

Indochina's Grasset Definitives 1904-06

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the French Empire was at its zenith. French colonies were sprinkled around the earth. In the Far East was the jewel of the group - Indochina.

As far as postage stamps, all colonies had been treated the same. Since 1892, they all had their "personalized" versions of the Navigation and Commerce stamps. However, since before the turn of the century, the Indochinese government had lobbied to obtain its own distinctive stamps which would portray the scenery and culture of Southeast Asia. These efforts were completely unsuccessful until the Navigation and Commerce stamps were entering their second decade of service.

A compromise was reached whereby Indochina obtained unique stamps but they had nothing to do with the local culture. The allegorical design was a castoff of France proper, known by the name of the designer, Grasset.

These stamps and associated postal stationery served virtually all the postal needs of Indochina. Public reaction resulted in their being replaced in only three years.

This exhibit shows how the Grasset definitive stamps met Indochina's postal needs during their short lives. The presentation is organized as follows:

Transfer of design from France to Indochina

Stamp Varieties

- Printing Varieties
- Color Varieties
- Millesimes
- Perfins

Postmarks on Stamps

Usages

- Individual denominations
- Combinations of denominations

Stationery

Overprints

- Overprint Varieties and Printing Registrations
- Color Shades of Original Stamps
- Overprint Usages

Grasset

In 1904, the Grasset definitives replaced the long-lived Navigation and Commerce series, which had been in service since 1892. The stamps were not well received by the public and were replaced with the Native Women definitives only three years later in 1907.



Grasset Design

In 1896, the Parisian designer M. Grasset prepared a design anticipated for French stamps. The design featured an allegory of female representing France. Officials of the French government greeted it with disapproval and the project was shelved.

Toward the end of 1902 or perhaps early 1903, Governor Paul Doumer was sent essays of a modified Grasset design. Perhaps Doumer saw acceptance of this design as a way to expedite his real goal of locally-denominated stamps or perhaps it was just a case of political arm-twisting. For whatever reason, it was announced that Indochina would issue stamps based on the Grasset allegory.



ESSAY FOR FRANCE



ESSAY FOR INDOCHINA

Design differences are few. Naturally, the French version has “REPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE” at the base as compared to the “INDOCHINE FRANCAISE” with the Indochinese version. On the French essay, the ornament to the left of the figure appears to be a sheaf of wheat with semicircular laurels. (The same symbol, minus the laurels, appears at the right hand side of the design.) The Indochinese version replaced the ornament with an anchor. Other than these differences, all major design elements appear to be the same. Shading on the face and other portions of the figure is more pronounced on the Indochinese essay.

Grasset Varieties



“ghost” impression



“smudged lipstick” variety

Imperforate Varieties



Grasset Color Varieties

The Grasset stamps were printed in two colors. The first was a muted background shade. The combination of colors gave the stamps their characteristic appearance.



NORMAL



4 centimes
in color of 2 centimes



NORMAL



NORMAL



15 centimes
in color of 30 centimes



NORMAL

Grasset Color Shades

Multiple printings resulted in shade variations for all denominations of the Grasset stamps. Naturally, the most common values exhibit the broadest range of shades.



Grasset
Color Shades



Grasset Color Shades



Grasset Plate Proofs



Grasset Color Trials



Grasset Color Trials



Grasset Color Trials



Grasset Color Trials



Grasset Millesimes

For annual printings, a single digit that represented the year of printing is presented in the center of the second row of each pane of Grasset stamps. For instance, “4” signifies 1904. “5” signifies 1905, etc. The French term for the numeral is “millesime.”



Grasset
Millesimes



Grasset
Millesimes



Grasset
Millesimes



Grasset
Used Millesimes



Grasset
Use of 2 centimes Millesime

Two pairs of Grasset stamps overpaid the 10 centime letter rate to Algiers in 1911. The pair of 2 centime stamps has the numeral "7" printed in the selvage signifying that the stamps had been printed in 1907.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI TONKIN 4 JANV 11
REVERSE
ALGER ALGER 6 FEVR 11

Grasset
Use of 10 centimes Millesime

A single 10 centime with a millesime "7" contributed to the franking for this 1909 registered letter to Bordeaux. Postage was calculated as follows:

letter rate to France	10 centimes
registration fee	25 centimes
total	35 centimes



POSTAL MARKINGS

LANG-SON TONKIN 19 AOÛT 09
boxed R with manuscript registration number

REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 19 AOÛT 09
BORDEAUX GIRONDE 24-9 09

Grasset Perfins

Three perfins are known on the Grasset issue.



BIC

Banque de l'Indochine (Hanoi Branch)



D.F.

Denis Freres

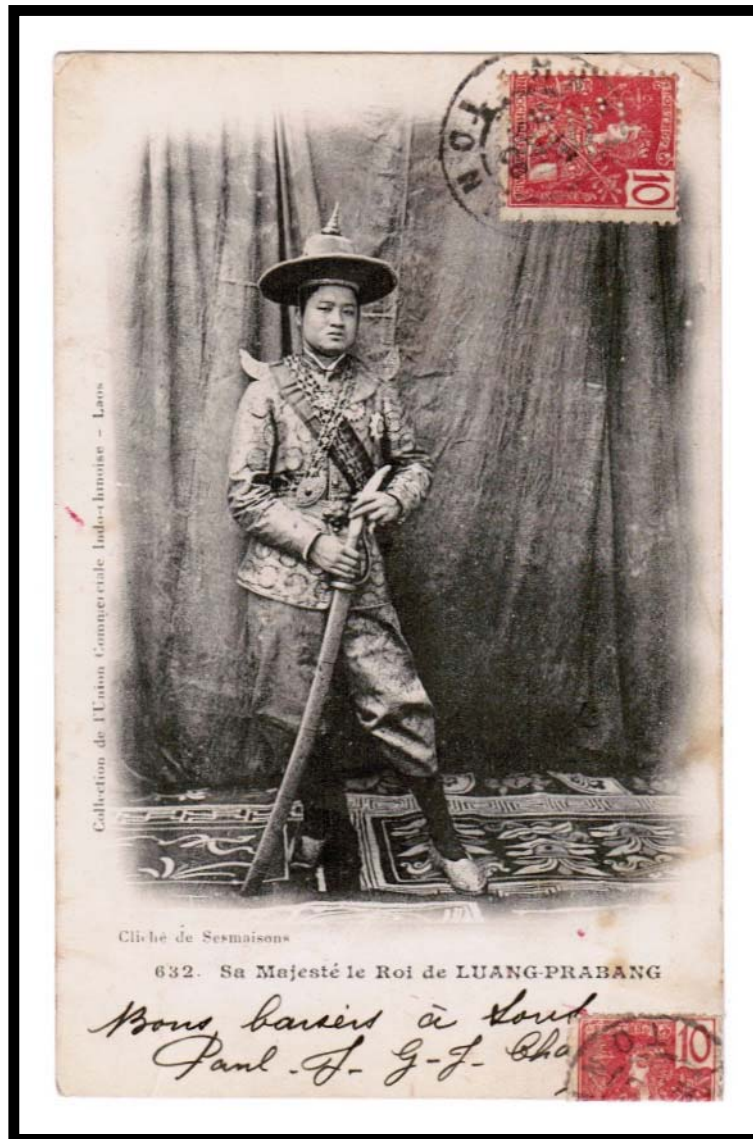


U.C.

L'Union Commerciale Indo-Chinoise

Grasset
Use of L'U.C.I. Perfin

The stamp at the top of this picture postcard was perforated L'U.C.I., the initials of L'Union Commercial Indochinoise.



POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI TONKIN 16 SEPT. 08
REVERSE
HANOI TONKIN 16 SEPT. 08

Grasset
Use of L'U.C.I. Perfin

This cover is a registered mailing from Hanoi to Paris in 1912. It was franked with a 50-centime Grasset stamp perforated with holes that spell out "L'U.C.I." On the reverse is a printed band with "L'UNION COMMERCIALE INDOCHINOISE – HANOI" confirming the origin of the perfin.

L'UNION COMMERCIALE INDOCHINOISE – HANOI

(reverse)



POSTAL MARKINGS

HANOI TONKIN 16 NOV. 12
framed R with manuscript registration number

REVERSE

HAIPHONG TONKIN 16 NOV 12