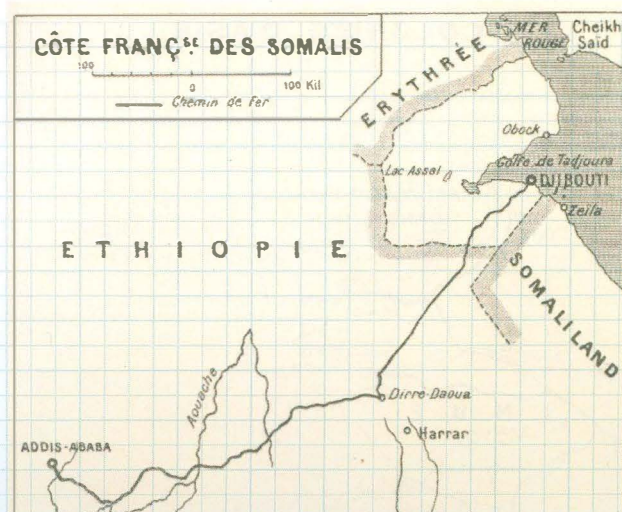


## THE ERA OF THE FRENCH COLONIAL GROUP TYPE: OBOCK

Obock was a small port located on the north side of the Gulf of Tadjoura in what became the French Protectorate of Djibouti and then the colony of the French Somali Coast. It was the first French Colony established in the area of the Gulf of Aden in the 1860's. Its principal purpose was to serve as an independent French coaling station for French ships transiting the Suez Canal. Because of an exposed anchorage, the Colonial Administration and port were transferred across the Gulf of Tadjoura in 1894 to Djibouti resulting in a severe decline in the importance of Obock. Obock received its Group Type stamps in December 1892, and they were used throughout the area until about 1910. Low value Obock Group Type stamps (1c, 2c and 5c) were overprinted in 1893 for provisional use in Djibouti until the arrival of its new pictorial issues.



**Earliest Recorded Group Type Use  
From Any French Colony  
December 11, 1892**



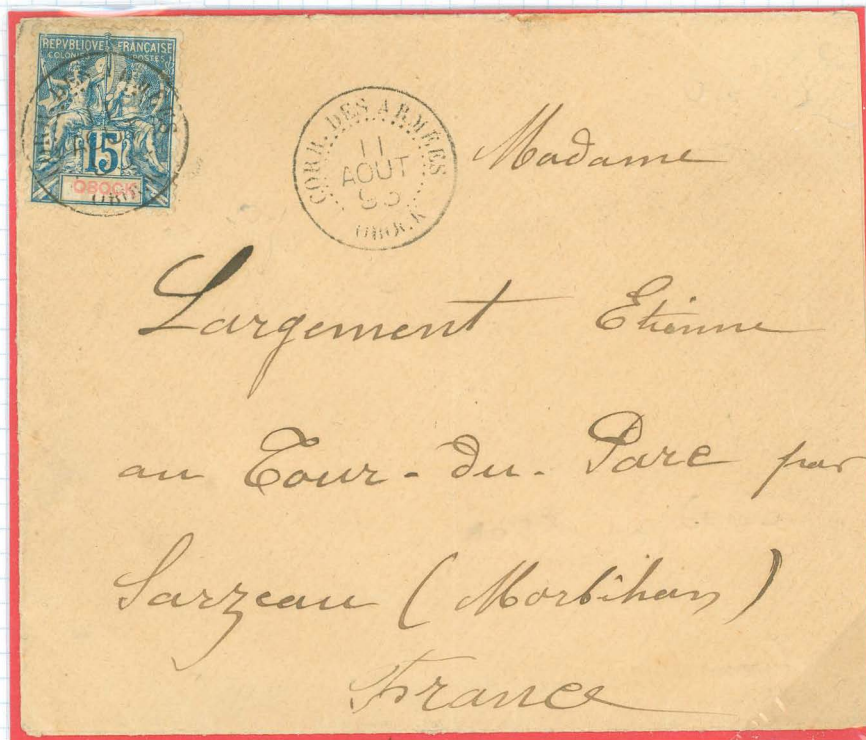
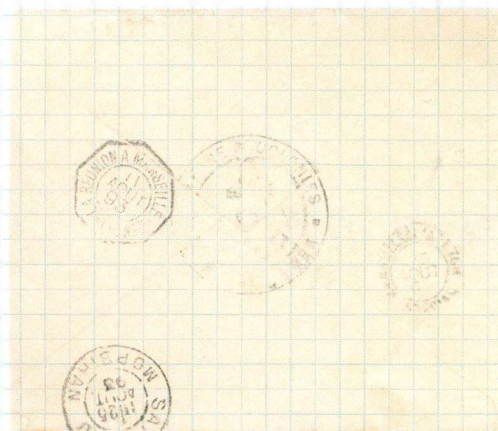
Group Type stamps and stationery were shipped from Paris to all of the colonies during November 1892. Arrival dates and first usages from the colonies have not been recorded, either officially or in the philatelic literature. In this exhibitor's thirty-five years of study, **the earliest recorded use of the Group Type from any of the French Colonies is the cover shown above.** It is a commercial cover posted at the quadruple registered rate of 1F25c (4 x 25c + 25c) from Obock on December 11, 1892 to France via the Reunion-Marseille Packet which called at Obock. Being one of the closest colonies to France, a first use of the Group Type from Obock is not unexpected. Relevant collectors and dealers have been challenged to show an earlier Group Type use via the exhibitor's publication in the Collectors Club philatelist, and his numerous discussions with them. To date, no earlier use (cover or used stamp) of the Group Type has been recorded. **This cover is considered to be one of the most significant covers in the entire era of the Group Type.**



Despite its small size and relative postal insignificance, Obock received a plethora of stamps for its use including a variety of provisional overprints on French Colonial Type Dubois stamps in early 1892, its own Group Type issue in late 1892 and a variety of colorful pictorial issues in 1894. The reasons for supplying so many issues to what was essentially a small village are uncertain, though the philatelic market may have played a role. The use of the Group Type issue from the entities of Obock and Djibouti/Somali Coast is examined in this one frame exhibit. This includes the use of Group Type stamps and postal stationery from this entity. Due to the small population in the area and the availability of numerous pictorial issues from both Obock and Djibouti, the actual number of covers illustrating use of the Group Type from this area is extremely limited. This grouping was gathered over a period of thirty-five years. The one frame exhibit is organized as follows:

1. Earliest recorded use of the Group Type issue from any Colony (Title Page)
2. Use of the Group Type issue from the colony of Obock
3. Use of the provisional Group Type overprints from Djibouti
4. Use of Group Type remainders from Obock and Djibouti as part of the Somali Coast
5. Use of Ethiopia – Somali Coast mixed frankings on Ethiopian mail
6. Miscellaneous mail

**Obock**  
**Military Concession Rate**  
**CORR DES ARMEES OBOCK**



Military concession rate of 15c, applicable to troops on station but not involved in combat, in lieu of the 25c rate to France and French Community destinations posted from Obock on August 11, 1893 to France. Validation of the rate by a commander's manuscript endorsement and signature or an appropriate military cachet was required for this rate. A cachet of a marine unit on the reverse validates the rate. The letter also bears a transit of the Reunion-Marseille French Packet. Only two examples of the **CORR DES ARMEES OBOCK** military datestamp have been recorded used on the Group Type mail.



Obock  
Registered Overseas Rates



Triple weight (30 – 45 grams) registered overseas rates (3 x 25c + 25c registration) posted from Obock in 1893 and 1896, respectively, to France and Germany. The former is in combination with a rare 1892 **OBOCK** provisional overprint on the colonial Type Dubois issue, and the latter shows single use of the 1F Group Type issue, the highest value Group Type issue that this colony received.



Obock  
Postal Stationery  
Printed Matter  
Letter Cards



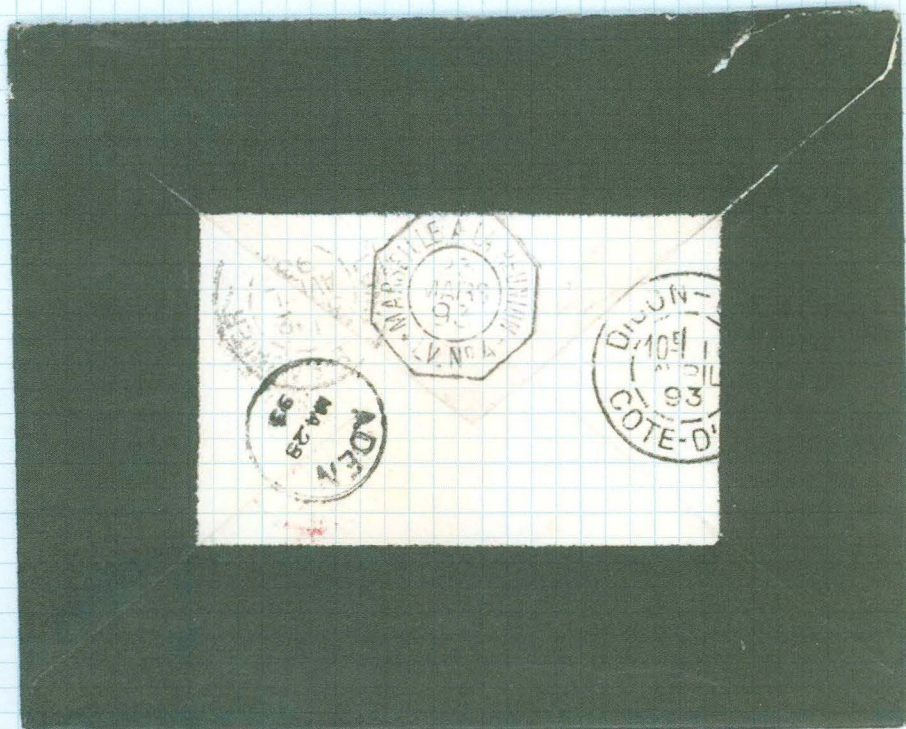
Printed matter postal stationery envelope at 5c posted from Obock in December 1897 to Perim, a British coaling island in the Red Sea. Backstamped **ADEN JA 6 98** confirming transit through the mails. It probably contained a holiday greeting. Posting from the French coaling station to the competing British coaling station is an exceptional destination.



Full message letter cards from Obock to Bangkok, Siam (an exceptional destination), via Aden and the **PENANG-TO-SINGAPORE** British Packet, and to France via the **REUNION A MARSEILLE** French Packet. Properly used letter cards from Obock are rare.



Obock  
Overseas Rate



Unusual mourning letter posted from Obock on March 23, 1893 to France at the 25c UPU rate via the Reunion-Marseille French Packet Line V. The letter was transferred to the British Service at Aden on March 29<sup>th</sup> for faster transit to France via the Modane A Paris rail line from Italy on April 1<sup>st</sup>.



## Djibouti Provisional Overprints

Three provisional overprints on Group Type were prepared in Djibouti in 1893 to mark the transition of the post and administrative offices, until the new pictorial issues arrived in 1894. They were the: **DJ** handstamp on the 5c Group Type to be used for printed matter; the **DJIBOUTI 25** overprint on the 2c Group Type stamp to be used for overseas mail; and the **DJIBOUTI 50** on the 1c Group Type to be used on registered overseas mail.



Strip of 5 of the 5c provisional overprint on piece used at the 25c overseas rate with the Djibouti undulating cancel.



Use of the 25c provisional stamp on September 20, 1894 on a commercial letter to Marseille also with the undulating Djibouti cancel in blue, transiting via French Packet Line N which served Japan, Indochina and intermediate ports; and the 50c stamp on a registered letter to Paris from Obock on February 10, 1894 via Line V of the Reunion-Marseille French Packet. The stamp bears a very rare provisional Obock 4 x 4 lozenge cancel, seen on fiscal usages, and indicates that these stamps were available in Obock at this time. All usages of these provisional issues are very rare.



Djibouti  
Group Type Usage  
French Community Registered Rate  
Registered Overseas Rate



Registered French Community rate (15c + 25c registration) franked with a single 40c Group Type posted from Djibouti on May 23, 1901 to Paris via French Packet Line N illustrating use of the double circle datestamp **COTE FRANCAISE DES SOMALIS DJIBOUTI** in blue. Double weight registered overseas letter (25c + 25c registration) posted from Djibouti on April 27, 1910 franked with a single 75c Group Type stamp of Obock to Dirre-Daoua, Abyssinia where received on April 29<sup>th</sup>. A different Djibouti datestamp is illustrated by this cover showing the dashed inner circle.



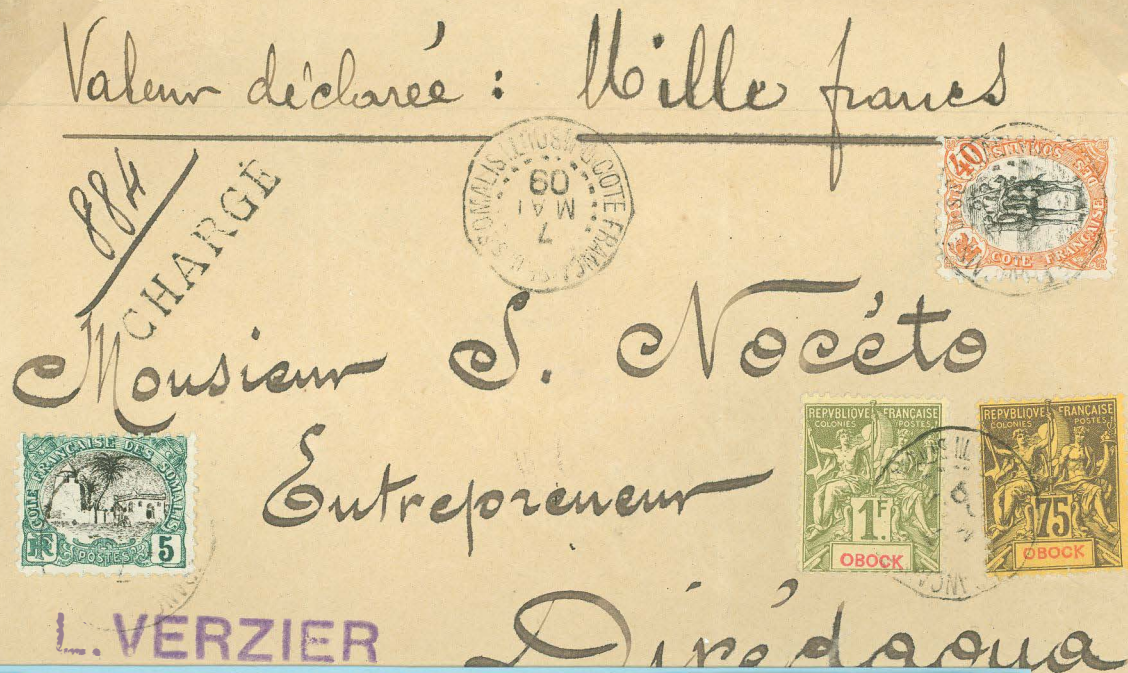
**Djibouti**  
**Declared Value Letter**  
**Proper Use of a Bisect**

Additional uses of the Group Type from Djibouti are found in combination with the pictorial issues of Obock, which were transferred to Djibouti to aid in their consumption, and those of Djibouti, plus the first definitive issue of the Somali Coast. During the 1901 – 1903 period the bisecting of various pictorials of Obock and Djibouti was authorized to meet shortages of the most needed values of stamps. Proper use of bisects is rare, as the practice was heartily welcomed by the philatelic community, and substantial abuse of the practice resulted in many philatelic covers.



A declared value letter posted at a 70c rate from Djibouti to a small village in the vicinity of Suez, Egypt on December 28, 1901. This letter illustrates proper use of a bisect of the Obock 20c pictorial stamp to create a 10c stamp to complete the rate. The nature of the letter is confirmed by the **CHARGE** handstamp, the manuscript **Valeur Déclarée Cent francs** endorsement, and the special cachet on the reverse which indicates that the letter weighed 7 grams (first weight level), had 5 was security seals in red, and they were impressed with the initials **DL**. The rate breakdown for this letter thus becomes: 25c overseas postage; 25c registration; and 20c insurance on a declared value of 100F. The letter bears a Marseille-Reunion French Packet transit and a **SUEZ CAISSE, 7 JA 02** arrival on the reverse.





Declared value front franked at 2F20c for 1000 francs insurance from 1909, but rate uncertain with the absence of the reverse and cachet. Also, a declared value cover from 1902 franked at 1F80c (a 5c pictorial is on the reverse) weighing 63 grams based on the cachet on the reverse. The breakdown on this cover is 75c postage for a fifth weight level letter (French Community rate of 15c per 15 grams), 25c registration and 80c insurance for a value of 1000 francs within the French Community.



Djibouti  
Combination Covers  
Registered French Community Rates

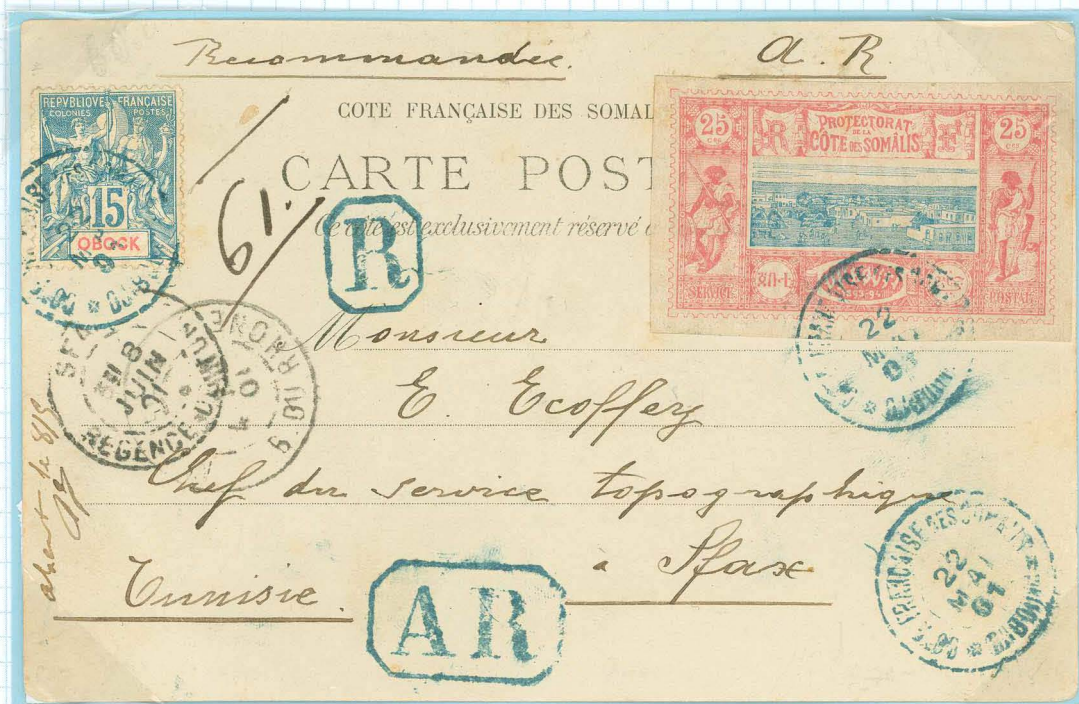


Combination of two 10c Group Type stamps of Obock and the 20c Obock pictorial issue prepaying the 40c French Community registered rate on a commercial letter posted from Djibouti to France on February 22, 1901. The letter bears the French Packet transit **YOKOHAMA A MARSEILLE L N N° 1, 2 MARS 01** on the reverse.



Similar combination cover franked at the 55c rate with a 40c Group Type stamp and a 15c Djibouti pictorial issue prepaying the double French Community registered rate on a commercial letter posted from Djibouti to France on August 12, 1900. Both letters are from the company that was building the rail line which served the Somali Coast.





Registered post card from Djibouti in 1901 to Sfax, Tunisia with a request for a return receipt (AR) overpaid at 40c by 5c. Return receipt requests are very rarely seen on post cards. Two have been recorded with Group Type usage. Also, a 40c registered French Community rate employing pictorial overprints created to fill a shortage on lower value stamps.



Djibouti  
Combination Covers  
Registered French Community Rates



Combination cover posted at the 40c French Community registered rate employing the 25c Group Type stamp and three 5c definitive issues of the Somali Coast posted from Djibouti on August 26, 1902 to France. This letter traveled via a British Packet to Brindisi and to France on the Modane A Paris rail like from Italy. Similar combination cover at the 70c triple French Community registered rate (3 x 15c + 25c registration) employing the 25c Group Type stamp, a 40c Djibouti pictorial issue and a 5c Somali Coast definitive issue from Djibouti on August 28, 1902 via the Reunion-Marseille French Packet to France.



# Ethiopia - Group Type Combination Covers Via Djibouti

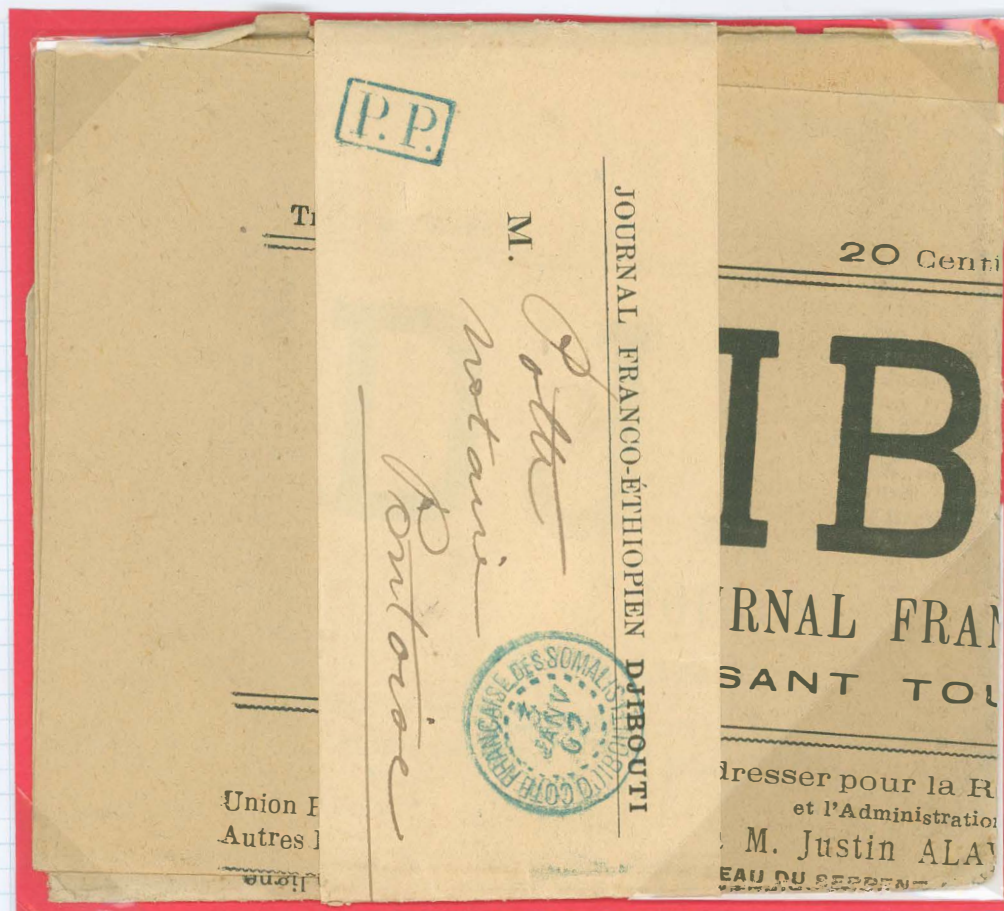
Because Ethiopia was not a member of the UPU around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, international mail was routed through Djibouti. Ethiopian postage was required for local transit to Djibouti, and Djibouti/Somali Coast postage was required for transit to international destinations. Combination frankings with Group Type are rare, as only remainders were available for most of this period. In his book and addendum (*Ethiopia 1867-1936*), Sciaky noted only one combination cover with Group Type.



Ethiopian post cards from Harar, Ethiopia at the simple rate ( $\frac{1}{2}$  guerche for local postage and 10c for international postage on July 28, 1898) and registered rate ( $\frac{3}{4}$  guerche for local postage and 35c for international postage on August 4, 1903) to France. The latter illustrates a combination of Group Type and definitive issues.



Djibouti  
Miscellaneous Mail



In early 1902 there was a temporary shortage of 5c stamps normally used to prepay printed matter. Prepayment of postage in cash was authorized until new supplies of stamps arrived from France. Such was designated by a boxed **P.P.**. A banded copy of the **JOURNAL FRANCO-ÉTHIOPIEN** illustrates the application of the special decree.



Postcard from Djibouti on May 5, 1903 sent by a member of the Madagascar occupation forces who happened to be in Djibouti claiming the military franchise privilege applicable in Madagascar. Such was rejected as inapplicable by the post office at Djibouti, and the letter was handstamped with a T in triangle for due, and charged 20c due, double the 10c post card rate, upon arrival in France.



Côte Française des Somalis

Gouvernement



207

CHARGE  
D'OFFICE

Monsieur le Ministre

du Commerce, de l'Industrie, des Postes et Télégraphes

Office National du Commerce Extérieur

3 Rue Gaydeau

Paris

Relative to franchise mail, the exhibitor has not seen military franchise mail from this area as there were no significant military campaigns to warrant such. Government Official mail is extremely rare, and the only example noted by the exhibitor is shown below. The printed **Cote Française des Somalis Government** and Government cachet on the reverse confirm its government origin, and the rare **CHARGE D'OFFICE** handstamp confirms post office acceptance of the franchise privilege on this registered letter from Djibouti on June 2, 1905 to Paris.



**Obock - Djibouti**  
**Philatelic Transgressions**



Philatelic covers are seen this period, particularly those employing colorful combinations of the pictorial issues and their bisects. These have been eschewed throughout this exhibit. However, the fragment shown above illustrates how far the creators of philatelic material would go, and it is being shown because of use of the Group Type stamps. This blatantly philatelic creation from Djibouti in August 1901 employed two 2c Obock Group Type stamps, a bisect of the 2c Obock Group Type stamp and a bisect of the 10c Djibouti pictorial issue. There was no authorization for bisects of Group Type stamps in Djibouti. What is interesting about this item is that it is at a proper 10c rate for mail within Djibouti, and employs genuine Djibouti cancellations. French Colonial postal clerks were generally happily to comply with the needs of philatelic customers at the time.

Thomas Salzmänn was a prolific collector of postal stationery during this period, and philatelic items addressed to him in Bern are readily found. However, this item illustrates an important aspect of UPU postal history. It was the responsibility of the originating offices to note postage deficiencies by striking an official **T** for postage due on items so identified. It was the responsibility of the receiving offices to note the amount due and assess the appropriate fine. Typically on mail from the French Colonies, the failure of the sending office to note a deficiency meant that the item would arrive without penalty. However, the Swiss were especially astute in recognizing underpaid mail (personal communication from H. Stone), even when sending offices were deficient in recognizing such as seen in the above properly treated and processed letter card.

