

Synopsis:

The Postal Issues of Faisal II of Iraq 1939-1958

The Life & Death of a Young King

Introduction

This is an exhibit focused on Iraq philately during the reign of Faisal II. (Arabic: الملك فيصل الثاني, romanized: *al-Malik Fayṣal al-thānī*) (2 May 1935 – 14 July 1958). It is a highly personal exhibit as my wife's maternal grandfather was Faisal's last Prime Minister prior to and during the 1958 Revolution which ended Iraq's Hashemite Monarchy. My mother-in-law tells stories of pre-1958 Iraq and her father's service as a cabinet member and ultimately the last prime minister to serve under with King Faisal. Obviously, she is an ardent monarchist who recalls visiting members of the royal court when she was a child.

The expanse of the exhibit includes the postal history of Iraq during Faisal's reign which began in 1939. He was only three years old when he became king, so until 1953 Iraq was ruled by his uncle, the Prince Regent. The items in this exhibit took a little over five years to accumulate, and the information gathering and research was extensive. I was guided to certain references by Iraqi expats residing in Canada, and of course from my wife's family. I culled information from interviews with my mother-in-law and father-in-law who both knew King Faisal II personally.

Reading books on the history of Iraq, and in particular, biographies of Faisal, coupled with memories of my in-laws adds depth, I believe, to the exhibit. I also availed myself of philatelic internet resources and catalogues to identify the issue date and printing techniques used in production during this time. In particular, Robson Lowe's "*Iraq: The influence of Bradbury, Wilkinson & co., ltd on the postage, official and revenue stamps*" (June 1984) was insightful.

The exhibit covers the years 1939 to 1959 and includes overprints and defacement of monarchical stamps by the new republic after the coup..

Organization of the Exhibit

I decided to organize the exhibit chronologically beginning with the very first issues of Faisal's reign, when he was just a boy. The real power prior to (and many would say after) Faisal's coronation was his uncle, Prince 'Abd al-Ilah.

Following a chronological order allows the stamps to tell the turbulent history of Iraq: From WWII pro-Nazi insurgency to British counter-insurgence... to the rise of Arab nationalism and burgeoning influence of the Iraqi Communist Party... all are reflected in the philatelic history.

There are notes on the evolution of Faisal's reign, as they relate to particular stamps, i.e. one of Faisal's first official acts in approving the 1949 UPU Issue, to the circumstances which led to the Treaty Abrogation and Save Palestine overprints to lastly his defacement on Iraq's postage after the coup. Non-postal Official stamps are treated at the end of the exhibit.

The exhibit is dedicated to Ahmad Mukhtar Baban أحمد مختار بابان (1900–1976), and his daughter, Sasa Baban, and to the memory of pre-1958 Iraq.

An interesting story appeared in the online National News: *“When Iraqi army officers summoned the royal family into the courtyard of the Qasr Al Rihab palace in Baghdad in 1958, they believed they were ushering in a new era of freedom for Iraq. By murdering the last king of Iraq, Faisal II, and his relatives, they hoped to end British control over their country.*

Instead, they ushered in a tumultuous republic, one that lurched from crisis to coup, until the arrival of a 42-year old Baathist thug called Saddam Hussein managed to consolidate power.

Spend enough time among the exiles in London – that educated generation that had to flee the brutal Arab republics of Egypt, Iraq, Yemen and Syria – and it is clear that nostalgia for the past is rampant not merely among them but also among their children, few of whom remember the period.

Even today, young Iraqis – of a particular class, admittedly – still yearn for a period they know only through history and memory, a time before overt political repression and before religion had such a hold in the public arena. For them, Faisal II and the monarchical period represents a country they could easily imagine living in, an era far different from today's Iraq."

The exhibit is not an exhaustive display of every error or misprint. While it contains a couple of these, it does offer a fairly comprehensive display of postal issues and history under this young king.

Although extremely time consuming, I found assembling this exhibit to be a great joy.

References

Independent Iraq: The Monarch & British Influence 1941-1958 by Matthew Elliot. Published in London by I.B. TAURIS & Co. 1996

Iraq Postal History 1920s to 1940s by Douglas Armitrage and Robert I. Johnson. Published in London by Stuart Rossiter Trust 2009.

Iraq: The Influence of Bradbury Wilkinson & Co on the postage, official and revenue stamps.
Published by Robson Lowe at Christies. 1984

The Harry S. Truman Library Articles on Faysal II, King of Iraq, 1935-1958 | Harry S. Truman
(trumanlibrary.gov)

Rememberances and family stories of Sara Baban, daughter of Faisal's last prime Minsiter.