

Stamps Become Money : Old Postage Stamps in the Search for Resources for the Ottoman State Treasury

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Ten years ago, Turkish scholar Salih Kış² published a study that sheds some light on the state's constant search for new sources of revenue, but also provides insights into how philately was viewed in this regard, as well as the rotten and ineffective state of the Ottoman bureaucracy at the highest level. Based on files and documents in various state archives (Babiali Evrak Odası, Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi, Hatt-ı Hümayun, Şûra-yı Devlet, etc.), Kış describes the efforts to sell stocks of old, obsolete stamps and postal order forms.

Since the Postal Ministry was established under the Ministry of Trade (*Ticaret Nezareti*) during its foundation, it was subordinated to this ministry for a long time in terms of administration and then to the Ministry of Public Works (*Maliye Nezareti*). In terms of its financial duties and responsibilities within the framework of the postal organisation law, it was subordinate to the Ministry of Finance (*Maliye Nezareti*).³ Therefore, the revenues generated by the organisation from communication services were transferred to the treasury. The postal organisation continued its relations with the Ministry of Finance after it merged with the Telegraph Directorate on 23rd September 1871 when it became the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs (*Posta ve Telgraf Nezareti, PTN*).

[...]

A First Study on Old Postage Stamps

The appreciation of old postage stamps in the world was closely followed in the Ottoman Empire as in other states. In this sense, the Ottoman Empire also initiated a study on the stamps issued by the postal organisation from 1863 to 1890. Sultan Abdülhamid II ordered the appointment of an official to identify and classify the postage stamps issued by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph. This officer was to be tasked with the organisation and classification of the stamps printed for 27 years and kept in the vaults of the ministry.⁴

Although an officer was assigned by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, no efficient work could be carried out in this regard. Shortly afterwards, this work was left unfinished as the officer in charge died. Since the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs did not take the responsibility of this task upon itself, the stamps in the warehouses could not be sorted and arranged according to their quantity and type. During the audit of the accounts of the Ministry in 1892, the old postage stamps in the vaults came to the fore again.

1 The original Turkish text was published in 2015 as *Pul Para Oldu Osmanlı Devleti Hazinesine Kaynak Arayışında Antika Posta Pulları* in the journal Turkish Studies under the journal's open access policy, i.e. [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). This licence permits sharing, copying, reproducing, and adapting the work in any size and format except for commercial use, including remixing, transforming, and building upon the work, provided that proper attribution is given to the original work.

For publication in the journal The Levant I made a summary of the study, and this was translated into German for the journal *Türkei-Spiegel*.

2 Today Prof. Dr. Salih Kış, Selçuk Üniversitesi, Konya, <https://selcuk.edu.tr/Person/Detail/salihkis>.

3 Demir, 2005, p. 21.

4 DH.MKT, 1845/98

The stamps were brought to the agenda thanks to a corruption complaint. After a report was made that the stamps in the warehouses of the Ministry were unofficially put on the market, the Vizirate (*sadaret*) initiated an investigation into the matter. The incident was to be investigated and concluded by a commission to be formed. After the commission's investigation, the old postage stamps would be destroyed by burning in the presence of a committee with the approval of the Sultan in order to prevent any new abuse. In addition, this issue would not be delayed like the stamp issuance and classification task and would be finalised immediately.⁵ The corruption that occurred in the process initiated for the determination of old postage stamps led to the decision to destroy the valuable old stamps.



Figs. 1-3: Tuğra stamps 1862/1863.

With the order of Sultan Abdülhamid II and the decision of the investigation commission, the destruction of the old stamps kept in the cellars was approved. Nevertheless, these stamps were not destroyed.⁶ Before the decision to destroy the old stamps by burning them in the presence of the committee, especially after the investigation of the commission established for the stamp corruption, a memorandum dated 17th October 1892 regarding the old stamps was taken from the administrative council of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs.

In this memorandum, it was revealed that, contrary to the order issued by the Sadaret, it would not be sufficient to separate and store 500 of each type of all postage stamps issued. Because in one of the paragraphs of this memorandum, it was stated that 1,000 of each type of stamps should be kept to be reserved for the collection made by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and the stamps to be given to foreign administrations and other places were taken into consideration. Therefore, it was emphasised that it would be appropriate to increase the amount of old stamps to 1,500. In the memorandum (*tezkir*) sent by the Sadaret to the post office, it was requested that the obligation to give stamps to every department, administration and applicant could not be understood and that more detailed information on this issue should be given.⁷ Thus, it was stated for the first time that old Ottoman postage stamps were collected within the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph. In addition, the expression of giving old postage stamps to local and foreign administrations and individuals who demanded them without any charge was also put forward for the first time with a memorandum of the ministry.

[...]

The Establishment of the Old Postage Stamp Commission

An official's petition revealed that the sale of old postage stamps in the Ottoman Empire could generate a significant amount of revenue for the treasury. Haçık Efendi, a clerk in the Accounting Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Hariciye Nezareti Muhasebe Kalemi*), informed the

5 DH.MKT, 1845/98

6 In the following period, during the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress, a regulation was made regarding the destruction and burning of old documents. After correspondence between state institutions on the subject, the Commission of *İslahat-ı Maliye* (Finance) was assigned by the Sadaret to draft a regulation on antique documents. In 1916, the Commission prepared a six article regulation draft "Devair-i Hükümet Evrak ve Defatirinin Müddet-i Hifzi ve Suret-i İmhası Hakkında" (Regarding the Retention Period and Method of Destruction of Government Documents and Records). BOA, İ.DUİT, no.58/69, 27.10.1916.

7 DH.MKT, 2016/21

Sadaret that enthusiasts collecting postage stamps could pay very large sums of money for them. He even gave the example that a stamp of 20 paras could be sold for 1 Ottoman lira.⁸

He stated that due to the interest of postage stamp collectors, many books, magazines and newspapers on stamps were published worldwide. He stated that the Ottoman finance could earn a significant income from the sale of old postage stamps that had been demonetised and were left to rot in warehouses. Haçık Efendi also stated that the Ottoman Postal Ministry was a well-established institution, that it had issued stamps 11 times between 1862 and his own time, and that the excess stamps that were no longer in use were kept in sealed chests in the warehouses of the Ministry, and that these became blocks by sticking to each other over time and started to decompose there.



Figs. 4-5: Duloz stamps 1865/1867.

He predicted that the treasury could obtain a revenue of 20,000 to 30,000 liras by organising and sorting these old postage stamps, which were left to rot, through a committee, and exporting and selling them to the market at intervals.⁹

The Sadaret requested information from the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs about the feasibility of the issues raised in Haçık Efendi's petition. The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs reported that the sale of old postage stamps through auctions had been on the agenda before Haçık Efendi's proposal, and while it was expected to generate 3,600 Ottoman Gold Pounds, the purchase was cancelled. The reason for this cancellation was that the quantity of old postage stamps was less than 100,000, there were very few stamp of 10, 20 and 40 paras, and they were cancelled and offered for sale in order to prevent their reuse in the market. In addition, the purchaser had decided not to buy the stamps since he would be entitled to a share of the entire lot and would be liable in the event of a problem.

After the auction was cancelled, the Ministry of Internal Affairs argued that the sale of more than 20 million old stamps would generate revenue for the exchequer, but that this would lead to many abuses. For this reason, the old stamps kept in warehouses were to be destroyed by burning in the presence of officials selected from among the members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Finance: Ziya Bey, Accountant of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Refik Bey, Deputy Chief Clerk of the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, and Hafiz Vehbi Efendi, one of the Accountants of the Antiques Commission (*Muhasebat-i Atika*) of the Ministry of Finance, were appointed for the destruction of old postage stamps by the decision of the Council of Ministers (*Meclis-i Mahsus-i Vükelâ*) and the Sultan's order.

Despite the appointment of officials and the sultan's will, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs kept delaying the destruction of old postage stamps.¹⁰ Subsequently, the council of the ministry issued a memorandum on the utilisation of these stamps and informed the relevant ministries as well as the Sadaret officials and the Sultan. With Haçık Efendi's petition, the old stamps were once again on the agenda and the opportunity to create a source of income for the finances once again emerged.

The Ottoman Ministry of Posts and Telegraph discussed the memorandum received from the Sadaret in the Council of the Ministry. Firstly, the council stated that selling old postage stamps at the value of official documents would not be the right strategy. Because the Sadaret had emphasised in its proposal that old postage stamps had to be cancelled in order to be sold as official documents.

8 Gold Pound.

9 ₢D, 1138/11.

10 ₢D, 1138/11.

If the stamps were cancelled and put up for sale, they would lose their value and would not be purchased by collectors. The Council of the Ministry emphasised that it would be in the interest of the state to approve the sale of all old stamps directly or through auctions at once without cancellation, and that if any remained, they would be destroyed by burning.¹¹ The inter-institutional correspondence regarding the direct sale, auctioning or wholesale destruction of old postage stamps did not yield any results.



Figs. 6–8: Duloz stamps 1867/1870.

Raphael Tideschi, the Director of the Stamp Branch of the General Debt Administration of the Ottoman Treasury (*Düyun-i Umumiye İdaresi Pul Şubesı Müdürii*), was instrumental in bringing the sale of Old postage stamps back to the agenda. In his petition to the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Tideschi stated that his duty was to the Ottoman treasury, that a small amount of revenue should not be wasted, and that increasing the source of revenue was the main motto not only of finance officials but also of all subjects. He said that the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph had previously considered selling the postage stamps that had been withdrawn from circulation in exchange for a certain amount, but the offer was rejected.

According to Mr. Tideschi, this offer was rejected, perhaps due to the small amount of money offered, but in case of destruction, the Ottoman treasury would be deprived of this income. Therefore, in order to create a new source of income for the treasury, Mr. Tideschi offered to sell the old postage stamps on condition that he would be paid a low fee. Therefore, Raphael Tideschi asked the Ottoman authorities to appoint him as the sales manager, as the sale of more than 20 million old postage stamps at a value of 10% would generate a large amount of money for the treasury and this money would constitute an important source of income for the treasury.¹²

The Ministry of Finance referred this proposal to the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs. Along with the petitions of Haçık Efendi, the Accounting Clerk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Raphael Tideschi, the Director of the Stamp Branch of the General Debt Administration, the previously drafted memorandum and the memorandum of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs were also sent to the Council of State.¹³ Thus, the final decision on the old postage stamps was left to the Council of State.¹⁴



Figs. 9–10: Duloz stamps 1876.

11 SD, 1138/11.

12 SD, 1138/11.

13 SD, 1138/11.

14 BOA, SD, no.1138/33, 14.10.1901. The documents sent by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs to the Council of State (*Şûra-yı Devlet*) had not yet yielded any results. As a result of the preliminary investigation, it was revealed that the documents sent to the Council of State had been referred to the abolished Financial Affairs Commission (*Umur-ı Maliye Komisyonu*) for investigation. Therefore, the examination of the documents by the Finance Commission (*Maliye Komisyonu*), which served as a sub-unit of the Council of State, caused the process to be prolonged.

The Council of State referred the documents received from the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph to the Finance Department. Firstly, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs' proposal was examined by the Department of Finance. The Ministry requested that the postage stamps, which were antiques, be sold through an auction and the proceeds of 38,000 to 40,000 liras be used for the new building needed by the institution.

Thus, it was emphasised that the new building would be constructed with the money from the sale of postage stamps without burdening the treasury. It was pointed out that if the income to be obtained was transferred to the treasury and money was added to the budget of the supervision for the construction of the building every year, the building would not be completed in 7 to 8 years.



Fig. 11: The 1892 General Post Office (Postahane-i Amire).¹⁵

In the memorandum (*mazbatada*), it was stated that the destruction of old postage stamps by burning them would not benefit the Ottoman Empire; on the contrary, the treasury would suffer losses as a significant amount of revenue would be lost. It was emphasised that if the old postage stamps, which had been withdrawn from use and were lying idle in post offices, were purchased by foreign post offices affiliated to the postal union and collectors, they would generate a significant amount of revenue for the treasury.

The mistake in the idea that the sale of stamps would lead to abuses, which had previously been brought to the agenda, were also revealed in the related memorandum. Since the colours and designs of the stamps issued each time were regulated separately, it was emphasised that the old and new stamps could not be confused with each other and that new stamps could not be sold instead of old ones due to the sale process.



Figs. 12-13: Duloz stamps 1877/1881.

It was also given as an example that Greece made a considerable amount of revenue from the sale of old 20 centimes postage stamps with 1 franc printed on them. It was reported that the funds

15 Kafkasmurat [pseud.]: *Postane-i Amire- Eminönü*. In: Wikipedia. Online: <https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dosya:Postaneiamire.JPG> (public domain).

obtained by each state as a result of the sale of old postage stamps to collectors constituted a great source of income for the treasury. After a detailed examination of the documents received by the Finance Department of the Council of State, the issues pointed out by individuals and institutions were resolved in a memorandum dated 14th November 1902. It was stated that without knowing the amount and types of old postage stamps kept in the warehouses of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, it was impossible to know how much revenue would be generated from them.

The Council of State decided to organise a five-person commission consisting of a chairman and four members for Old postage stamps. In addition, the meetings of this commission were to be held three days a week at the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph building. Thus, all the sorting and classification procedures for old postage stamps were to be finalised within 1½ months.¹⁶ Throughout this process, the responsibility and control belonged to the Council of State, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and the Court of Accounts (*Divan-i Muhasebat*) were to work together in the formation and functioning of the commission.¹⁷



Figs. 14–15: Empire stamps 1884.

The commission to be formed was to supervise the determination and classification of the number and types of postage stamps that were demonetised from use and kept in warehouses, their recording in a book, the determination of their sales procedures in the interest of the treasury, and their sale to stamp collectors.¹⁸ This commission was to convene under the chairmanship of one of the members of the Court of Accounts.

The members of the commission were to include one official each from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, and the General Debt Administration. The memorandum of the Council of State was sent to the President of the Court of Accounts by the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 14th April 1902. The Imperial Council (*Divan*) selected Kirkor Efendi, one of the members, as the chairman of the commission and notified the Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹⁹ The Ministry of Internal Affairs, after sending a memorandum to the relevant ministries and administrations for the commission memberships, also informed the President of the Court of Accounts about the situation.²⁰

The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs notified the relevant institutions that it had appointed Corci Efendi, one of the members of the parliamentary administration, as a member of the commission to be formed for the old postage stamps. It was also decided to appoint Chief Clerk Münir Bey, also a member of the parliamentary administration, as a member of the commission, and Aziz Bey, Clerk of the Revenue Stamp branch of the Ministry, as the clerk of the commission, since the transaction with the old postage stamps concerned the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs.²¹ Thus, the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs appointed a total of three officials for the membership and clerkship of the commission.

While the members of the commission to be formed for postage stamps were being determined, a new arrangement was made regarding the memberships. Firstly, the Council of State had requested the appointment of an officer from the General Directorate of Debt Administration (*Düyyün-i*

16 BEO, 1880/140969.

17 DH.MKT, 501/72.

18 DH.MKT, 501/72.

19 DH.MKT, 501/72.

20 DH.MKT, 501/72.

21 DH.MKT, 501/72.

Umumiye Varidat-ı Mahsusa) for the membership of the commission. Raphael Tideschi, the Director of the Stamp Department of the General Debt Administration, was appointed as a member of this commission.²² However, Raphael Tideschi's membership was cancelled due to the fact that the old postage stamps had no connection with the General Administration of Debt.²³

The name of Aziz Bey, the clerk of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs' stamp accounting department (*Posta ve Telgraf Nezareti Muhasebe Pul Maddesi Katibi*), who had been appointed as the clerk of the commission, was proposed for this vacant membership by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.²⁴ The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs stated that Aziz Bey had been employed at the Postage Stamp Directorate since its establishment and that he was qualified in stamps and that he should be utilised. With the acceptance of the decision by the relevant institutions, Aziz Bey was elected as a member of the commission in addition to his clerkship.²⁵



Figs. 16–17: Empire stamps 1890.

Thus, due to the appointment of three officers from the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs to the commission membership, the decision to send a member to be selected from the Revenue Administration of the General Directorate of the Debt Administration (*Düyun-ı Umumiye Varidat-ı Mahsusa İdaresi*) was cancelled. Servet Bey's name was proposed for the commission membership from the Ministry of Finance.²⁶ Therefore, the Commission was composed of Kirkor Efendi (chairman), a member of the Court of Accounts (*Divan-ı Muhasebat*), Corci Efendi (member), Chief Clerk Münir Bey (member), Aziz Bey (member), Clerk of the stamp branch, and Servet Bey (member), a member of the Council of the Ministry of Finance.

After the formation of the working staff of the commission for old postage stamps, some problems arose in determining the meeting place. Firstly, the meeting place of the commission was specified in the Council of State decision as the Ministry of Telegraph and Post.

Later on, the Dersaâdet Post Office under the same ministry was determined as the meeting place.²⁷ However, the commission lost a lot of time in the selection of members, which caused the meeting place to change constantly. During this period, the commission did not hold a single meeting.

This time, the location of the commission in Dersaâdet Post Office was changed to Katircioğlu Han²⁸ in İstanbul. It was decided that three interconnected rooms in this *Han* would be the meeting place of the commission. Since the annual rent of the Han rooms was 100 liras and there was no appropriation for this amount, it was decided to add the rental fee as a one-off to the 1903 budget of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraph.²⁹ However, the Finance Department of the Council of State reported that some rooms of the Imperial Mint Administration (*Darbhane-i Amire, Mesukat-ı*

22 BEO, 1880/140969.

23 DH.MKT, 501/72.

24 DH.MKT, 501/72.

25 DH.MKT, 501/72.

26 There is no document regarding Servet Bey's appointment as a member of the commission. Nevertheless, Servet Bey's name and seal appear as a member in a memorandum of the commission's decision on old stamps. BOA, DH.MKT, no.501/72, 19.10.1903, fol. 16.

27 DH.MKT, 501/72.

28 The Katircioğlu Han is today the Laleli Çukurçeşme Han in Laleli, İstanbul. For detailed information, see http://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laleli_%C3%87ukur%C3%A7e%C5%9Fme_Han%C4%B1. It is also known as Taşhan, and Sipahiler Han.

29 DH.MKT, 501/72.

Şahane İdaresi) were allocated for the meeting place of the commission and that the necessary report was prepared.³⁰ It was also requested that the one-year lease contract for the Katırcıoğlu Han be cancelled and that the commission take office as soon as possible.

However, a meeting could not be held in the rooms of the Imperial Mint Administration (*Darbhane-i Amire*) reserved for the commission. This time, the repair and furnishing of the Lottery Department of the Imperial Mint was on the agenda for the commission. The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs held a meeting with the Directorate of the Imperial Mint for the meeting place of the commission. As a result of the investigation carried out at the Lottery Department, it was possible to repair and furnish the place with very little expense and turn it into a suitable venue for the commission. Due to the value of the Old postage stamps, the allocation of other venues would have created a major security issue, which would have increased the financial burden and necessitated the hiring of a security guard. Thus, it was thought that it would be more advantageous to prefer a venue that did not require renting and hiring new personnel.



Figs. 18–19: Empire stamps 1886.

Since its establishment, five different locations were identified as meeting places for the commission, but not a single meeting was held in any of them. The meeting place of the commission on old postage stamps formed by the Council of State's Department of Finance (*Şûra-yı Devlet Maliye Dairesi*) finally decided to be the Imperial Mint's Lottery Department (*Darbhane-i Amire Piyango Dairesi*) and the situation was notified to the commission and the relevant ministries.³¹ The relevant ministries were informed by the Vizier's Chancellery (*Sadaret*) to start meetings immediately after the repair and furnishing of this venue.³²

The Workings of the Stamp Commission

The Commission started to work after the meeting place was resolved. In this process, it was not only concerned with old postage stamps, but also with the sale of postage stamps on old postcards and postal orders. The destruction of postal money orders two years after the expiry of their validity period due to lack of space caused the loss of an income that would constitute a source for the Ottoman finances. The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs that the stamps and forms on these remittances could be sold through auctions, as in the case of old postage stamps, after it was realised that the stamps and postal order forms were cut and collected by collectors and enthusiasts due to their antique features.³³

Ata Bey, Inspector General of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, also sent a detailed report on postal money order stamps to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In this report, the issues pointed out by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs were emphasised in detail. It was revealed that the destruction of postal remittances two years after the expiry of their use period was carried out according to Article 15 of the Regulations on Postal Remittances, but there was no provision on the destruction of documents in the relevant regulation.³⁴ In addition, the destruction of the remittances

30 Y.A.RES, 121/28.

31 Y.A.RES, 121/28.

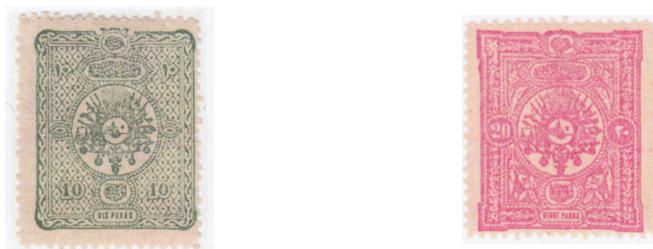
32 DH.MKT, 501/72.

33 DH.MKT, 501/72.

34 Article 15 of the Postal Money Order Regulation reads as follows: "The remittances that are not paid to the recipient (*sel-i ileyh*) within two years from the date of their issuance shall not be valid and the amount they contain shall be recorded as treasury money." BOA, DH.MKT, No.501/72, 6.06.1904, folio 12.

after two years would not allow for the investigation of problems that might arise later and the correction of errors. For this reason, it was pointed out that it would be the right decision to keep the relevant remittances for 15 years after the expiry of their validity period. In case of any difficulty in their preservation, they could be locked in one of the neighbouring hans for a fee of 50 to 60 kuruş per month, just like other official documents, until the construction of the new post office building was completed.

It was estimated that since the value of such documents would increase with the passage of time, and they would be more valuable in 15 years' time, they should be utilised at that time, and now, if the old postage stamps were arranged and classified and sold to collectors through auctions, it could bring a large income to the treasury or cover a large part of the construction costs of the new post office building. Therefore, in this report, it was proposed that postal money orders be considered in the same category as postage stamps, which had been issued for 42 years and had been withdrawn from circulation over time, and that an arrangement regarding this issue be quickly made and implemented.³⁵



Figs. 20–21: Coat-of-Arms stamps 1892.

An arrangement was made to extend the safekeeping of postal money orders from two years to 15 years. With this arrangement, 50 crates of old postal money orders were kept in a warehouse for a monthly rent of 60 kuruş in 4½ years. It became clear that the existing warehouse would not be sufficient if they were kept for 15 years like official documents, and that a qualified officer should be employed for their security and classification.³⁶ Therefore, the preservation of old postage stamps and communication documents such as postcards and postal money orders, which would cease to circulate after a while, would constitute an important resource for the treasury.

On 25th October 1903, the Sadaret also entrusted this commission with the task of converting Thessalian postage stamps into cash in order to raise funds for the construction of the Hamidiye-Hijaz Railways.³⁷ The assignment of another task to the commission before any progress was made regarding the old postage stamps caused both the process to be prolonged and the workload to increase.

With the order of Sultan Abdülhamid II dated 5th January 1903, the Sadaret had instructed the commission to take over the old postage stamps kept in the cellars of the Old Telegraph Office and to start work. The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs had temporarily appointed Fazlı Bey and Tahir Bey, members of the parliament, to assist the commission in the handover ceremony. This committee had applied to the Topkapı Palace Guardian (*Topkapı Sarayı Hümayunu Muhafizi*) to receive the old postage stamps. Since the former Telegraph Office was located in Topkapı Palace, the old postage stamps were kept in the cellars of this building.

Rıza Paşa, the Guardian of the Topkapı Palace, stated that he had not received an order regarding the old postage stamps that he was responsible for protecting and that he could not deliver them to the commission without the sultan's order.³⁸ The paşa informed the commission that he could deliver the stamps immediately if the Topkapı Palace Guardian received an order on this matter.³⁹

35 DH.MKT, 501/72.

36 DH.MKT, 501/72.

37 Y.A.RES, 121/28; DH.MKT, 501/72; BEO, 2440/182961.

38 DH.MKT, 501/72.

39 BEO, 2440/182961.

When the old postage stamps were not delivered, the commission issued a report and informed the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the situation. The necessity and urgency of the transfer and delivery of the stamps by delivering the relevant decision to the Guardian of the Topkapı Palace as soon as possible was expressed.⁴⁰



Figs. 22–23: Coat-of-Arms Postage Due stamps 1892/1901.

The Imperial Guardian of the Topkapı Palace had continuously left unanswered both the letters of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs regarding the delivery of the old postage stamps to the commission.⁴¹ Since Rıza Paşa, the Palace Guardian, had previously declared that he would not take any action without the sultan's order, he had not responded to the memorandums from the ministries. For this reason, the Ministry of Internal Affairs applied to the Sadaret on 23rd October 1904 and requested that a decree be issued for the delivery of the stamps, which were rotting in the cellar due to dampness and other effects, so that they could be arranged and sorted as soon as possible.⁴²

In its memorandum dated 16th January 1906, the Court of Accounts explained the value of the stamps in the cellar of the old Telegraph Office. According to this report, the old postage stamps, which were left to the control of the commission during the examination of the financial accounts of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs for the year 1902 by the Divan's examiners and kept in the vault, were worth 34,270,916 kuruş.⁴³ This was the current value of the stamps, which would increase even more if they were sold through an auction. After the value of the stamps in the vault was learnt, the issue of ensuring their security during the sorting and sale processes came to the fore. The relevant ministries applied to the Sadaret for the security of the stamps to be provided by the Royal Staff Rifle Company (*Maiyet-i Seniye Tüfekçi Bölüğü*). The Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II appointed head-gunner Tahir Paşa on 21st March 1906 to ensure the security of the old postage stamps.⁴⁴

The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs informed the Sadaret⁴⁵ that although 2½ years had passed since the sultan's order to hand over the old postage stamps to the commission on 5th January 1903, no work could be carried out since no handover of the stamps had taken place yet. In the statement made by the Sadaret, it was stated that the requests of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and the Ministry of Internal Affairs were submitted to the Sultan and that the decision would be made as soon as possible.⁴⁶ Despite this statement, there was no development in terms of the sultan's order.

On 21st April 1906, the Ministry of Internal Affairs applied to the Sadaret again about the commission responsible for the old postage stamps taking office and receiving the stamps. The Sadaret informed the Ministry of Internal Affairs that the matter had been conveyed to the Sultan through the clerk of the Sultan's private office and that a decision would be issued as soon as possible.⁴⁷

40 DH.MKT, 501/72.

41 DH.MKT, 501/72.

42 DH.MKT, 501/72.

43 DH.MKT, 501/72.

44 DH.MKT, 501/72.

45 Y.A.RES, 131/28.

46 Y.A.RES, 131/28.

47 DH.MKT, 501/72.

Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs notified the Sadaret three times on 23rd October 1904, 17th April 1905 and 22nd March 1906 that Sultan Abdülhamid II's order was needed for the commission to receive and work with the stamps kept in Topkapı Palace, no result was obtained.⁴⁸ Correspondence between the Ottoman institutions about the delivery of the stamps continued for more than three years. In the end, the memorandum of the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 25th April 1906 was submitted to the Sultan by the Sadaret and the decision regarding the transfer of the old postage stamps to the commission was issued on 28th April 1906 with the order of Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁴⁹



Figs. 24–25: Thessaly and Eastern Roumelia stamps 1898/1880.

After the decision on the transfer of the Old postage stamps to the commission in charge was issued on 9th June 1906, the details of the execution of this process began to become clearer. For the opening of the vault where the old postage stamps were kept and the handover ceremony, some officials other than the commission were assigned⁵⁰. These officials were to participate in the opening of the vault and the sealing of the protocol to be issued after the handover ceremony of the old postage stamps. Among these officials were Rıza Paşa, the Guardian of Topkapı Palace, Hakkı Bey, the Director of the Imperial Mint, Reşat Bey, the Accountant of the Ministry of Finance, Behiç Bey, the Deputy Director of the Ministry of Trade and Public Works (*Ebniye-i Tensik Kalemi, Ticaret ve Nafia Nezareti Ebniye-i Tensik Kalemi Müdür Muavini*) and Şekip Bey, the Director of the Ministry of Finance in the department for paper money. Mr. Behiç and Mr. Şekip were also to assist in the sorting of the stamps by the commission in the following period.

After the delivery of the old postage stamps, the Thessalian stamps to be sold for the Hamidiye-Hijaz Railways were also delivered to the commission. However, Kirkor Efendi, the chairman of the commission and a member of the Court of Accounts, informed the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs that he was unable to serve as chairman due to rheumatism. The Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs wrote a memorandum to the Sadaret about the appointment of one of the members or an outsider as the chairman of the commission.⁵¹

The commission and its accompanying persons received the old postage stamps kept in crates in the cellar of the old Telegraph Office after issuing a confirmation of receipt. The commission transported the old postage stamps to the Lottery Department of the Imperial Mint Administration, also located in Topkapı Palace, to be sorted and classified. After the arrangement and sorting process, 150 stamps of each type were delivered to the Guardian of Stamps (*Pul Muhafizliğine*) in accordance with the request of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs.⁵² The reason for requesting these stamps may have been the Ministry's intention to archive old stamp types or to open a museum of old postage stamps in the future.⁵³

48 DH.MKT, 501/72.

49 BEO, 2811/210758.

50 BEO, 2854/214041.

51 DH.MKT, 501/72.

52 BEO, 2900/217464.

53 Today, old postage stamps are housed in the PTT Stamp Museum, which operates in the former Emlak ve Eytam Bank building in Ulus, Ankara, which was opened in 2013 after being restored. In this museum, world stamps, Ottoman Empire stamps, Anatolian Government stamps, Republic of Turkey stamps and thematic stamps consisting of seven different themes are exhibited.

After the handover ceremony of the old postage stamps, the commission in charge of the sorting and classification of the stamps began to work in the rooms allocated to it in the Lottery Department.⁵⁴ The presence of 34,270,916 kuruş worth of old postage stamps in the 1892 accounts of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs may have prolonged the duration of the sorting and classification work.

There is no information on how many stamps were to be disposed of at the end of this work carried out by the commission and under what conditions. In addition, we do not have any precise information on the procedures and principles under which this stamp sale was carried out and how much revenue it generated for the treasury. However, we can make an illustration about the functioning of this process by considering the old postage stamps sold through auctions after the Second Constitutional Monarchy. Accordingly, it was announced in a newspaper advertisement in 1912 that old postage stamps would be sold through auctions. The auction of old postage stamps was held under the control of the Post and Telegraph Directorate of the Ministry of Finance. At the end of the auction, 385,314 kuruş revenue was obtained from the sale of old postage stamps worth 1,767,262½ kuruş. In addition, the officials who prepared the old postage stamps for the auction by arranging and sorting them were given a bonus of five per cent of the total revenue.⁵⁵ The awarding of bonuses to officials who helped to prepare old postage stamps for sale and dispose of them through auctions was also formalised by a decision of the Council of State.⁵⁶

As can be seen in the above example, old postage stamps with a total value of 1,767,262½ kuruş were auctioned in 1916 by notifying enthusiasts through newspaper advertisements. From this point of view, it is highly probable that the commission in charge of the arrangement and classification of old postage stamps also auctioned Old postage stamps with a value of 34,270,916 kuruş in accordance with the same procedures and principles. Therefore, by making an arrangement regarding the old postage stamps, which the Ottoman Empire had initially left to rot in cellars and then planned to destroy, the Ottoman State created an important source of income for the treasury from the auction sale of these available payment instruments.

Conclusion

The existing old institutions in the Ottoman state apparatus were redesigned according to the requirements of the era within the framework of modernisation. For this reason, important structural reforms were implemented in the Ottoman postal organisation in the first half of the 19th century. With the Tanzimat Edict, the postal organisation was reshaped according to European standards and transformed into the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs.

Initially, the service of circulating official state documents between central and provincial institutions was gradually extended to the general public. However, due to the high cost of the existing communication fees, the number of private individuals communicating did not increase, which decreased the efficiency of the postal organisation. In England, postage stamps, which were put into circulation in 1840 in order to minimise the fees in postal services, started a new era in the field of communication. The Ottoman Empire started to use this means of payment in communication about a quarter century later, on 13th January 1863. Thanks to the use of postage stamps, Ottoman subjects gained the opportunity of cheaper communication.

The issuance of postage stamps is a sovereign right of states, just like the issuance of money. Postage stamps began to be valued, just like money bills, after a while after they were put into circulation around the world. Collectors began to show great interest in old postage stamps, especially those that had been demonetised. With this interest, a postage stamp catalogue and album

54 BEO, 2900/217464.

55 Hüseyin Said Bey, an official in the Documents Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Captain Mehmet Ali Efendi, an official in the Yıldız Investigation Documents Commission, received a bonus of 14,500 kuruş (five per cent) out of a total of 290,000 kuruş for their services. BOA, BEO, No.4317/323721, 14.10.1914.

56 BEO, 4301/322509.

was made in France for the first time in the world. In order to spread the interest in collecting old postage stamps to wider circles, not only newspapers and magazines about old postage stamps were published, but also national and international stamp exhibitions were held.

The Ottoman Empire took the first step towards the utilisation of old postage stamps in 1890. Although an official was assigned to uncover the old postage stamps that were withdrawn from circulation and kept in cellars, no results were obtained and the valuable stamps were left to rot. Due to the economic depression in the country, the issue of these stamps came to the agenda again in 1900. An official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who closely followed the developments in old stamp collecting in the world, shared with the government officials the information that a significant source of income would be created for the treasury if these payment instruments were sold to collectors. Upon the realisation that old postage stamps would contribute to the improvement of the current economic situation by the state, a series of studies were initiated.

As a result of these efforts, a commission was established to sort and classify old postage stamps. In the beginning, the selection of members and meeting places for the commission took a long time, which prevented the commission from working efficiently. At a time when the state was in need of even the smallest revenue, the bureaucracy's slowness was instrumental in continually postponing an opportunity that would have created an important source of money for the treasury. It took three years even to transfer the old postage stamps kept in the vaults to the commission. Nevertheless, it is necessary to look for other reasons behind the postponement of the auction sale of these means of payment, which increased in value with each passing time, at a time when they were needed and in high demand.

The commission for the sorting and classification of old postage stamps fulfilled its mission as per its remit of establishment and made these means of payment, which cost a large sum of money, ready for sale through an auction. Although there is no information on the sale of these stamps, we can assume that the auction was held. The fact that Old postage stamps were sold through auctions one by one in the following period strengthens our assumption. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire made a great effort to use all available means to improve the financial situation of the treasury and in this regard, it showed the ability to convert Old postage stamps, which were left to rot in cellars, into money. Therefore, based on the inseparable unity of communication with finance, the relationship of Ottoman old postage stamps with the state economy, especially the details of the relevance of old stamp sales to the treasury, have been revealed for the first time in this study.

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