquebot system is likely to survive, given that it has come a long way from being a traveller’s friend to a collector’s toy”.¹⁰

Interestingly enough, out of the four Kuwaiti paquebot cancellations that were listed by Hosking, only two were listed in the Al-Shakar book, the latest work on Kuwait postal history.¹¹ This book seems to overlook the other two. The two cancellations it listed are type KBC 08,¹² and type KLC 34.¹³ Those being Hosking types 2990 and 2992 respectively.

I do not know the reason behind the unlisting the other two paquebot cancellations, but my theory is that the authors might simply have not known about their existence (This is quite understandable and does not underrate the huge effort that was put into this respectful work, especially since according to Hosking, the missing two are ‘C’ rated, *ie.* reasonably scarce).

¹⁰ Roger Hosking, Ship to Shore, *Stamp Magazine*, March 2002, P.69.

¹¹ Salam and Saleem Al-Shakar, *Kuwait Postal Cancellations 1915-2000 and Stamps Designs after the Liberation of Kuwait*, Manama, 2000.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 52.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 77.

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Information about this paquebot service as carried out in Kuwait is quite unavailable; postal history titles do not seem to address it at all.

Main questions are:

1. in which post office(s) were these paquebot letters deposited and cancelled with the 'PAQUEBOT' cancellation?
2. What were the postal rates applicable for paquebot letters?
3. How were these rates decided when foreign stamps were used?
4. I have seen examples of covers with mixed franking, *ie* where foreign stamps were affixed along side Kuwaiti stamps. Was this a permissible practice? under what conditions was this practice followed?
5. According to Hosking, the latest use of a paquebot cancellation was recorded in Kuwait in 1989, why did this service stop?
6. What alternatives were introduced to substitute the paquebot service?

Feedback is encouraged.

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The Ides of June, 2001

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5/8/1958 - Paquetbot

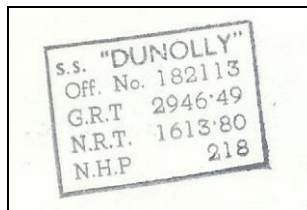
DATE 19/8/1959
LOCATION Own collection
REIGN Abdulla Al-Salim
DSCRPTN Paquetbot cover sent from Kuwait to USA, posted on board the "S.S. DUNOLLY" (a USA ship?), franked with Sudan 3PT camel rider black & blue, tied by a "KUWAIT*5 AU 58" killer cancellation. With two strikes of Ship's square cachet applied on face. Reverse bears a number handstamp. A fine example of paquebot mail.

For more information about Kuwait's paquebot mail system, see:
Mashaal A. Alhajeri, 'Kuwait Paquebot Mail', *Arabian Gulf Postal History Quarterly*, no. 5 (Autumn 2001), 21-22.

FRANKING Sudan 3PT camel rider black & blue
RATE
ROUTE Kuwait > USA
CANCELLER "KUWAIT*5 AU 58" killer cancellation



CACHET Ship's square cachet



CENSORSHIP
LABELS
CONDITION V. good
RARITY Rare.
NOTES (1) Paquetbot;
(2) Sea mail;
(3) Postal autonomy.
ATTCHMNT

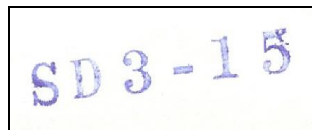
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SCAN 1



SCAN 2



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19/8/1959 - Paquetbot

DATE

19/8/1959

LOCATION

Own collection

REIGN

Abdulla Al-Salim

DSCRPTN

Paquetbot cover sent from on board the "M.S. Bintang" (Netherlands), franked with 5x 5 cent Netherlands stamps, tied by two fine strikes of the bilingual "KUWAIT * 19 AU 59" double ring cds. Ship's circle cachet applied on front. A fine example of paquetbot mail.

For more information about Kuwait's paquetbot mail system, see:
Mashaël A. Alhajeri, 'Kuwait Paquetbot Mail', *Arabian Gulf Postal History Quarterly*, no. 5 (Autumn 2001), 21-22.

5x 5 cent Netherlands stamps.

FRANKING

RATE

ROUTE

Kuwait > Milwaukee (USA)

CANCELLER

Bilingual "KUWAIT * 19 AU 59" double ring cds.

CACHET

Ship's circle cachet.

CENSORSHIP

LABELS

CONDITION

V. good

RARITY

Rare.

NOTES

- (1) Paquetbot;
- (2) Sea mail;
- (3) Postal autonomy.

SCAN 1



SCAN 2

