

Japanese Occupation of Burma – Bird stamps or not - that is the question?

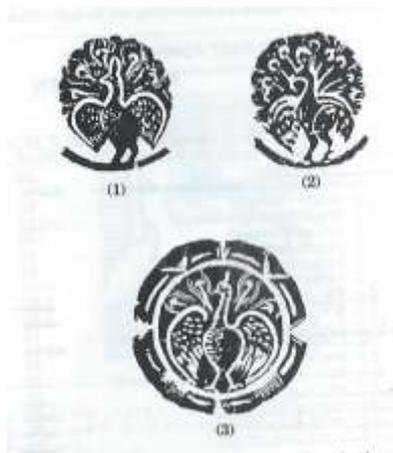


The Burma Independence Army formed by Aung San in 1941. Bogyoke Aung San; 13 February 1915 – 19 July 1947 served as the 5th Premier of the British Crown Colony of Burma from 1946 to 1947. Initially he was a communist and later a social democratic politician. Aung San was assassinated in 1947 and regarded as a hero who was instrumental in securing Burma's independence from Great Britain. Before World War II Aung San was actively anti-British; he then allied with the Japanese during World War II, but switched to the Allies before leading the Burmese drive for autonomy.

The Independence Army took control of the delta area of the Irrawaddy in May 1942. They re-opened a postal service in the area and were authorised by the Japanese to overprint local stocks of stamps with the Burmese emblem of a Peacock. Postage and Official stamps were used for ordinary postal purposes. The overprinting was often quite crude and haphazard; it is unlikely that anyone had any real philatelic knowledge and it is not known who was actually made responsible for applying the overprints.

Gibbons has a warning regarding these stamps as often forgeries have been found but forgeries are due to the wrong colour of overprint, dates that pre-date May 1942.

All the stamps that were overprinted were issued in 1942 and there were 7 x different overprints. The initial issues all had Black overprints and 3 x handstamps were used as follows:



The impressions are quite clear. The top row of stamps all have either Type 1, 2 or 3 overprints. The 4a stamp (top row 2nd from left) initially was overprinted in Red and later corrected to black. The 4a is the only known stamp from this issue that had a multiple overprint. Once the Red overprint had been corrected a 'double overprint' SGJ17a, 'double overprint both inverted, SGJ17b, 'overprint double one inverted' SGJ 17c and 'overprint double both inverted' (top row 2nd stamp from right) SGJ17d.

In all, 20 x Postage & Official stamps has these overprints, values ranging from 3p to 2r. All were overprinted at Myaungmya. The 1a purple-brown ordinary and official stamps were issued as Lithography and Typography printings and both had overprints applied. As far as I can determine the 1a (top row left hand stamp) is the Litho printing as the Typo has a jubilee line in the centre of the left margin. A copy of a Typo and Litho stamps from Jind is below.



Even without the Jubilee line the differences are quite distinctive (if you know what you are looking for).

Although I have 3 x used copies of stamps with this overprint the cancellations are such that there is no clear evidence from the postmarks that these stamps are genuine.

The next 3 x overprints are not as crisp and clear as Types 1 to 3 and are shown below:



4 x stamps were overprinted with the Type 4 that does not have a line under the legs of the peacock. These stamps were handstamped at Pyapon in black which was regarded as an 'experimental type'. The last 4 x stamps on the first scan are all Type 4 overprints. Their provenance is a little suspect as Gibbons does not record 'double overprints', 'overprinted missing in pair with normal' and 'inverted overprint' varieties for these stamps however I have contacted Hugh Jeffries at Gibbons and he is currently looking at the scans to determine if these are genuine. His initial response was that he thought that when compared to normal stamps they appeared genuine. I will send them to him for expertisation.

The 3 x handstamps are less clear and crisp when compared to the Types 1 to 3 overprints.

The remaining stamps in the scan are all Type 5 or 6 overprints with numerous varieties. These stamps were overprinted at Henzada. The overprints can be found in blue or blue-black. The stamp below has an inverted overprint on the front and an upright overprint on the gum side SGJ27b var. This has been expertised by Gibbons and will be included in future catalogues.



The final Overprint is Type 6a and only used on stamp SGJ44 which is the 8a Myrtle-green.



This stamp was issued in 1938-1940 and later issued with the SERVICE overprint as shown above (SG29 & SGO23).

The Japanese Occupation of Burma stamp was overprinted at Myaungmya and is a black overprint. There are 2 x version of this overprint. One has a base about 5mm long; the other has a base that is 8mm long and are found se-tenant in the sheet. A se-tenant pair therefore must have both lengths of overprint. The peacock are slight different in the neck. It is thought that this stamp was only used for Official use and was withdrawn when the Japanese Directorate-General took control of the Delta in August 1942.



So should these stamps be regarded as 'bird' stamps? I often shudder when Gibbons lists the Grenada Mickey Mouse riding on an Ostrich or the British Antarctic Territory 17p Penguins riding on a sledge as bird stamps yet does not recognise these very interesting Burmese stamps as bird stamps?! From a philatelic point of view the Burmese stamps are regarded as philatelic 'gems' whereas the other stamps may not be regarded in the same light.



There are no rules to dictate what people should or should not collect so I choose to include the Burmese Peacock-peasant Overprints as Bird stamps – would you?

Graham Horsman