

# TIME IN CODE LETTER FORM

by

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PART II

## THE VILLAGE POSTMARKS

The circular date handstamps employed at the larger Branches, opened after 1885, and also at the smaller Postal Agencies, usually located at the corresponding Village Police Stations from where they derive their name as from 1900, bear either time slugs in the form of code letters, "AM." or "PM", or "AM" only. The fact that some Agencies use code letters whilst others use "AM" and "PM" proves that the former were simply used to indicate the time of post. It is not likely that the code letters had been used to indicate origin of the mail or any thing similar.

Handstamps with "AM" only are: Attard, Caccia-Gozo, Chirchop, Crendi, Dingli, Garbo-Gozo, Gargur, Ghain-Sielem-Gozo, Gudia, Luca, Micabbiba, Naxaro, Safi, Sannat-Gozo.

Those with "AM" and "PM" are: Asciak, Balzan, Curmi, Marsa, Misida, Musta, Nadur-Gozo, Paula, Siggieui, Tarxien, Xeuchia-Gozo, Zabbar, Zebbug, Zeitun, and Zurricco.

Datestamp errors and abnormalities exist and the Malta Study Circle Paper No. 25 — Malta Village Postmarks, Pages 31-35, lists considerable errors and their period of use, missing time slugs and other abnormalities which make the study of the Village Postmarks so interesting.

Larger branches and more important Postal Agencies used code letters instead of "AM" or "PM". Such a practice explains that mail needed to be cancelled more often.

Code letters "A", "B", "C" were used at the following Postal Agencies:

- at Birchircara, first as Branch Post Office, between 1st April 1898 and 30th April 1899 and then at the Postal Agency at the old Police Station 19, St. Rocque Street;
- at the Casal Lia Postal Agency at 45, Bakery Street, Lija (The fact that the Maltese nobility flocked to their summer residences and villas in Lija and Balzan, explains why more than two times of cancelling the mail was necessary;
- at the Hamrun Postal Agency. At Hamrun, the population in 1901, exceeded 10,000.
- at Rabato, Gozo, between 1885 and 1887 before it was changed to Victoria.



At Migiarrò, Gozo, "A" and "B" were used between the years 1885 and 1900. The code letter "A" which cancelled mail in the morning appears twice as often as "B", which was used in the afternoon. As a proof of this is an incoming U.P.U. Post Card to Migiarrò shown on the Malta Study Paper No. 11, Page 10, with Malta B/MY 22/93 (at that time "B" was a morning cancel at the G.P.O., Central Office) and Migiarrò, Gozo, B/MY 22/93 which was obviously an afternoon cancel.

Melleiha opened as a Branch Post Office at 31d, Strada Cimitero, on the 29th March 1902, but closed on the 10th May 1903. At that time it was thought that this Branch Post Office would be a better link between the two Branch Post Offices in Gozo, namely Victoria and Migiarrò, and those in Malta. But the dates above prove that this was not needed at the time. However, the opening of the Branch Post Office, at Melleiha, explains why code letters "A", "B", "C", and "D" were used. After the closure of the Branch Post Office, in 1903, the Postal Agency carried on with the code letter "A" only. Forgeries of the code letter "C" on Cover have been seen.

A 21 mm c.d.s. with code letter "A" was used at St. Paul's Bay. Many Village Postmarks collectors anticipated the use of the other letter at St. Paul's Bay, but it seems that only "A" was used at this Postal Agency kept at The Wignacourt Tower.

Code letters "A" to "F" were used at Notabile Branch Post Office, since 1897 and up to 1930; "A" to "F" and nil on the Cospicua 20 mm c.d.s.; and "A" to "G" on both the 23 mm and the 25 mm Cospicua datestamps; also code letters "A" to "G" were used by the Victoria, Gozo, Branch Post Office between the years 1887 and 1954 when the code lettered Victoria 21mm c.d.s. were withdrawn. The last occasion when they were used was on the 8th September, 1954, to cancel some of the First Day Covers of The Centenary of The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

A letter dated by the Valletta oval and the proper time datestamp, exactly at 4.30 p.m. DE 27/04, addressed to Nadur, Gozo, bears the backstamp Nadur, Gozo, AM DE 28/04. This is a clear indication that "AM" or "PM" or their code letter substitutes indicated time and not the village of origin of the mail, as is thought by a few. In fact another letter cancelled by Musta AM cancellor dated AP/11, is backstamped by the Valletta 30 mm double ring 9.00 a.m. 17 AP/11, and Notabile, where the letter is addressed to, C/AP 17/11, "C" being an early afternoon cancel. And yet another striking proof is a card cancelled by the Sliema single ring 27 mm (Sliema has never used any code letters, but always different times, since the opening of the Branch Office in 1895) 8 a.m./SP 1/21, backstamped Valletta "C"/SP 1/21 and Cospicua "G"/SP 1/21 ("G" being the latest time change at Cospicua). Also, if the code letters on the different c.d.s. used by the Branch Post Offices and Postal Agencies. had other significance than time, it would have necessitated that the Sliema Branch Post Office use them besides the time and date handstamps; but as all Postal History collectors know, Sliema has always used the exact time for their cancels; thus it is crystal clear that code letters on the different handstamps meant nothing but "time".

On or around 1968, genuine village cancellors were used illegally.<sup>(12)</sup> The "AM" or "PM" or "A" or "M" codes shown on the forged Ascjak (2 types), Caccia, Safi and Sannat have rather short ends and are recognizable from those struck genuinely, though no known genuine Sannat strikes have so far been recorded.

Forgeries have been found of a significant proportion of the village strikes.<sup>(13)</sup> Among them are Ascjak, Balzan, Caccia — Gozo, Zebbug and Zurrico. The "AM" on the Balzan forgery is wider than on the genuine; so are the forged "AM" on the Balzan forgery is wider than on the genuine; so are the forged "AM" on the Caccia — Gozo, Micabbiba, Musta, Siggieui and Zebbug. No code letters appear on the Victoria — Gozo forgery, whilst "C" and "D" code forgeries appear on the St. Paul's Bav and Mellicha forged village post marks. The Xeuchia — Gozo fakes do not bear either "AM" or "PM" as they should.

## References

9. Said Malta Catalogue — 1978 — Village Postmarks pp. 173-181.
10. Malta Study Circle Paper No. 11 — Victoria and Mgarr, Gozo.
11. Said Malta Stamp Catalogue — 1978 — Village Postmarks.
12. Dr. Anthony Abela Medici — Detailed Study of Malta Village Postmarks under the title 'Collection of Malta Village Postmarks and their forgeries' awarded the Gold Medal at the VIIth Philatelic Exhibition at the Auberge D'Italie.
13. Malta Study Circle Paper No. 25 — Village Postmarks, Malta.
14. Malta Study Circle Paper No. 10 — Malta — Forces Mail (1974).