

The Usage of Mexico's Medio Real Stamps and Marks - 1856-1867

Historic and Postal History context: The Medio (half) Real stamp of Mexico served different purposes from the date when the first Medio Real stamp was issued, 1 August 1856, to the end of the Maximilian era and Empire by the end of April 1867. Starting as a stamp of widespread general use for internal mail to soon becoming a little used value of limited and specific use.

1. During the first 5 months of its introduction on **1 August 1856** the Medio Real was the base rate for **ordinary internal mail** weighing less than ½ oz. for a distance not exceeding 30 leagues (= 125km).
2. On **20 December 1856** the Medio Real usage was restricted to paying the postage for **Commercial Circulars**, a rate set without distance limit.
3. In **April 1865**, during the Empire period, Maximilian issued a decree granting Austrian and Belgian volunteers writing to their home country the **reduced military concession rate** of Medio Real as the internal Mexican rate. This concession rate replaced the normal 2 Reals ½ oz letter rate for distances over 16 leagues.
4. On **18 July 1865**, coinciding with the establishment of the Mexico-American Shipping Line an Imperial Decree introduced a '**Port Fee**' of Medio Real as payment for the transfer of mail from the Veracruz central post office to packet boats in the port. The port fee was restricted to mail travelling with the Mexico-American Shipping Line and was introduced to secure speedy delivery to these vessels. The Port Fee of 18 July 1865 applied also for **incoming mail** transferred from the packet boat to the Veracruz central post office. The port fee on incoming mail was always payable locally together with the internal Mexican postage (Mexico did not have any postal agreements with other countries prior to Mexico's membership of the UPU in 1879).

Scope: Usage of all the Medio Real stamps issued during the period covered are shown. For what concerns the last Empire issue, the Maximilian issue, a new currency had been introduced and the 'Medio Real' stamp has the face value: 7 centavos. The exhibit gives equal treatment to usage of the different "1/2" (Medio Real) postage paid marks of stamped markings of the period. Medio Real stamps are on rare occasions found bearing foreign cancellations. These originate from mail of the categories shown in this exhibit. No covers exist showing foreign cancellations on the Medio Real stamp.



Commercial circular only



Austrian volunteer



French/GB convention mark



USA 20c tax mark

The structure of the exhibit: The exhibit is structured chronologically treating in turn the different usages. Starting with initial usage for ordinary internal mail of August 1856, then the restricted application to circulars from December 1856, followed by the April 1865 concession rate for military volunteers and finally the 18 July 1865 Medio Real port fee. In each case, the Mexican usage is shown first, followed by the foreign entry mail taxed locally at the equivalent tax rate.

Rarity: Most documents presented here are rare. The only exception is the early examples of ordinary internal mail sent at the Medio Real rate. The survival rate of printed matters / commercial circulars is very low. The volume of mail sent at the military concession rate was never high. Surviving covers showing the Medio Real port fee are few (eight single letters, 12 double weight letters and one triple weight letter, shown in this exhibit). The port fee on incoming mail is rarer still. Particular highlights of the exhibit include:

- Incoming French and American printed matters charged the internal Mexican Medio Real rate.
- Medio Real concession rate mail from Austrian, Belgian and French volunteers to their home country.
- An incoming cover from Austria with a spectacular 72 kreuzer franking addressed to an Austrian military volunteer and charged the Medio Real concession rate for the internal Mexican carriage.
- An incoming letter sent from New-York by the packet boat "Manhattan" of the Mexico-American Shipping Line charged the Medio Real port fee.

The 1856 Medio usage up to December 20, 1856

From August 1, 1856 the usage of the Medio Real was for normal mail weighing less than ½ ounce and for a distance not exceeding 30 leagues (125km). This low tariff lasted only up to December 20, 1856 when it was doubled by the postal authorities with in addition a reduction of the distance to 16 leagues (67 km).



Sealed October 1856 letter, franked by the Medio stamp of the original issue, from MEXICO to PUEBLA distant by 108km (26 leagues), weighing less than ½ ounce, in line with the original tariff.

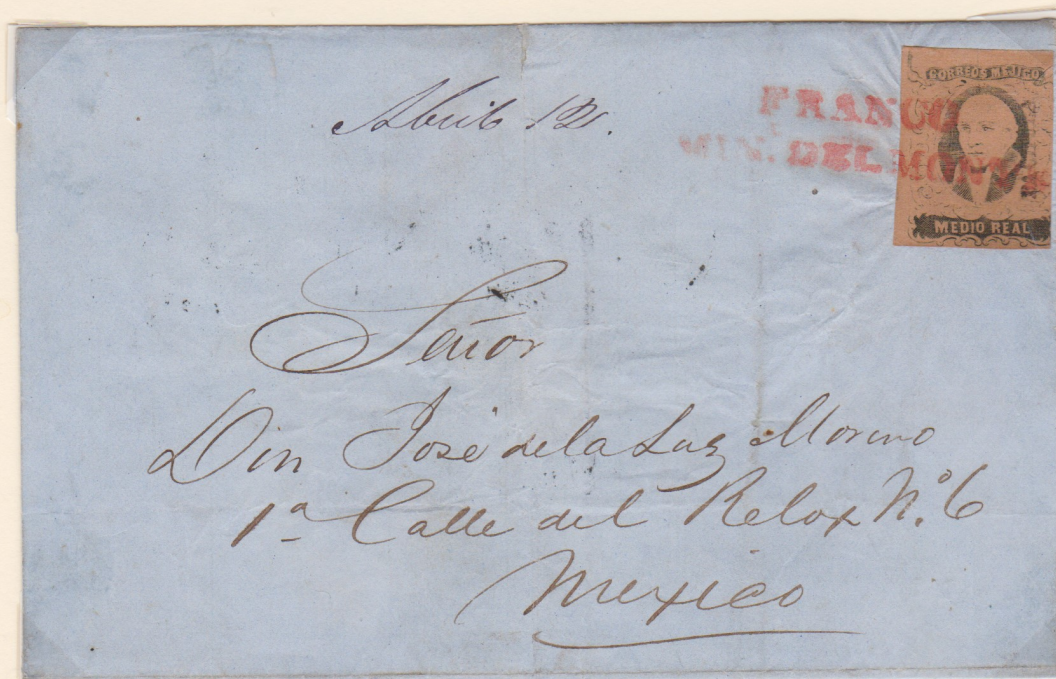
The only exception to this change was for circulars, for which the rate was unchanged at 1/2r (Medio) (provided the circular was unsealed) and without distance limitation.



Mexico, 1856 issue ½r blue, San Luis Potosi, **postal fraud usage** with stamp previously cancelled by indistinct town cancel, tied by 1857 San Luis Potosi date stamp **paying the circular rate** to Mexico.

The 1861 Hidalgo issue used on printed matter

On December 20, 1856 the postal rates were increased for normal mail, like letters, whereby the distance limitation was reduced from 30 leagues, as local tariff, to 16 leagues only. For circulars, no distance limitation ever existed. In 1861, to increase revenues, the postal administration decided a change in stamp printing colours with immediate ban of the previous issue.



Circular dated Abril 12, 1862 sent from PACHUCA district village of Mineral del Monte to MEXICO-city, franked with the medio real Hidalgo issue of 1861. The adhesive is tied by a strike in red ink of the two lines FRANCO/ MIN. DEL MONTE handstamp (Szk. N°1132).

Less than ten 1861 similarly franked circulars have been registered so far.
(R.D. JARETZKY certificate dated 20-8-1985)

Half Real Mexican Tax on Incoming U.S. Circular

U.S.A. Commercial Circular dated N.Y. June 14, 1865 entitled "Relato de F.A.HIRSCH", entirely "manuscript" from New York, giving general information on the prices applicable locally for a given number of commodities. The commercial circular is franked 2 U.S. cents as American Mail Rate Direct via American Steamer, quoted here "Per Manhattan". This rate applies up to the port of unloading.



Upon arrival in Mexico, the local tax, 1/2 real in black, was applied as the amount due by the addressee for the Mexican part of the journey. It is not known where the 1/2 tax was applied, because other letters addressed to PUEBLA, and via VERACRUZ, have a different arrangement of the 1/2. The 1 and 2 are usually separated horizontally, not vertically like here. This arrangement is unknown. Even though the real currency had been replaced by the centavo on May 1, 1865, when the 3-centavos Eagle stamps were issued, the Mexican administration had not updated the tax marks to the centavos equivalent.

Half Real Mexican Tax on Incoming French Circular

French Commercial Circular dated 1° de Setiembre de 1869, from Paris addressed to a library in Irapuato (a sub-office of Guanajuato), submitting a price-list of books edited in France. The commercial circular is franked 12 centimes by the Empire Napoleon III stamps in line with the 1-1-1866 tariff applicable to printed matters sent to overseas countries via England, without distance limitation.

This rate applies up to the port of unloading, as it is confirmed by the PP red mark. The London transit PAID red stamp is dated DEC. 69, confirming the validity of the French franking up to the country of destination.



When reaching Mexico, the local black tax of $\frac{1}{2}$ (real) is applied as the amount due by the addressee for this commercial circular Mexican part of the travel. In spite the real currency had been replaced by the centavo since May 1, 1865 (when the 3 centavos Eagle stamps were issued), the Mexican administration had not amended the tax marks to the centavos equivalent.

Half Real Mexican Tax on Incoming Ecuador Circular

Ecuador Commercial Circular dated in 1869, from Guayaquil, quoting the rates applicable for transportation of cacao to a list of major harbours worldwide.

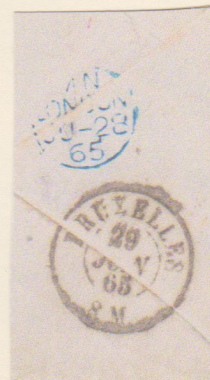
The commercial circular is franked 2 pence with a pair of British 1865 1d Queen Victoria stamps, tied by "C41" barred oval consular handstamp; reverse with "Guayaquil January 12, 1869 British P.O." date stamp; front with "Panama, January 20, 69" transit date stamp and " $\frac{1}{2}$ " reales inland tax rate handstamp applicable in Mexico to circulars without distance limitation, in this case the address is in Guadalajara.



When reaching Mexico, the local black tax of $\frac{1}{2}$ (real) is applied as the amount due by the addressee for this commercial circular Mexican part of the travel. In spite the real currency had been replaced by the centavo since May 1, 1865 (when the 3 centavos Eagle stamps were issued), the Mexican administration had not amended the tax marks to the centavos equivalent.

The Medio Real (1/2R) Rate for Belgian Soldier's Mail

Letter likely mailed in May 1865 from the MORELIA area by the Belgian Chief Commander, Baron Alfred Van der SMISSEN to BRUSSELS in Belgium where it arrived on June 29, 1865. The back of the envelope bears a LONDON transit mark dated June 28 and the seal with the baron crown and motto "NO STEP BACK" in Latin.



In April 1865, an Emperor decree by Maximilian expanded the usage of the medio (½) real as a special tariff allowing Belgian and Austrian volunteers to pay the rate to the port of VERACRUZ, in lieu of the 2 reales rate applicable to commercial mail for letters weighing less than ½ ounce over a distance of 16 leagues. The medio real stamp bears the consignment number 220-1864 of the MORELIA district.

The 1/1 manuscript mark of 1 shilling and 1 penny on the front represents the sea and transit rate granted to Britain, whilst the red 13 is the Belgian francs claimed from the addressee. In fact the correct amount due by the receiver should have been 15 decimes to include the Belgian local rate of 20 centimes, omitted here.

(MEPSI Certificate N° 17948 + Certificate by J. Van der LINDEN N°A991047)

The Medio Real (1/2R) Rate for French Volunteer's Mail

Letter sent from MORELIA by a Frenchman, signing as secretary to the Belgian Army Paying Officer of Volunteers, addressed to his parents in LILLE (France) on November 29, 1865. The letter is franked by a medio (½) real stamp from the MORELIA consignment N°143-1865 as it is allowed to the Belgian army of volunteers.



In April 1865, an Emperor decree by Maximilian reduced the rate from 2R to 1/2R as a special tariff allowing Belgian and Austrian volunteers to pay for the route to the port of VERACRUZ, for letters weighing less than ½ ounce over 16 leagues. The stamp cancelled in MORELIA on December 1, before the transfer to VERACRUZ where the French Consular hand-stamp MEXIQUE 15/DEC/65 was applied. On the back, the octagonal date-stamp VERACRUZ PAQ.FR.B N°4 dated 16/DEC/65 indicates that the French packet "Nouveau Monde" departed the same day to reach St-NAZAIRE on January 8, 1866. On arrival, the letter was taxed 8 (decimes) payable locally.

(R.D. JARETZKY's Certificate states "This cover is up to now the only recorded ½ Real concession rate cover to France and is a historical document of highest importance")

The Medio Real (1/2R) Rate for Austrian Soldier's Mail

Letter mailed on July 23, 1866 from PUEBLA by an Austrian soldier to "her Highborn the Mrs. von SCHWORKMANN, born von LOWTZOW, in GOTTESGABE near Schwerin MECKLENBURG", where it arrived on August 31. The back of the envelope bears a LONDON transit mark dated August 28 and two "AUS FRANKREICH – PER AACHEN" dated 30/8 1 B. Also the local double circle distribution handstamp is applied "AUSG / N°1 -31/8".



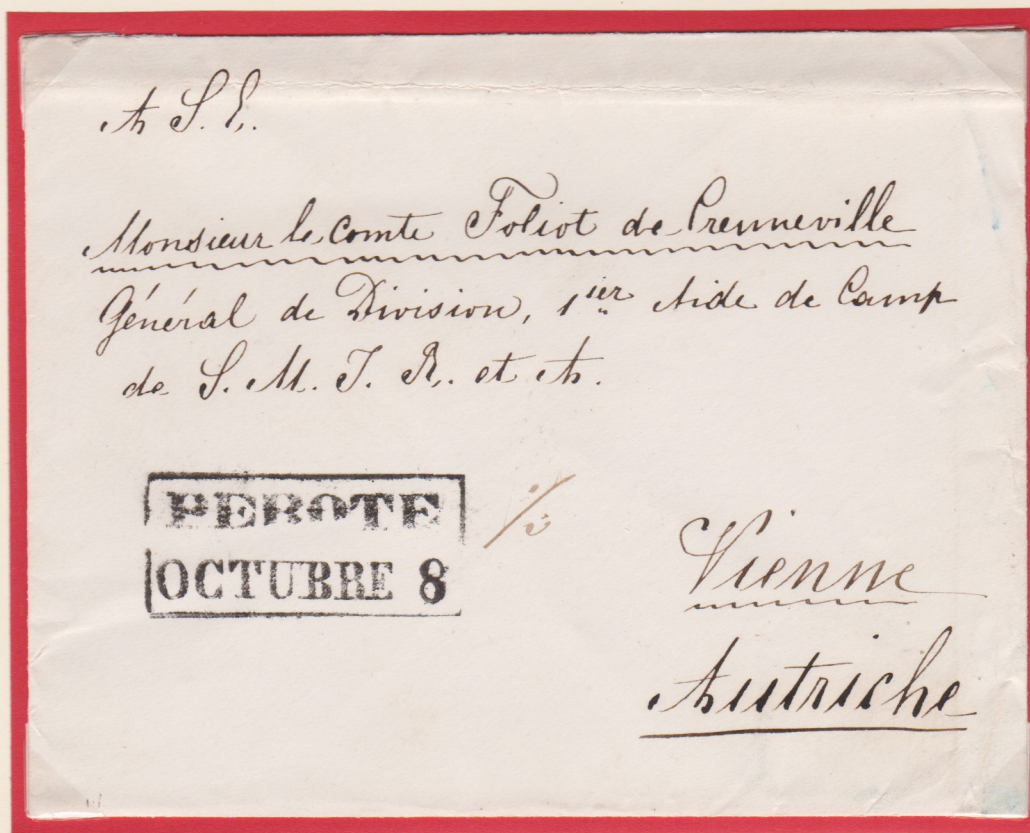
In April 1865, an Emperor decree by Maximilian expanded the **usage of the medio (½) real as a special tariff allowing Belgian and Austrian volunteers to pay the rate to the port of VERACRUZ, in lieu of the 2 reales rate applicable to commercial mail** for letters weighing less than ½ ounce over a distance of 16 leagues. The medio real stamp bears the consignment number 53-1866 of the PUEBLA district.

The letter was sent from Mexico by a British steamer to London and further on to Calais. It entered Germany in Aachen (Prussia) where the "10" mark in blue was applied to be claimed from the addressee. The "10" Prussian Silber Groschen was crossed and replaced by its equivalent "16" Schilling from Mecklenburg when it reached that lander.

The boxed "GB/1f 60c" mark on the front represents the sea and transit rate granted to Britain. The French "F.48" article of the 3 July 1865 convention between France and Prussia was for reimbursement to the French P.O. of 6.9 Groschen per 7,5 grams on mail to Prussia via France from U.S.A and abroad. According to SALLES, this is an error to apply on Mexican mail, as above.

Manuscript Medio on Austrian Volunteer's Mail

Envelope mailed from PEROTE, a sub-office of JALAPA to the General de Division, **First Aide de Camp** to the **Emperor** François-Joseph of Austria, franked by a **manuscript ½ only**, addressed to VIENNA on October 8, without indication of the year (between 1864 and 1866). This franking covers the route up to the port of VERACRUZ as applicable to members of the Austrian and Belgian Volunteers' Corps.



There is no transit mark on the cover as it was likely sent via the diplomatic pouch (see the MEPSI certificate). It is usual when the addressee is the sovereign of the country of destination, to grant tax exemption on arrival. The same exemption is granted to the sender when the document is mailed within the country of the addressee, which is not the case here.

(MEPSI Certificate N°31616 dated 23 Sep. 2008)

The Austrian Volunteers' Tax on Incoming Mail

Letter mailed from BRÜNN to the pharmacist in charge of the Austrian volunteers in ORIZABA on October 11, 1865. After a misrouting via LONDON on October 14, the letter was loaded at St-NAZAIRE on the "Impératrice Eugenie" on October 16.

At VERACRUZ, the **postage tax of ½ real**, equal to 7 centavos, was applied as reduced rate applicable to all Belgian and Austrian volunteers, in line with the Emperor's decree of April 1865 **reducing the Mexican part of the route from 2 reales to ½ only**.



The Austrian four-colour franking of 72 Kreuzer corresponds to the 1862 tariff applicable for a single weight letter of 1 lot (equivalent to - ½ ounce) to overseas destinations via AACHEN, where the rectangular (PP) red mark was applied. Because of the mishandling via GB, the red mark 1/1 for 1 shilling 1 penny was first applied as well as the circular (PP), before the requested routing "Mexique via St-Nazaire" was recognized. The 2 at the top left corner is the French number of ports (2 x 7.5gr) corresponding to the 1 Austrian lot weight. On the back, the handstamp "LIGNE B/17/OCT./65/ PAQ.FR.*N°3*" is applied.

(Certificates FERCHENBAUER & VAN der LINDEN)

The Port Fee on a single weight letter

The manuscript mention "Vapor Mexico Americano New-York" meant that the sender requested that his mail be shipped by the **Mexico-American Shipping Line** established according to the Imperial Decree dated July 18, 1865. This line was established between VERACRUZ and NEW-YORK with a stop in HABANA. The decree provided the tariff applicable based on the mail weight, and specified a payment of 7 centavos (equivalent to the "medio" at the time of the Eagle stamps), as Port Fee to bring the letter directly to the vessel.



Envelope from MEXICO to NEW-YORK (U.S.A.) dated October 30, 1865 franked at 2.5 reales.

The 2 reales stamp pays for the route between MEXICO and VERACRUZ. **The medio real added here is to pay for the "Port Fee"** to carry the letter from the central VERACRUZ post office to the boat on the dock. On the front, the circular **STEAMSHIP 10** is the amount due by the addressee for the sea and local part of the trip.

(Royal Philatelic Society-London certificate N°179380)

Letter from MEXICO to SAN FRANCISCO via New York

There is **no manuscript mention specifying the shipping line to be used but the application of the half real stamp meant that the sender requested that his mail be shipped by the Mexico-American Shipping Line operating on the Atlantic rather than the Pacific Ocean**, the usual route to SAN FRANCISCO. This line was established between VERACRUZ and NEW-YORK with a stop in HAVANA.

An Imperial Decree dated July 18, 1865 was specifically relating to mail shipped by the Mexico-American Shipping Line. The decree specified **the payment of 7 centavos (equivalent to the half real at the time of the Eagle stamps) for mail carried from the central post office of VERACRUZ to the ship ready to depart.**

The 2 reals stamp pays for the route between MEXICO and VERACRUZ. **The half real added is to pay for the "Port Fee"** to carry the letter from the central VERACRUZ post office to the boat on the dock. The circular **N.Y.STEAMSHIP / 10** is the US tax amount due by the addressee for the sea and US part of the trip. However the SAN FRANCISCO post-master claimed double that amount as indicated by the manuscript mark to pay for double weight rather than single assessed in NEW-YORK.



Partial letter from MEXICO to SAN FRANCISCO (U.S.A.) dated May 1, 1866 franked at 2.5 reals, with 2 R Eagle stamp invoice 71-1865 and ½R Eagle stamp from the same consignment. The stamps are cancelled by the typical MEXICO double ring handstamp (Taylor MX-1/36)

(MEPSI certificate N°12111 of January 15, 1989)

The Port Fee on a Double Weight Letter

The Imperial Decree dated July 18, 1865 related to mail shipped by the Mexico-American Shipping Line. The decree provided the tariff applicable based on the mail weight, and specified the payment of 7 centavos (equivalent to the "medio" at the time of the Eagle stamps) for mail carried from the central post office of VERACRUZ to the ship ready to depart, as "Port Fee".

Letter sent from MEXICO to PARIS (France) via NEW-YORK (U.S.A.) as requested by the sender. This letter dated February 2, 1866 is franked at 4.5 reales, with 4R stamp invoice 19-1866 and ½R stamp from the same consignment. The stamps are cancelled by the MEXICO double ring handstamp (Taylor MX-1/36).



The 4 reales stamp pays for the route between MEXICO and VERACRUZ for a double weight letter, rather than for the "Por Extraordinario" speed service, as evidenced by the 20 US tax in transit. The letter must exceed ½ ounce to justify the 24 decimes French tax due by the receiver for a triple French weight level (of 7.5gr each) applicable to commercial document at the rate of 80 centimes per ¼ ounce (or 7.5gr).

(MEPSI certificate N°31465 dated 16 April 2008)

The Port Fee on a Triple Weight Letter

Letter from SAN LUIS POTOSI via MEXICO to BORDEAUX (FRANCE) dated August 16, 1865 **franked at 6.5 reales**, with 2R Eagle stamp invoice 132-1865 and 4R+½R Eagle stamps from the 133-1865 consignment. **This rate corresponds to a letter weighing 16gr, that is just over ½ ounce but treated as “Per Extraordinario” that is twice the usual 3R rate applicable for a distance exceeding 16 leagues.** The medio real added here is to pay for the “Port Fee” to carry the letter from the central VERACRUZ post office to the boat on the dock.



The letter originating from SAN LUIS POTOSI must have been carried by private carrier to MEXICO where the postage stamps were applied for the trip to VERACRUZ. All stamps are marked with the MEXICO district overprint and are tied together by the FRANCO/MEXICO cds's dated 24 Aug.

On the front, the black “ANGL PAR CALAIS” transit mark is dated 28 SEPT. The boxed “GB/1F60” is a British accountancy mark to the French post. **The French manuscript tax of 24 decimes is payable by the addressee for a TRIPLE rate letter linked to the 16gr.** On the back, the red LONDON transit dated SEPT. 28, the black Paris transit on the next day and the arrival in Bordeaux on SEPT. 30 are applied.

(Brian MOORHOUSE Cert. ME/131029/3)

The Port Fee on a franked USA letter

Letter mailed franked by 1861/66 Washington 10c green, amended design, from NEW-YORK to GUADALAJARA on March 24, 1866 **carried by the "Manhattan" of the Mexico-American Shipping Line.** As internally endorsed, the letter was posted at VERACRUZ, where the postage rate of 2 ½ reals, equivalent to 32 centavos, was applied.



The 2 reals tax stamp pays for the route between VERACRUZ and GUADALAJARA as the letter does not exceed ½ ounce. The July 18, 1865 Imperial decree provided the tariff applicable based on the mail weight, and specified the payment of ½ real for mail carried (from)/to the central post office of VERACRUZ (to)/from the ships of the Mexico-American Shipping Line in the harbour.

The letter was docketed as received on April 12, 1866.