

Transjordan Stamps and the Elusive April–October 1923 Surcharges—A Personal Opinion

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Practically every country can boast a philatelic rarity of one form or another, but how many countries can boast a plethora of rarities, unique items, major errors, astonishing covers and what's more can give the philatelist a great chance that at some time in his or her collecting life they will discover something new and unrecorded. Well, the stamps of Transjordan are just the ticket. I can certainly vouch for this fact. I have been collecting the stamps of this country for nearly 30 years and have been able in that time to introduce several new finds into the Stanley Gibbons catalogue. Even today there are at least two more items I intend to present for inclusion.

Why were the stamps of Transjordan so rare and unpredictable?

In order to answer this question, one needs to look into the emergence of this country and the political history that surrounded it at the time. I am not a historian nor do I intend to bore you with too many historical facts, but suffice it to say that few people 'out there' in the early 1920s sent letters (this is why the stamps of that period are rare on cover). There was no postal administration as such, so the British political advisors organised the production of postage stamps for the territory in order to ensure that legitimate postal and fiscal dues were not lost. This resulted in the overprinting in Jerusalem of the then

current EEF stamps with the words 'East of the Jordan' in Arabic. These stamps were later to be surcharged and overprinted several times because of currency changes or commemorations, but invariably they were being regularly surcharged in order to replenish the continuing shortage of the main values required for both the inland and the international rate, the ½p. and 1p. values. The surcharging was done on an *ad hoc* basis and this resulted in the astounding array of rarities from this country. Here we look at my favourite of all the Transjordan issues, the April–October 1923 surcharges (SG 70/83).

A first glance at the catalogue would perhaps make the would-be collector put the book down and reach for a stiff drink, and understandably so, for two reasons; the first is that some of these stamps catalogue over £7000 and the second is that it looks as though one would need to be a mastermind to work them all out. Now this is where you should finish your drink and look at them again. A little bit of time spent studying the surcharges and the different issues they were applied to would pay dividends. Granted, some of these items are unique and others practically impossible to find, but several values catalogue under £100 and these are the ones to hunt for. Remember that less than 1000 copies were produced of the majority of these stamps.

Why did these stamps have such low print figures?

I am certain that this was due to the fact that in a large number of cases the post office officials reached for whatever block, pair or single they could find and surcharged it by hand with a steel die to give the new value required, usually ½p., 1p., or 2p. No terms of reference really existed then.

To show the rarity of these stamps I have compiled a list of the quantities printed, based on a variety of sources, including Ledger (L), Darlow (D) and Robson Lowe (RL). Where a discrepancy occurs between these previously published sources, all the figures are given. Figures marked (A) are an informed guess of my own where the print figures are unavailable, and this is based on what has appeared on the market over the past 40 years. It is possible that my figures may need to be adjusted upwards by a small margin. In general, however, I believe that they all reflect an accurate picture.

Perhaps when an official was distracted from handstamping the surcharge by a friendly chat or a cup of Arabic tea or coffee he would skip a stamp, giving collectors of today a pair with a surcharge omitted, or he may have handstamped it twice giving a double surcharge; as you find these errors in *se-tenant* strips or blocks. He may, on occasion, have picked up the die upside down, giving one or two stamps an inverted surcharge before realising his error and correcting it. These errors were of no importance to him then, as several values from this issue are known with the errors of surcharge used on cover.

Little did this official know what value he was putting on these items and how



Surcharge inverted

Pair showing double surcharge on first stamp





The following are the quantities printed of each stamp on an issue-by-issue basis.
(A remarkable display of rarity in stamps)

On surcharge November 1920 issue

70	2½/10th p. on 5m. Orange (perf 14)	200 (A)
70c	¼p. on 5m. Orange (perf 14)	25 (A)
70d	¼p. on 3m. Yellow-brown (perf 15×14)	Two known used
70e	2p. on 20p. Pale grey (perf 14)	One known

Surcharge on Stamps of Palestine

71	¼p. on 3m. Yellow-brown (perf 15×14)	6 (L)
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Surcharge on November 1922 Surcharge issue

72	¼p. on 3m. Yellow-brown	Black surcharge	2 (D)
73	¼p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Black surcharge	500 (L)
73b	¼p. on 9p. Ochre (perf 15×14)	Red surcharge	5 (A)
74	½p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Black surcharge	791 (L)
75	½p. on 9p. Ochre (perf 15×14)	Red surcharge	323 (L)
		Black surcharge	4-6
76	½p. on 9p. Ochre (perf 14)	Red surcharge	1 known used
77	1p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Black surcharge	480 (L, D)

Surcharge on December 1922 Overprints issue

78	¼p. on 3m. Yellow-brown	Red-purple & Violet	990 (L)
	(perf 15×14)		
79	¼p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Violet overprint	4500 (L, D)
79d	¼p. on 9p. Ochre (perf 15×14)	Violet & Black	24 (1 mint)
		(L)	
80	½p. on 2p. Olive (perf 15×14)	Red-purple, Violet & Black overprint	1073 in total (L)
81	½p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Violet	6 (D)
81a	½p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Red-purple	61 (D), 30 (L)
82	½p. on 5p. Purple (perf 14)	Red-purple overprint	3-4 (L)
83	1p. on 5p. Purple (perf 15×14)	Red-purple & Violet	10 (D), 20 (RL)
83c	1p. on 5p. Purple (perf 14)	Red-purple	2 or 3 (D)

Surcharge on 1 March 1923 Overprints issue

84	¼p. on 3m., Yellow-brown	Gold overprint	1000 incl Black (L)
	(perf 15×14)		
85	½p. on 9p. Ochre (perf 15×14)	Black overprint	12 (A)
		Black overprint	374 of both (L, D)
86	½p. on 9p. Ochre (perf 14)	Black overprint	perf 14 is scarcer
87	1p. on 10p. Ultramarine (perf 14)	Gold overprint	79 (L), 25 (RL)
		Black surcharge	4-6 (A)
88	2p. on 20p. Pale grey (perf 14)	Violet surcharge	746 incl Black (L)
		Gold overprint	
88A	2p. on 20p. Pale grey (perf 14)	Black overprint	12 (A)

Corner marginal block of 12 showing double surcharge on third stamp in top row and omitted surcharge on the fifth

much interest and excitement he would be arousing with the serious collector of Transjordan today.

Further details on this issue are available in the recently published book *The Stamps of Jordan—1920-1965* which is limited to 300 signed and numbered copies and is available from Stanley Gibbons at the price of £75.

Good luck with your hunting.

Block of four showing surcharge omitted on top right stamp

