

## La grand cassure

As I have learned more about French stamps and the postal service in Algeria, I have found a few unexpected items in my collection. One of the more interesting printing flaws of the classical era (but probably the most common) is the great plate crack (*la grand cassure*) that occurred while printing the 25 centime Cérés stamp. As it turns out, those stamps were used in Algeria as well as in France.

The crack itself appeared above the bottom row of stamps on the sheet and also affected several stamps in the row above the last. Fortunately, André Suarnet studied all the classical era blue stamps and published his work.<sup>1</sup> He devotes 16 pages to *la grand cassure*, illustrating the states of damage and retouching.

The first of the two examples I have was clearly marked by someone who owned it in the past. The pencil notation refers to Suarnet as well as the crack itself. This is stamp 146 of the 150-stamp pane, first state of the plate crack, and the most obvious of all of them. It was this badly damaged before the printers attempted to repair the plate. Although used in Alger, the largest city in the country, it is still a nice find.

The second example was also used in Alger about seven months after my other example. One can see that the damage is less pronounced than the cover to Tarare. This is position 144 before it was repaired.

This cover didn't include a notation that it had a damaged stamp on it. As a result, I didn't notice the unusual stamp until I made a special tour through all the stamps in my exhibit looking for printing flaws or other unusual things to note. It was a find to come across this second example of *le grand cassure*.

So while this is a chance to show two unusual Algerian postal history items, it is also a lesson in studying one's collection. Suarnet started his book with his own remark: "La première vertu d'un philatelistes c'est la patience...."



<sup>1</sup> Suarnet, André, *Etude des Timbres-Postes dits LES BLUES de FRANCE 1849-1876*, Provins (1933).

