

Early Manuscript Delivery Charges

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Before the introduction in Malta of handstamped delivery charge marks on April 6th, 1816, the amount due for postage was indicated in long-hand. Most mail from abroad had a digit, usually large, handwritten on the front, which corresponded to the charge due.

The present note does not deal with those letters which only show numbers; these are relatively common and have been recorded. I propose to illustrate some much scarcer examples in which the charge is fully written in longhand, not in numbers.

As far as I am able to ascertain, these types of charges have not been recorded before. Information about them is scanty. Who wrote out the charges? The sender, the carrier vessel, the postal authorities or the addressee?

I would exclude the sender. The handwriting is always different from that of the writer of the letter. Independently of the language used in the letter, the handwritten charge seems to be always expressed in Italian. For the same reason, the addressee is excluded.

This leaves the carrier vessel or the postal authorities as the likely authors.

To give some idea of the cost of postage, I have illustrated each letter with coins equivalent in value to the charge levied from the addressee for delivery. The currency of the Knights of Malta, Spanish-American, Sicilian coins and those of the Italian states continued to be used extensively in Malta up to 1886, although in 1855 sterling was declared to be the sole legal tender in Malta.

Figure 1. A letter from Ancona, Italy, to Malta, dated May 11, 1813 which reached Malta on the 30th.

This letter bears the indication "Condannata Collonati Due di Spagna" (Taxed to pay two spanish "Collonati"). Spanish and South American Dollars, more accurately eight Escudos, were popularly referred to as "Colonnati", from the two columns supporting the coat of arms of the Kings of Spain.



Condannata a scudi due di Spagna

Fig. 1

Figure 2. A letter from Vienna written in English on various dates (last date October 26, 1813) received in Malta on January 23, 1814. This letter bears the indication "Condannata a scudi due per la pronta consegna" (Taxed at pay two scudi for speedy delivery). It is illustrated with the two scudi coin issued by Grand Master De Rohan in 1796.

The writer, John Lowe, gives news of the great battle fought in Leipzig a few days before, on the 16–19 October, 1813, between Napoleon and the Coalition armies led by Blucher and Bernadotte. Known as the Battle of the Giants, it was the salient event in which the French Army suffered a mortal blow. "Bonaparte" we find in the interesting letter, "is not retreating but flying. We are not without hope of his return to France being prevented. This capital (Vienna) was most brilliantly illuminated last night in consequence of news."



Condannata a scudi due per la pronta consegna

Fig. 2

Figure 3. A letter in English from Vienna dated October 18, 1813, received in Malta on January 21, 1814.

This letter bears the indication: "Condannata un scudo" (Taxed to pay one scudo). It is here illustrated with a silver one scudo coin issued in 1776 by Grand Master De Rohan.

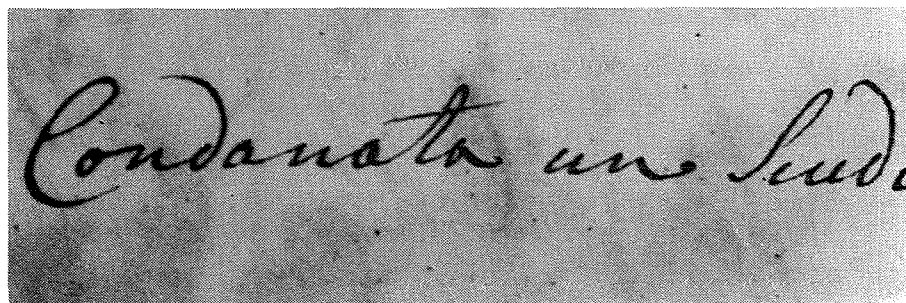
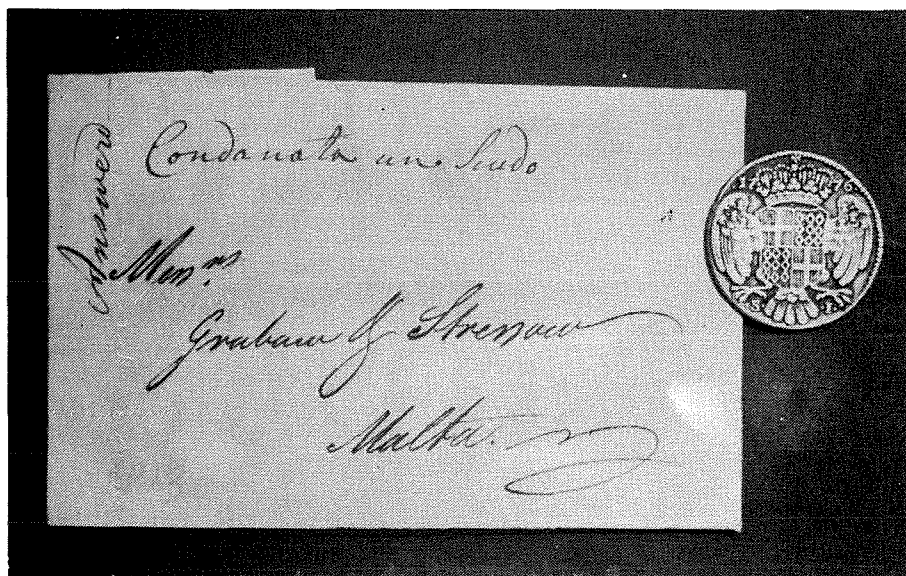


Fig. 3

Figure 4. A letter from Marseille written in French to an English merchant in Malta on May 23, 1825.

This letter carries the indication "p. consegna li sarà pagato scudo uno di Malta" (for delivery, one Maltese scudo will be paid to you.) The letter is illustrated by a different one scudo coin issued in 1776 by Grand Master De Rohan.

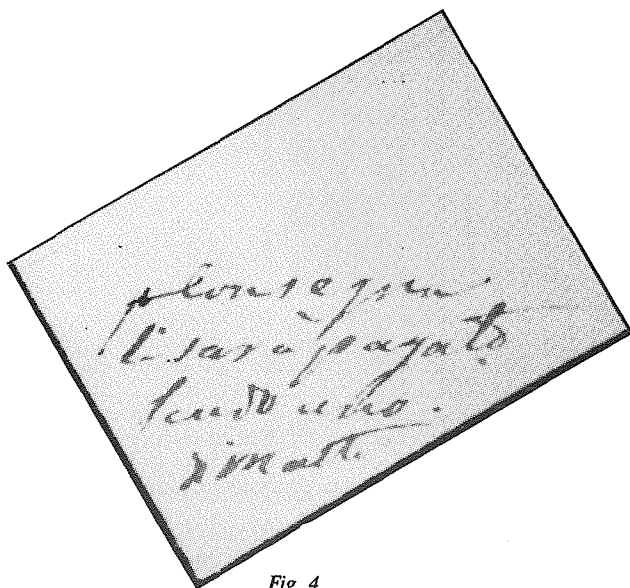
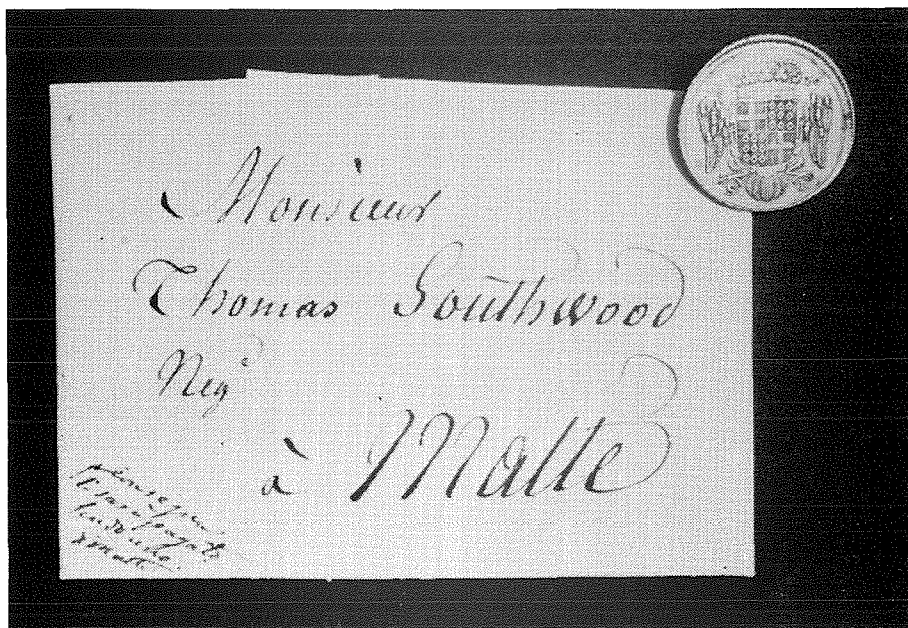


Fig. 4

Figure 5. A letter from Marseille written in Italian on June 21, 1830 and received in Malta on July 16.

This letter bears the composite indication "Tari 25 - £5 pagati in Livorno". It is illustrated by three Sicilian silver coins - two Tari coins and one 1 Tari coin, to a total of 25 Tari. To it is added one Five Lire silver coin from one of the Italian States.



Fig. 5

This letter has a most interesting P.S. which I am translating as it refers to a minor historical episode about which nothing is known: "For the sake of the natinal honour of 'Malta I am to tell you that among the crew of the French Brigs of war that were heading for Traverso (?) on the African Coast, there was a Maltese sailor who had embarked at Tron (Lyons?). This Maltese sailor, on his own, saved the crew of the two Brigs from the fury of the Beduins who wanted to kill them at all costs. the Maltese swore for three times to the Beduins that the crew was English, which the Beduins made the Maltese swear for three times, placing their pistols and daggers on his chest, and he with firmness swore that they were English (judei? jews?).

"The Maltese led the crews and the officers to Algiers where they are well treated by the Dey. The officer who made the report to the Minister warmly proposed that this Maltese be recommended to the King of France to obtain the recompense that his brave conduct deserves".