

The "Farouk 3 Lire" Cover of Tuscany

By Dr. Roberto M. Rosende

There it was, in full color, at the top of the front page of the April 22, 1991, issue of *Linn's Stamp News*, the largest weekly stamp newspaper, and in the area reserved for the hottest news of the week.

Bollafi, scion of the family of distinguished professional philatelists and the auctioneer of this marvelous collection, dedicated five pages to the story of the cover. With the permission of this good friend,



Fig. 1. The Farouk cover with the 3 lire ochre used on January 7, 1860, from Livorno, Italy, to Alexandria, Egypt.

Why was this 1860 cover, franked with three values of the coat of arms stamps of the old Italian state of Tuscany, and known in the world of philately as the "Il 3 lire FAROUK," on page 1? Because its price was big news. This cover had just sold for U.S. \$700,000 in Bolaffi's March 2 auction of the world-famous "Pedemonte" collection of stamps and covers of the old Italian states.

About one month before we received the beautifully printed catalog at The Philatelic Foundation. It included a separate section entitled "Capolavori Filatelici della collezione" (philatelic masterpieces), where the 48 top pieces were reproduced in full color and with special descriptions. Alberto



Fig. 2. King Fuad, left, and King Farouk. During Fuad's childhood the Egyptian postal service used Italian-language cancelers. The royal portrait of Farouk appears on Egyptian stamps.

we would like to share his emotion-filled narrative.

Our PF consultant and sculptor Domenico Facci, A.N.A., president of the Italy and Colonies Study Circle in the United States, had this story translated and summarized for us:



Fig. 3. Postmark used at Suez during 1869 showing use of Italian language.

"If one wants to speak of a great philatelic rarity, divesting it from its technical point of view, then the 3 lire Farouk is the ideal since a story could be written that rivals Agatha Christie's novels. Think of the atmosphere surrounding a trip on the Orient Express or travelling on the Nile and you can imagine this old stamped letter going to Alexandria, Egypt.

"Stamps, that great invention of the 19th century, continue to be found in far away lands, assuring the delivery of messages, and among all of them, the 3 lire of Tuscany, with its high face value, allows a message to take long postal trips.

"The legend of the Farouk cover was born at the time of King Fuad (1868-1936), who as a child discovered the usage of the Italian language in the first Egyptian postal service, established by a private Italian company. Even though the posts were nationalized in 1864, the Italian language continued to be used on the cancelers, and the system was

directed by Cavallieri Muzzi, an Italian from Bologna who was rewarded with the title of 'bey' for his services.

"The Farouk letter with its stamps, cancellations and postal writings not only gave us the chronicle of the happy events of the times and the ending of the second Italian war of independence, but also bears the images of the newly printed stamps of Tuscany."

And so goes Alberto's description of this famous cover, one of two known with the 3 lire of Tuscany, the scarcest of all the classic issues of Italian States.

The cover originated at Livorno, Italy, and is dated January 7, 1860. It is franked not only with the 3 lire ochre (Scott No. 23, left) but also with a 40 centesimos carmine (Scott No. 21, center) and a 20 centesimos blue (Scott No. 20, right) for a total of 3 lira and 60 centesimos. The sender was the Medina Company, and the cover went to its offices at Alexandria, Egypt. As per written instructions, it was carried by a French steamer.

This is the earliest known date of usage of the 3 lire stamp; and it is remarkable that the other example, a single on a letter to Paris known as the Rothschild cover, is dated almost a year later in December 1860.

Of course, a rarity like this has been examined by many experts and this one has certificates from En. Diena, A. Diena and A. G. Bollafi. But how did this cover come to be known as "Il 3 lire FAROUK"?

Fig. 4. Cover with a single copy of the 3 lire ochre addressed to the Marquis Bourbon del Monte in Paris. (From the Baron Alphonse Rothschild collection)

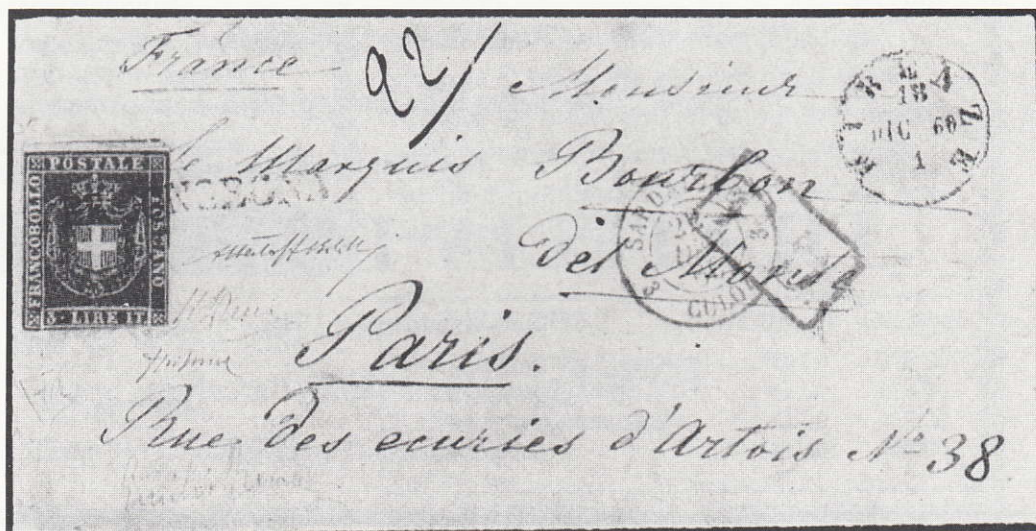




Fig. 5. General Naguib, leader of the 1952 revolution that ended Farouk's reign.

this cover was one of his favorites.

When the armed forces directed by General Naghib revolted and dethroned him in 1952, Farouk fled the



Fig. 6. Newspaper clip from the Sunday, February 21, 1954, issue of *Il Giornale D'Italia* announcing Farouk's hiring of a team of lawyers. (From the Dena archives)

It is well known that King Farouk of Egypt was an enthusiastic philatelist, and the royal collections grew enormously under his patronage. It is said that

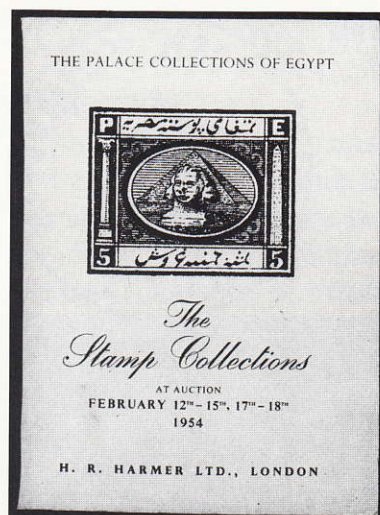


Fig. 7. Cover of the H. R. Harmer Catalog for the 1954 sales of the "Palace Collections of Egypt."

1954, sales. Of course, he was not successful.

It is easy to understand why from that event this rarity, for so long out of the philatelic market, quickly received the nickname by which it will always be known. ❖

country without his beloved stamps. When the government announced that the royal collections would be sold in Cairo by the auction firm of H. R. Harmer of London, the king mobilized his resources, hiring lawyers in London, Paris and Beirut with the object of invalidating the results of the February 12-18,

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