

Malta Pre-Stamp Markings 1806-1857

Part 2 – Straightline ‘Paid’ Handstamps 1819-1843

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Introduction

This second article on Pre-stamp postal markings used at Malta continues a theme established in the first part that covered the Curved Box handstamps. It serves two purposes (1) a general review of the handstamps involved, with an update to previously published worksⁱ and (2) further information on the various fakes of Malta pre-stamp straightline markings on cover or entire that are now in circulation. The latter updates my article on the subject in *Melita*ⁱⁱ.

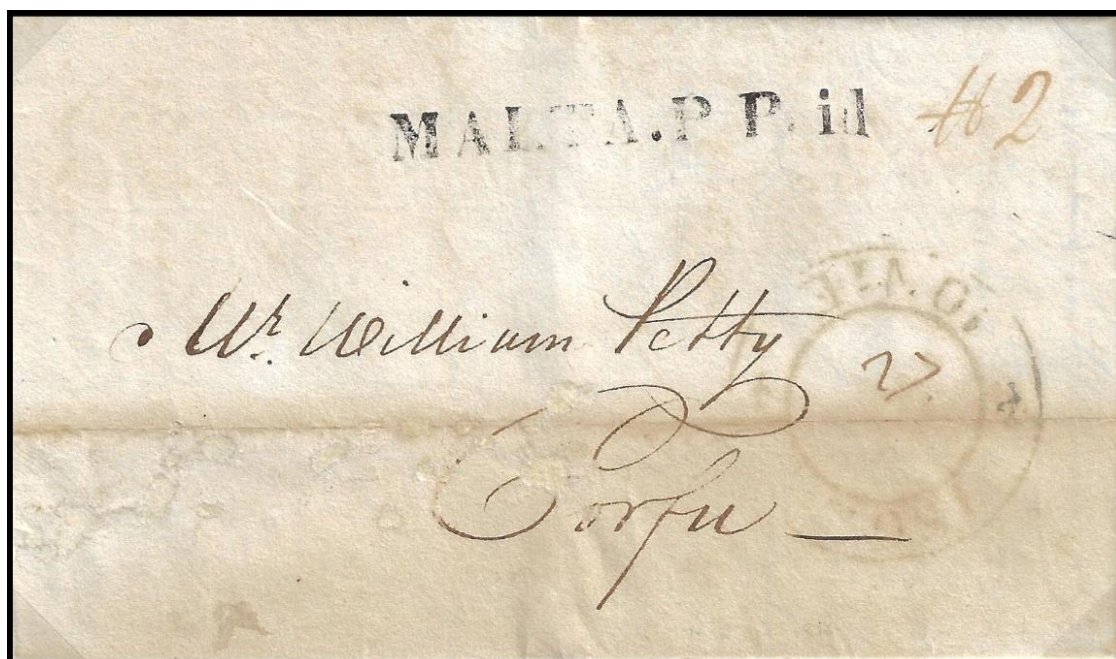
Straightline handstamps were first utilised in Malta for postal purposes in 1817 and thereafter continued in various configurations until 1849. Between 1819 and 1831, straightline handstamps were only used for prepaid mail and operated in parallel with their curved box equivalents. From 1834, straightline handstamps of various types were used for either unpaid or prepaid mail.

This article reviews the straightline ‘Paid’ handstamp types, which are listed chronologically from 1819 to 1843, with full size artwork (unless otherwise stated).

1819 - 1831 Straightline ‘MALTA P Paid’ and ‘MALTA P PAID’ Handstamps

The British Mediterranean Packet service was established by the Admiralty in 1806 during hostilities with Napoleonic France. After the wars ceased in 1815, the Ionian Islands became a British protectorate and there was pressure from the governor, Sir Thomas Maitland, to provide improved communications. This resulted in the first major change to the Mediterranean Packet service, which was extended from Malta to Corfu in April 1819. This service was notionally monthly from Falmouth, but the sailing ships’ arrivals were heavily influenced by weather conditions. Mail from Malta to Corfu was required to be prepaid and items destined for the British Packet were handstamped with curved box handstamps.

Additional sailings between Malta and Corfu were provided by other vesselsⁱⁱⁱ, usually drawn from ships of the Royal Navy based at Malta. A new straightline **MALTA.P Paid** handstamp was introduced in Malta for items of mail destined for these additional sailings, some of which preceded the first Admiralty packet service to Corfu. This was superseded during 1820 by a handstamp with the same legend, but with all letters in upper case and an asterisk as spacer.



1819 (Mar 20) Prepaid entire from Malta to Corfu with MPP-3a

MPP-3a / PD5

MALTA.P Paid

56.0 x 5.2 mm

Recorded Dates of Use

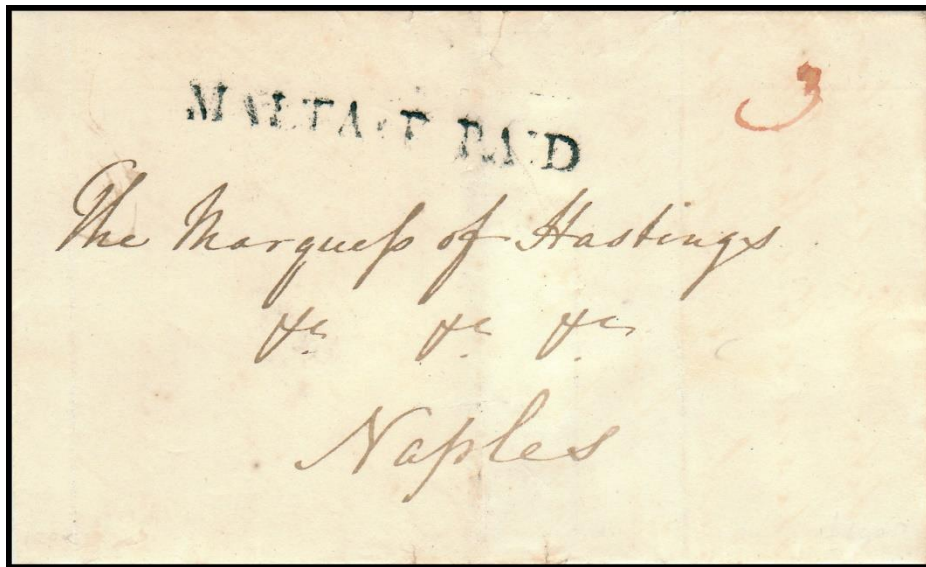
Earliest 06 FEB 1819

Latest 25 MAR 1820

Of interest is the similarity with handstamp type MLL (see Part 1). Although few examples of MLL or MPP-3a are recorded, their images show with reasonable confidence that the letters MALTA are the same in both handstamps. This infers that MPP-3a was constructed later using the letters from MLL.

Analysis of type MPP-3a on covers or entires shows slight variations in the handstamp settings over time. These include different spacing between P and Paid and the use (in 1820) of a comma instead of a full stop. These minor variations were probably introduced during cleaning and re-assembly.

MSC Study Paper 2 (1989 edition) allocates reference MPP-3b to a similar handstamp, but with an asterisk as spacer between MALTA*P Paid. One example has been reported^{iv}, maybe in error? However, as no images have been located, this is an area for further research.



1827 (Jan 15) Prepaid entire from Malta to Naples with MPP-1a, rated 3(d)

MPP-1a / PD6

MALTA*P PAID

52.0 x 4.7 mm

Recorded Dates of Use

Earliest 20 MAY 1820

Latest 15 NOV 1831

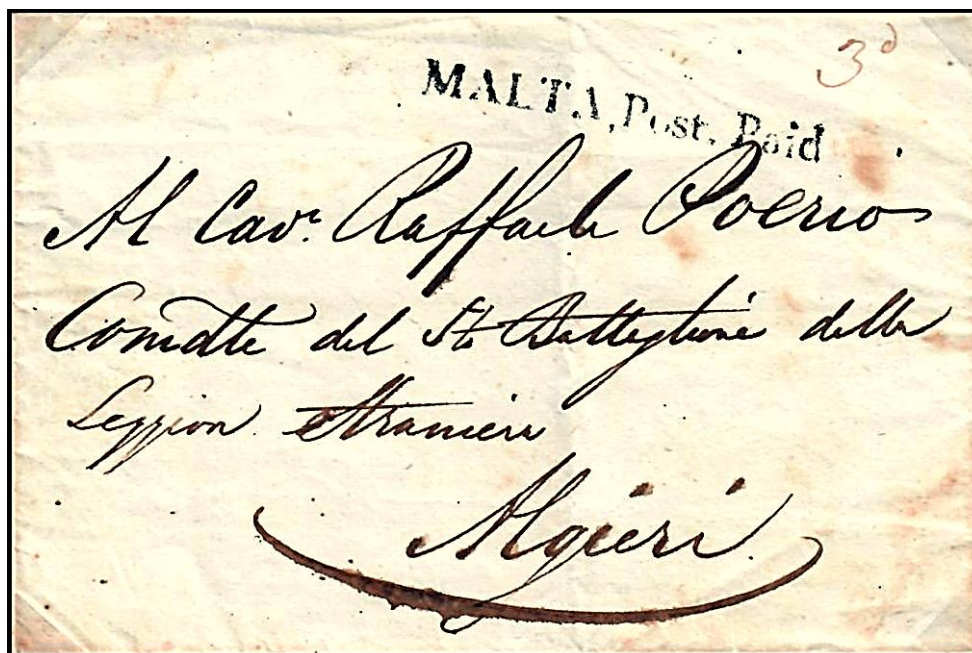
Handstamp type MPP-1a appears to have replaced type MPP-3a on non-British packet mail, while mail destined for British packet services continued to use curved box handstamps. Note that a different type set with smaller letters was used for MPP-1a, compared to MPP-3a.

MSC Study Paper 2 (1989 edition) allocates reference MPP-1b to a similar handstamp, but with a reduced length of 50mm^v. No examples of this have been seen or images located. Another area for further research?

1832 - 1836 Straightline 'MALTA Post Paid' Handstamp

This period, contained within the reign of William IV, is characterised by an overall reduction in prepaid mail recorded from Malta. Reasons for this reduction are not known, however the advent of British steam packets in 1830 and their faster journeys could explain why prepaid non-packet mail is particularly difficult to find.

During this period another style of Malta straightline handstamp was probably in use, although no dated covers are recorded. This new handstamp appears to use the same type set as MPP-1a. The letters used for MALTA are very similar in the two handstamps.



Undated prepaid entire from Malta to Algiers with MPP-4, rated 3d. Addressed to Raffaele Poerio, an Italian Commander with the French Foreign Legion based in Algiers between 1832 & 1835.

MPP-4 / PD7

MALTA, Post. Paid

53.5 x 4.7 mm

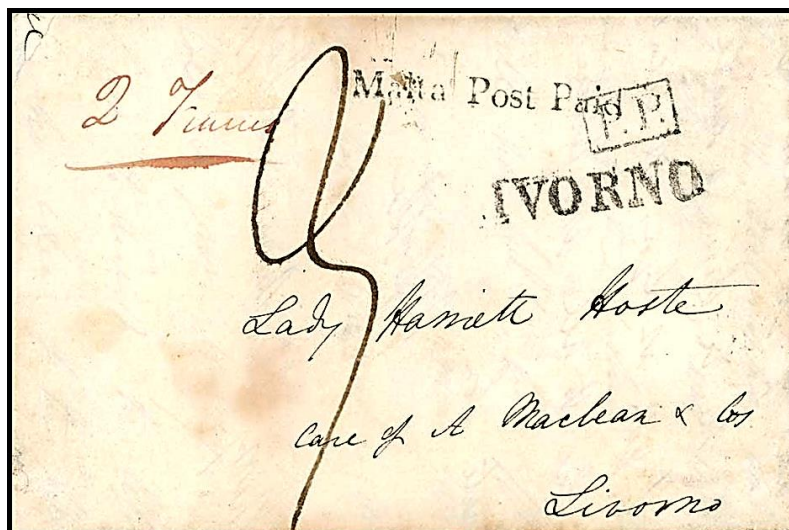
Recorded Dates of Use

Earliest	??
Latest	??

1837 - 1842 Straightline 'Malta Post Paid' Handstamps

The Victorian era saw an upsurge in shipping routes via Malta, particularly with the introduction in May 1837 of a French steam packet route from Marseilles to Constantinople (*la Ligne du Levant*). The French also provided a route to Egypt by connection at Syra with the Athens-Alexandria service. A French packet agency was simultaneously established in Valletta (Tristant 1983) which handled incoming and outgoing mail with the paquebots. This upsurge was reflected in increased mail volumes and yet again, a new style of straightline handstamp was introduced for prepaid non-British packet mail. This had the same legend and type set as MPP-4, but all of the **Malta Post Paid** words had lower case lettering and blank spacers.

Between 1837 and 1843, the *Ligne du Levant* provided Malta direct postal connections with the Italian ports of Naples, Civitavecchia (for Rome), and Livorno (for Genoa). Although Italian *pacchetti* operated in this period, there is no evidence of any regular services to Malta.



1838 (Jan 1) prepaid entire from Malta to Livorno with MPP-2c Setting 1. Rated 2 Francs – French paquebot double letter rate (up to Jun 38).

MPP-2c Setting 1/ PD8

Malta Post Paid

45.0 x 4.7 mm

Recorded Dates of Use

Earliest 17 DEC 1837

Latest 26 JAN 1839

During 1838, this handstamp was probably dismantled for cleaning and on re-assembly, the spacers were changed. Although the overall length remained the same, **Post** moved closer to **Malta**.



1840 (Nov 14) prepaid entire from Malta to Marseilles with MPP-2c Setting 2.
Rated 2F30 – French paquebot triple letter rate + 20c local delivery.
Note that this example shows lines from the handstamp frame.

MPP-2c Setting 2 / PD8

Malta Post Paid

45.0 x 4.7 mm

Recorded Dates of Use

Earliest 15 NOV 1838

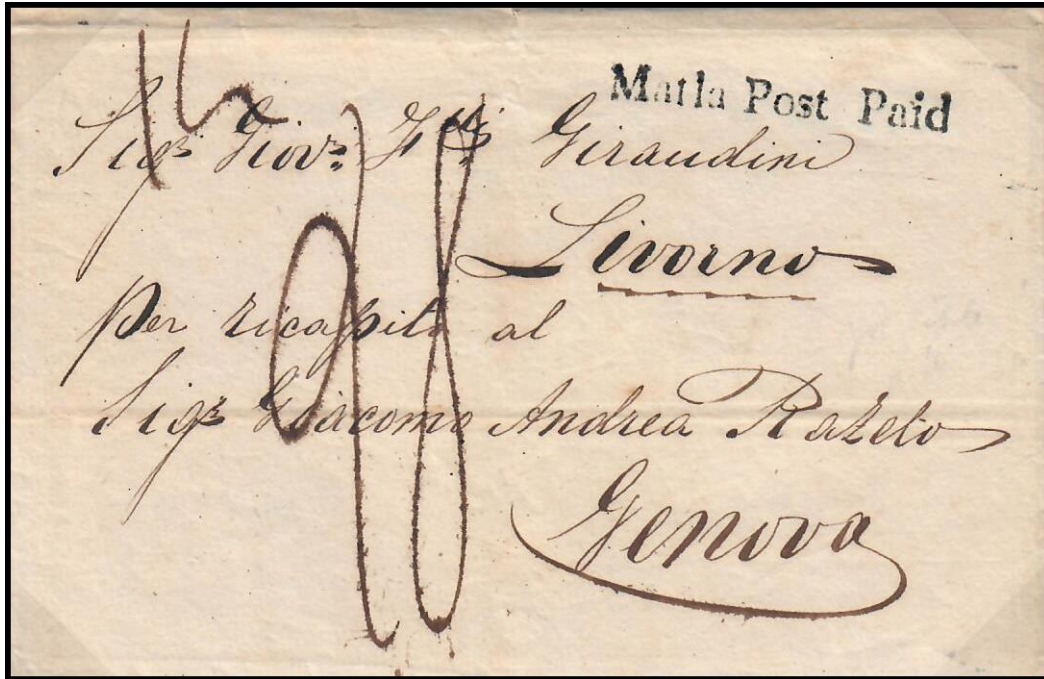
Latest 25 NOV 1842^{vi}

Some comments about MSC references MPP-2a and MPP-2b might be useful here. These refer to different length versions of MPP-2c (47mm & 50mm respectively), yet no illustrations of examples have emerged during this research. Their origin appears to be Robson Lowe's Encyclopaedia types HS3 and HS4 which are quoted with the same corresponding lengths and possessing horizontal bars above and below. Additionally, RL type HS5 is quoted as size 45 x 4½mm **without** horizontal bars.

As research now shows, the 'horizontal bars' are created by the handstamp frame, with the majority of examples showing some part of the rectangular frame. As all recorded examples are 45.0 x 4.7mm, it is considered that HS3/MPP-2a and HS4/MPP-2b do not exist, although it is very difficult to prove.

1839 'Matla' error

In early 1839, the Malta Post Paid (MPP-2c) handstamp was re-assembled after cleaning with two letters transposed, resulting in **Malta** reading **Matla**. The error is recorded between January and March 1839, after which it was corrected to MPP-2c Setting 2.



1839 (Feb 25) entire from Malta to Genoa, prepaid to Livorno with MPP-2c Matla error. Prior to 1848, French paquebot mail for Genoa was forwarded from Livorno. This 15g entire was charged 28 soldi on arrival in Genoa.

MPP-2c Matla error / PD8 State 2

Matla Post Paid

45.0 x 4.7 mm

Recorded Dates of Use

Earliest 04 JAN 1839

Latest 08 MAR 1839

Forgeries of the 'Matla' error

The **Matla** error is another handstamp that has received attention from the forgers, although with care, the offending items can usually be identified. All recorded fakes with a forged Matla handstamp are on genuine Sonnino correspondence to Alexandria. Most are undated or have dates outside the known period of correct usage. The forged handstamp is dimensionally accurate, but none of the fakes exhibit any additional postal or charge markings, which genuine items should carry.



Forged Matla handstamp

Features:

- 'over-inked' appearance
- 3 dots between Matla & Post (believed to be constant)



Shown twice full-size

Reference image for comparison

Between 1837 & 1841, Alexandria was served from Malta by the monthly British steam packet and the more frequent French service via Syra. This helps with identification of the fakes, as any prepaid mail sent by the British packet was handled by the Malta Packet Agency, where they only used a cursive box PAID MALTA handstamp (MSP-1b or MSP-1c). Prepaid mail sent using the French service (with MPP-2c) was endorsed with the Paquebots de la Méditerranée rate of 80(cents) or multiples thereof. On arrival at Alexandria, mail from the French service was handled by the French PO where a receiving datestamp was normally applied. Most of the general forgery identification information contained in Part 1^{vii} is also applicable to the Matla fakes.

1842-43 Straightline 'MALTA POST PAID' Handstamp

A new handstamp was introduced by December 1842 with MALTA POST PAID in 3mm high capital letters. It appears to have replaced MPP-2c, but had only a short life.



1843 (May 5) Prepaid entire from Malta to Marseilles

MPP-2d / PD9

MALTA POST PAID

43.0 x 3.0 mm

Recorded Dates of Use

Earliest 23 NOV 1842

Latest 06 JUN 1843

The earliest scan seen is an entire written in Tunis on 1 December 1842 and forwarded to Marseilles from Malta, where it received a strike of MPP-2d. Proud (1999) records earlier (23.11.42) and later (25.11.43) items, but no illustrations or other information on these have emerged during this research. The former is assumed to be correct, but the latter needs further investigation.

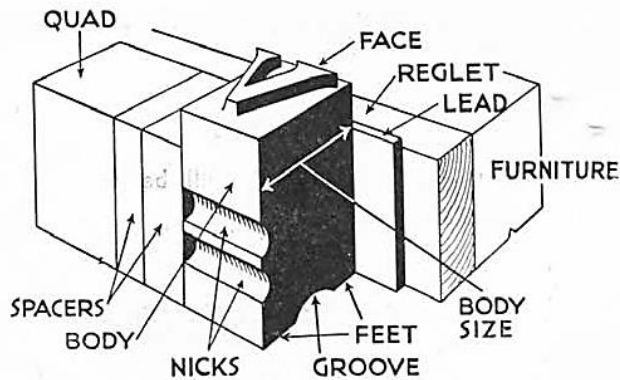
It would appear that after the 1843 Anglo-French Postal Convention was signed, responsibility for all prepaid mail using British or French packets from Malta was consolidated at the British Packet Office from June 1843. This probably explains the rapid demise of MPP-2d.

Straightline Handstamp Construction Technique

Research has shown beyond reasonable doubt that many, if not all, of the straightline handstamps were constructed from individual cast letters and spacers held in a frame, in a similar manner to contemporary letterpress printing. These handstamps appear to have been dismantled occasionally for cleaning and re-assembly can sometimes introduce variations in the handstamp appearance. Usually these are minor differences in overall length caused by variability in letter body and spacer widths, but in at least one instance, letters were placed in the wrong order – **Malta** was mis-spelt **Matla**. A diagram of modern letterpress typesetting illustrates the handstamp assembly principles used in Malta.

This technique was also used for the Delivery Charge Markings employed by the Island Post Office. The latter have been researched by Dr. Giovanni Bonello (1986)^{viii}. The metal type set is believed to have been borrowed from the Government Printing Office and to originate from the Grand Masters' printing press. Use of the same type set and employment on outgoing non-British packet mail suggests the Malta straightline handstamps may have also been located at the Island Post Office.

Letterpress Typesetting



Letterpress Type and Spacer General Arrangement

Examples of Type Variations

Malta Post Office

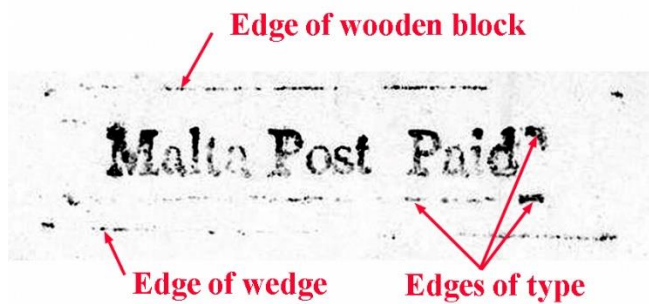
MPO-1 Setting 1 (47.5 x 4.7mm)
Narrow type in Malta and narrow spacer between Malta & Post.

Malta Post Office

MPO-1 Setting 2 (50.5 x 4.7mm)
The broader appearance of Malta can be seen compared to Setting 1.

Straightline Handstamp 'Frames'

Portions of the so-called frames appear in many examples of covers and entires with straightline handstamps. Dr. Bonello (1986) suggests that the handstamp may have been pressed using a levered device. It is known that levered devices with a frame (or chase) holding the type were used during the 1800's and letterpress assembly techniques would produce the types of 'frame' markings in question.



An 1842 example showing 'frame' lines



Lower edge of type

Typical letter



Typical Victorian-era levered device

Detail view (right) shows cast iron frame (or chase)



The assembled type had to be locked into the frame (or chase as it is known in letterpress terms). This was achieved using wooden blocks with pairs of wedges to carry out the final adjustment. It is considered that these wooden blocks and wedges are the source of the 'outer' frame lines, with the lower part of the type body creating horizontal marks below individual letters and spacers.

It is not absolutely certain a levered device was used; however, a manual letterpress handstamp would be constructed using the same technique and give similar results. It is quite possible that a simpler manual handstamp was used for type MPP-2d in any case.

1834-49 Straightline 'MALTA POST OFFICE' Handstamps

These will be covered in a separate article (Part III), hopefully to follow soon.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks to Roger Bower in Australia, who has checked his Malta database for items of relevance. Thanks also to MSC members Alan Bannister and Tony Camilleri for their comments and information.

The many auction houses that freely advertise their sales with illustrations that are increasingly useful to potential purchasers and researchers alike.

Bibliography:

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- Ganado, Albert Dr. The Growth of the Malta General Post Office 1802 – 1886 (Philatelic Society of Malta Magazine Vol.15 No.3 December 1986)
- Malta Study Circle Malta – The Stamps and Postal History 1576-1960 (published by Robson Lowe, London 1980) ISBN 0 85397 123 4
- Malta Study Circle Study Paper 2 – Malta Post Office 1806 – 1885 (published 1989)
- Proud, Edward B. The Postal History of Malta (1999) ISBN 1 872465 31 5
- Robson Lowe Encyclopaedia of British Empire Postage Stamps 1661-1947 – Volume 1 – Great Britain and The Empire in Europe (published by Robson Lowe, London 1952)
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At the time of writing, the latter could be downloaded from the internet with URL www.philatelicsannex.org/reference/letter_rates_v1-1.PDF)
- Tristant, Henri Franco-Maltese Postal Relations from their Origins until 1870 (E.Said, Malta 1983)

References

- i MSC Handbook (1980), MSC Study Paper 2 *Malta Post Office 1806-1885* (1989 edition) and *Postal History of Malta* (Proud 1999)
- ii *Melita* Vol.17-3 (Spring 2010)
- iii Ship's names endorsed on covers & entires include HMS *Dispatch*, HMS *Express*, HMS *Larne*, HMS *Scout*, HMS *Superb*.
- iv Malta Newsletter Vol.10 No.4 p51 records an 1819 item addressed to Corfu sold at J. Kunz auction in Vienna 25-27 May 1981 (lot 1348) with handstamp MALTA*P Paid and endorsed p.Manchester. It is believed this is the source for MPP-3b and although illustrated in the auction catalogue, no image has been located by the current author. An image of an 1819 cover to Corfu endorsed p.Manchester has been found, but bears an example of MPP-3a. Accordingly, the 1981 report may be in error, but as it is currently unresolved, it remains an area for further research and checking.
- v Seventeen entires and covers with images have been seen, with dates of use spanning 1820-1831. All those examined have 52 x 4.7mm handstamps. It is believed that SP2 has slightly inaccurate handstamp measurements for MPP-1a/MPP-1b, which should be replaced by those in this article
- vi An example of MPP-2c used in 1850 to Alexandria has been reported (ex-Abramson lot 745, Camillery lot 169). This post-dates the merger of the Island Post Office with the British Packet Office in 1849, after which no straightline handstamps are recorded. The date is therefore suspect and further information is needed.
- vii *Melita* Vol.20-1 (Spring 2018) pages 9 &10
- viii The Delivery Charge Marks 1816 – 1849 (PSM Magazine, Vol.15 No.1, March 1986)