

STARTING A PALESTINE COLLECTION TODAY **By David Smith (U.K.)**

Philatelic societies across the world, including those associated with the Holy Land, are recording that there are few newcomers to our hobby. Many reasons are quoted, such as the existence of alternative hobbies and distractions, the difficulty of acquiring material and information, and the potential cost. In this article I describe an experiment in forming a new collection of Palestine with a small outlay. It is impossible to pretend that I am a newcomer to collecting this country, but I have tried to act as if I knew very little, and will attempt to explain in a way that a relative newcomer may follow the procedure.

For my tenth birthday, a kind aunt gave me a paperback book with the title "Stamp Collecting on a Small Income" whose front cover showed the hands of a philatelist using hinges to mount a short set of mint definitive stamps from, I think, St Helena. (Short sets of definitives were popular with collectors in the days when top values of five shillings and above were beyond their budget.) With this title in mind, this article could be sub-titled "Palestine collecting on a small outlay."

Before starting, one needs some information. My local library had a copy of a catalogue of stamps from the Middle East which listed all the basic issues of Palestine from 1918 to 1948. It had black and white illustrations of the stamp designs and the overprints, dates of issue, watermarks and the catalogue value of each one. As the library book was issued in 1995, these catalogue values were out of date, but I noted that there were several stamps whose price, in used condition, was 10 pence. This is the minimum price, and some dealers say that this means that the stamp is so common that it should read "10 pence for a dozen". Along with the printed page which I could look at when I was examining stamps, the prospective collector can use the extremely comprehensive online guide which is a resource provided by Tobias Zywietz (http://www.zobbel.de/stamp/pal_ine.htm) which describes all the issues from 1918 to 1948 in reasonable detail. Together the basic catalogue and the webpages mean that the apprentice Palestine philatelist is very well served - far better than a starter or learner collector for the majority of countries.

My aims in creating a collection were to learn about the issues of Palestine by creating a brand new collection, to enjoy myself as I did so, and not to spend a great deal. My first rule for this experiment was to keep within a budget of £50 to £60 (at the time, \$80 to \$90 or 60 to 70 Euros).

How to acquire some stamps? I have been buying on eBay for many years, and so it was natural to turn to this source. To find stamps, I went to the auction site and searched using the term (palest*, palast*) in stamp auctions which meant that I could find material described in English and other languages. Then I set myself down some further rules about the lots.

First, I was not going to trust any vendor who used the word "rare" in the description. (eBay tells sellers "Don't make false or misleading claims of sales scarcity, value, condition or investment potential" but this advice is ignored very widely.) Very quickly, I found vendors selling one stamp from the 1927 pictorial issue (catalogue value 10 pence) as "rare" with a starting price of 99 pence or 99 cents.

Second, I was going to factor in the cost of postage in my assessment of whether to bid or not. Some vendors were greedy in this respect. The worst that I discovered was an Italian vendor who

charged 2 Euro for postage within Italy, and 18 Euro outside. As noted below, the charges that I actually paid were varied.

Third, I wanted to enjoy the “Learning experience” so was going to buy mixed lots rather than complete sets. Buying anything described as a “Set” carries the implication that it could be placed straight onto album pages without being studied or investigated. It would be a little like the collector on the cover of that paperback book. But I wanted to see the stamps that I was buying, so only bid on lots which illustrated all the stamps clearly. Additionally, with regard to Palestine, I only chose lots which offered a mix of pictorial (post 1927) and earlier issues (1918-1927). The catalogue descriptions implied that the earlier issues were more “interesting” and would provide fodder for the aim of learning. Users of eBay have written articles giving advice to new bidders. Some of these guides to buying stamps on eBay assert that every mixed lot or collection is certain to have been examined by an expert before being offered for auction; if this has been the case for mixed lots of Palestine, then the “expert” has minimal expertise.

Fourth, related to the above, I chose not to concentrate on either mint or used stamps. So the lots I bid for were mixed in this respect as well as in age.

Finally, I was going to sort my stamps into a stock book, before deciding what to do with my acquisitions. So I didn't include the cost of an album in my budget. I could have bought a simple stock book on eBay for £4 including postage, but used an old one from home.

As the majority of lots on the auction site are placed there for seven days, I looked for items once a week for five weeks. When I found an interesting lot, I used the catalogue price guide to assess what sort of value of bid to place. There is a very simple rule that seems to apply to lots with the earlier issues, which is that as the number of different stamps increases, then the value increases even faster. (Economists and scientists would call this a non linear relationship, the reverse of economies of scale.) So I would expect a lot with ten different overprinted stamps to sell for three or four times the price of one with five. Then one with twenty different overprinted stamps might sell for ten times as much as that price for the lot with five. I didn't bid in the first week; I watched to look at selling prices, gaining experience. Except in one case, when I placed a bid, that was the last time I looked at the lot until the closing date. As another eBay guide comments “There will generally be a similar lot along within a few days”.



Figure 1: a lot bought on eBay for 6.20 Euro, including postage

With the self-imposed budget, it was natural that my focus should be on lots selling in the range £5 to £15. Less than this, and postage would dominate; more than this, and it would be easy to burst the budget. I ended up with six lots, one of which is illustrated in Figure 1, in the form that it appeared in eBay.

That in Figure 1 was the only one priced in Euros; the remainder were priced in US Dollars, irrespective of what country the vendor came from. The lots cost \$11.51, \$12.50, \$12.99, \$20.52, \$22.70 and 6.20 Euros, including postage. The total expenditure of £56 was within my budget. I bid on several other lots which I lost, sometimes as the under-bidder - but eBay doesn't show how high the winner was prepared to go. For one of the "expensive" lots, my initial bid was quickly overtaken, and I wondered what made it interesting to someone else. That was the only lot that I returned to, and I noted that there were several stamps with a high face and catalogue value and so decided to increase my starting bid to \$25, with the aim of including such material - and that bid was enough to win. One lot was posted on album pages, but the others were sent loose in packets.

The stamps were generally in good condition, although a few had heavy hinge remains, or were still on scraps of envelope. Apart from those which were on album pages, the stamps were not identified, and those on pages were sometimes haphazardly placed on the page. There were several stamps that were not Mandate Palestine; two with Transjordan overprints on the 1918 issue of EEF stamps, three recent used stamps from the PNA, ten Jordanian stamps overprinted for Palestine, eighteen Egyptian ones for Gaza. Hopefully a beginner would be able to recognise that these were not from Palestine itself. Tobias Zywiets's webpage illustrates the Transjordanian issue.

Having removed these other stamps, it was time to sort those which were relevant. Simply by looking at them, without using the catalogue, I could arrange them into five heaps. First, early issues without overprints. Then, those with overprints with serifs (the Jerusalem overprints). Third, those whose overprints were sans-serif (the London overprints). Next, the biggest heap, the pictorial issues. Last, a small selection of postage dues. Two stamps and one odd item didn't fit this five-way division; the stamps were identifiable as revenues, not listed in the stamp catalogue. The odd item looked like a stamp on airmail paper, and a search through the website showed that it came from an aerogramme, which had been cut out and treated by a collector as a stamp.

The pictorial issue.

Sorting the pictorial issue is quite easy. The values are clearly marked, and the colours are clear. As a first time collector, I needed the online list to show which stamps come from the 1927 issue and which from the 1932 or 1942 issue. Once I had completed the sorting, I found that my purchasing had provided me with at least one used copy of each stamp except two, the 90m (SG 101 from 1927) and the 250m (SG 109 from 1942). One used stamp, a 3m, was perfined with the letters A.P.C.. The reference sources that I had used so far did not give an explanation of this, but there had been one lot on eBay of three stamps with these perfined initials, so this learner had noted that such stamps existed. As these had carried a substantial premium price at auction, this stamp was a bonus. A second used stamp had a portion of the stamp margin attached, with the digit "1". Further assessment of the importance of this is clearly a matter for a more advanced collector than the newcomer. There were mint examples of eight different stamps. Among the mint stamps, there were two blocks of four. The perfined stamp and the

marginal one are shown in Figure 2, and the basic collection in Figure 3, where the mint stamps precede the used ones of the same issue date.



Figure 2: Two oddments from the pictorial issue. A stamp perfined and one with a part of the sheet margin

Figure 3: The stamps from the pictorial issue acquired in the six lots, with duplicates removed. Mint stamps precede the used stamps of each issue

Postage Due and Revenue Issues.



Figure 4: The purchases included four examples of the First Postage Due issue, a mint and a used copy of the 10m Revenue stamp.

It is very easy to identify examples of the First Postage Dues. Philatelists have commented that the five values in the set are among the crudest issues of the twentieth century. The examples

(in Figure 4) which came in the auction lots show that the stamps are poorly centred, and of different sizes. Alongside them are the mint and used examples of the stamp labelled “Revenue” which is not listed in the basic lists used.

The catalogues identify the later Postage Due issues which can be sorted according to their colour. In my lots, there were the two lowest values of the Second Postage Dues (mint) and all but the 2m value of the Third Postage Due (also mint). There were also two used stamps from the latter set (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Second and Third Postage Due stamps

The 1918 issues (lithographed and typographed).

As a novice, I was not surprised that there were no copies of the 1 piastre indigo stamp, the first issue of Palestine, issued in 1918. One had been on eBay during the weeks of observation, and there had also been one lot which claimed that it included a copy, but illustrated examples of the later ultramarine stamp of the same design. (Caveat emptor!) My assortment of stamps included five examples of the 1 piastre ultramarine, one of which was marginal and mint. There were also three examples of the overprinted stamp (5 milliemes) and Figure 6 shows a collectable quartet of these lithographed stamps, the later “Blues”, each one mint and used.

The one lot for which I had rebid after seeing its popularity provided a complete mint set of the typographed stamps from 1918. The stamps of this set are straightforward to identify and were plentiful. Six copies of the 1m, eight of the 2m and a block of 4, seven of the 3m, five of the 4m, nine of the 5m, and the same number of the 1 piastre. Of the higher values, there were duplicates of the 2 piastre and 5 piastre. One mint stamp came with a part of the sheet margin, with the number 49 written there in pencil. (Figure 7. Using more detailed reference material would identify that the 49th stamp in the sheet has a known plate variety. It is an easy variety to see with the naked eye.)

The guide to this issue online illustrates the use of the stamps outside Palestine with postmarks from the Ottoman period of occupation. It also refers to, and illustrates, the issue of some of the set with rough perforations. The roughness is another easy feature to identify without the need for a magnifier, and my lots included a few instances of this recurrent feature. The block of four stamps carries a postmark from “ALEP” which can be identified as Aleppo in modern Syria.



Figure 6: Collectable stamps from the later "Blues"



Figure 7: 5 piastre position 49 identified, with dot beside "5"



Figure 8: Block of four of 2 Millieme stamp used in Aleppo.



Figure 9: The 1918 Typographed set, mint

The Aleppo postmark is shown in Figure 8, and the mint set in Figure 9. Postmarks on the used stamps were generally indistinct, although some letters could be read in a few cases. One had the letters "T.A.E.E." (identifiable as an Army post office) and another the letters "QUIE" from an Ottoman office. However, none of the resources used had lists of postmarks, so the learner would need further advice about identifying postmarks from fragments.

The Jerusalem overprints (seriffed)

Tobias Zywietz, in his online guide, offers an "Easy Sorting Guide to the Palestine Mandate Overprints" which is sufficiently detailed to allow nearly all of the basic stamps to be identified by eye or with a small magnifier. My purchases provided me with an assortment of 32 stamps with seriffed overprints from the three issues overprinted in Jerusalem. As soon as I had found one where the Arabic was clearly shorter than on another, I had the key to separating the first overprint (Jerusalem 1) from the later ones. In my case, the stamps divided almost half and half between the first overprint and the other three. I looked in vain for any stamps of the "Narrow Setting" which should be recognizable with the naked eye if one has a normal example to compare it with. Then I used the "Easy Sorting" to separate the second and third local overprints, leaving me with the following stamps:

Jerusalem 1: 1millieme (1 mint, 3 used), 2m(1 mint), 3m (1 mint), 4m (1 mint, 1 used), 5m (1 mint, perf 15x14), 1 piastre (5 used).

Jerusalem 2: 1m (1 mint), 2m (1 used), 5m (1 used), 1p (1 used, perf 14).

Jerusalem 3: 1m (2 used), 3m (6 used), 4m (1 used), 5m (2 used), 1p (2 used), 5p (1 used).

There are perforation differences noted in the catalogue and guide, and the “Easy Sorting” instructions show that these can be identified without a gauge or magnifier, because the stamps have either 14 or 15 teeth in the perforation at top or bottom. So, once you know the perforation on one stamp, you can compare it with every other one to see if it matches or differs by one tooth!

Given the catalogue prices (even in 1995) for any stamp with face value of 2 piastres or more, it is not surprising that there was only one such stamp in the assortment that I had bought. Nonetheless, the variety of 18 examples (counting mint and used as distinct) is a good basis for expansion and further study (see later in this article).

The London overprints (sans-serif)

The final assortment to be sorted was comparable in size to the assortment of pictorials. As I had deliberately selected to bid on eBay for lots which mixed pre 1927 issues with pictorials, it was not surprising that I should have acquired numerous stamps from the two sets overprinted in London. What was surprising was that most of these were used; perhaps I was unlucky, or perhaps the mint stamps from this era do not appear in assortments to the same extent as do mint copies of other issues.



Figure 10:
APC perfin
on London 2

My second surprise was that I had gained two perfined stamps from this issue. One is shown in Figure 10. Again, from having looked at the sales on eBay, such stamps carry a premium even greater than that for the pictorial issue.

Of the London 1 overprint, I had acquired at least two used examples of all the values from 1 millieme to 5 piastres. The catalogue prices and the details on the website of the number of stamps printed showed that the remaining values were extremely scarce. Similarly, many of the high values of London 2 overprints, with the new colours and printing, are scarce. Ignoring perforation varieties, I had examples of all values except the highest (20 piastres), used, with a couple of mint copies. The postmarks on both issues were generally quite heavy, so that not all the stamps were really collectable. Maybe this is a warning for another beginner, to spend more time looking at the quality of the postmarks on mixed lots.

Postmarks

I have noted occasionally that there were legible postmarks on some of the stamps. The majority of these came from the major cities of Palestine, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv/Jaffa and Haifa. There were some where the legible text showed that the stamp had been used on registered mail, or on a parcel. A few other marks were legible, and I noted some from Safed and Lydda. Further research identified two partial handstamps as coming from the Haifa-Kantara T.P.O. and Hadar Hacarmel in Haifa. (Figure 11)



Figure 11:
HADAR
HACARMEL
postmark

What next?

For my modest outlay, I have acquired a wide-ranging collection of the stamps of Palestine from the first year's issues through to the end. I have learnt to recognise the different issues and have

started to be able to separate the five issues with overprints. There are plenty of gaps. From ignorance, I have progressed to a basic knowledge; in American educational terms, I have passed my examination in PALESTINECOLLECTING101.

Where next? Having started the collection, how might it be developed without breaking the bank? I suggest that there are three ways.

Extending the basic collection. Obviously, there are many gaps in this starter collection. With patience, and time, and regular scrutiny of the lots on eBay, it will be possible to fill some of these gaps by repeating the same process of buying mixed accumulations. Such a solution to the question of what next would not require further literature in the short run. In the process, one would gain yet more duplicates of the more common issues; perhaps the solution would be to create ones own mixed lots for sale on eBay.

Specialising in one or more of the issues. Expansion and further study of one issue is perhaps the way that most collectors of Palestine have progressed. A decision about which issue or issues would be of greatest interest would be a personal preference, but the collection that has been created in this experiment might help the novice to proceed. The London overprints and Jerusalem 1 were plentiful; so were pictorials, and, to some extent the 1918 typographed issue. However, the next stage in specialisation in any of these issues would be helped by the purchase of detailed literature, perforation gauge and a quality magnifier. Perhaps, one day, some of the detailed literature will be available online.

Collecting postmarks. Used stamps provide a low cost way of acquiring examples of the various postmarks used in the thirty years of Palestine's postal history. It isn't ideal, because most postmarks are illegible. However, low-cost bulk lots of stamps would provide material for developing a collection to show the variety and spread of the postal service in the country. Further literature would be needed to index and catalogue the postmarks and postal markings that are found on stamps. Again, some day, this may be provided online.

Conclusion and References

This article has been written to encourage new collectors, by showing that it is possible to "get into" the philately of Palestine without difficulty and without taking out a mortgage to afford material. It may be copied freely by other journals, or a PDF copy obtained from the Holyland Philatelic Society.

I have mentioned more specialised literature. The books that I now refer to most frequently are:
Bale Catalogue: The stamps of Palestine Mandate; (various editions)
The Postal Markings of Mandate Palestine (1917-1948) by Michael Sacher (1995) [London, The Royal Philatelic Society, ISBN 0 900631 30 9]
The Postage Stamps of Palestine 1918-1949 by David Dorfman (1989)
Handbook of Holy Land Philately Part 1 (1918-1st July 1920) by Werner Hoexter (1970)