

French Mail Paquebot Far East Itineraries 1862 – 1880 (FEMSI Volume 2)

A description of my new book, titled as above, and published by the Hong Kong Philatelic Society, is provided below. This book is Volume 2 of Far East Mail Ship Itineraries (FEMSI), Vol. 1 of which concerned primarily the P&O. A presentation re. this book made to the Society of Postal Historians, and a related one prepared for the Hong Kong Study Circle meeting at London 2010, can be viewed at: <http://www.hongkongstudycircle.com/papers.html>.

During the 1860 - 1880 period there was extensive expansion of the Far East ocean mail service. In 1862 France began operation of a mail paquebot (packet) line to Hong Kong in direct competition with the British P&O line. The French Messageries Imperiales (MI) line was extended to Shanghai the next year, and a branch service to Yokohama was opened in 1865. The Messageries Imperiales became the Messageries Maritimes (MM) in 1871.

Raymond Salles' "bible" of French maritime postal history tomes are a major contribution to the body of postal history knowledge, but as in any research work, a few errors crept in. It appears that specific port call dates in Salles' route tables were sometimes scheduled dates vs. actual dates, or were otherwise inaccurate; e.g., conflicting port call dates on the same itinerary. The omission of some major Far Eastern port dates, such as Hong Kong, except during the early years of the MI service, left the record incomplete. The "bare bones" chronology was provided, but there was little "flesh" to bring the postal history to life.

FEMSI Volume 2 provides tabular itineraries of the French mail ship lines to, from, and within the Far East, 1862 – 1880. Comprehensive Oriental French paquebot itineraries between Hong Kong, Shanghai and Yokohama are detailed, and augmented by eastward and westward dates at Marseille for these voyages (many of the Marseille dates from Salles' Tome II). Some more limited information is included concerning the rest of the French line port calls between France and the Orient: Messina / Naples, Alexandria / Port Said, Suez, Aden, Galle / Colombo, Singapore, and Saigon.

Notes explaining and expanding upon the tabular itineraries are included, along with illustrations intended to relate postal history stories associated with these mail voyages. The illustrations include reproductions of excerpts from the contemporary newspapers, paintings and photographs of a few of the ships, and covers carried on the listed voyages. These covers were selected to illustrate some point(s) of postal history significance, e.g.: first voyages, unusual routings, problems encountered by the ships (e.g., wrecks and other mail delays), and other related points of interest.

Descriptions of the illustrations have been provided, to include, where appropriate: postal rates (which were closely tied to the mail routes during the period covered by this work), postal markings (often related to the specific mail lines and routes, particularly in the case of the French service), changes in postal administrations, their regulations, and their procedures, names of and information about postal and mail line officials, facts about the ship lines, and the vessels employed by those companies (e.g., ship construction details), and other related historical and postal history facts.

This 500+ page book has over 300 illustrations of covers, most in color, and other related postal history artifacts. The majority of the information in this book was derived primarily from original research employing microfilms of contemporary newspapers, although many details were borrowed from other authors, particularly Raymond Salles.

The ordering forms for this book and two of my earlier books are included herein, and can be downloaded from the following web sites:

<http://www.hkpsoc.com/webpages/news.htm> or <http://www.hongkongstudycircle.com>.