



PHILATELY II. POSTAL HISTORY

The postal service is a government institution whose very nature entails facilitating communication among its citizens, and between its citizens and those living in other countries. As such, in times of national upheaval or crisis, postal matter inevitably get caught up in the movement of information associated with that situation as well as the authorities' attempts to control it. Because the years 1906-25 stand out as being a particularly dramatic period in modern Persian history, the Persian postal service frequently became enmeshed in the political upheavals of that era. To stop the spread of certain information, postal matter were, at times, strictly controlled. Not all mail was opened, but special attention was paid to particular senders and addressees. To legitimize censorship, special censor marks were applied on envelopes.

Systematic control of mail was first initiated by the government in major cities in western Iran during the [Constitutional Revolution](#). During the period of upheaval in Iran leading up to and following World War I, the practice of censorship was re-introduced to the Persian mail system, albeit now by several parties across most parts of Iran. In December 1915, Neẓām-al-Salṭana Reẓāqoli Khan, governor of Lorestān, initiated contact with the Germans for aid in building up a military force (Bast, tr., p. 55). Soon this National Force controlled the major cities of western Persia, such as Hamadān, and introduced military rule and censorship of all postal matter (Amarlou, p. 52; [Figure 1](#)). The Russian army received new military reinforcements and



reestablished control (Bast, tr., p. 55; Sepehr, p. 112). This included the censoring of all postal matter (Amarloui, p. 53; [Figure 2](#)). The Turkish government reacted to the Russian military actions by sending their army to the border. Kermānšāh fell to the Turks in June 1916 and Hamadān in August of the same year (Bast, tr., p. 61). Turkish forces imposed a strict form of censorship on all postal matter (Amarloui, pp. 69-71; [Figure 3](#)). Neẓām-al-Saltāna returned to Kermānšāh and established the Provisional National Government in August 1916 (Bast, tr. p. 63, Bahār, p. 22). Meanwhile, in southern Persia, the British occupied Bušehr in August 1915, and enforced martial law (Sepehr, p. 196; Amarloui, 83). There they came into armed conflict with tribes and rebel groups occupying the land around the city. This conflict lasted many years. Both the British and the various rebel groups censored all mail from this part of the country (Amarloui, pp. 92,107; [Figure 4](#)).

After World War I, the political and military upheaval in Persia continued. By the latter half of 1918, Dunsterforce and Norperforce, two British-led military contingents, were operating in west and northwest Persia respectively. They assumed political control of this area, and censored all postal matter (Amarloui, pp. 119, 129; [Figure 5](#)). The British crafted the provisional [Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919](#), which sparked immediate popular protests and was rejected by the Persian parliament. In response, the Persian Civil Service took control over local administrations and continued the censorship of all postal matter (idem, p. 159; [Figure 6](#)). Many local resistance groups formed during 1920-24 (see, e.g., [JANGALI MOVEMENT](#)) periodically controlled all political activities in their spheres of influence, including the censorship of mail (idem, p. 174; [Figure 7](#)). By now, there was widespread discontent with Qajar rule. Various pro-Republic groups moved to western Persia, taking over some city administrations, and censoring the mail (idem, p. 206; [Figure 8](#)). The military finally enforced martial law in the major cities and stopped all anti-government activities. They continued controlling and censoring mail. However, as the accession of Reza Shah Pahlavi ended two decades of chaos and instability, the practice of censoring postal matter stopped as well.

There was one final, brief period of postal censorship during World War II, when the Soviet Union and Britain occupied Persia, and in this capacity, censored all postal matter. When mail was opened before delivery, it was usually resealed with a censor label printed in English or Persian. Anglo-Soviet-Persian censorship marks are in two types with the words printed in English or Russian.



Considering the above historical context, postal censorship during 1910-25 might have been done under the authority of the local postmaster on behalf of the government, with 67 types of markings; by the foreign powers Britain, Russia, or Turkey, with 47 types of markings; or by rebel groups, with 27 types of markings. Altogether, more than 140 different controls or censor marks have been recorded from this period, many with color variations. During World War II, a total of 55 different censorship markings were used by the British and the Soviet Union.

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