

A FAKE RARITY OF CLASSIC NEPAL

--Wolfgang Hellrigl

This story of an exceptional Nepal cover really began in New Delhi. The illustrated cover was exhibited at "INDIA '89" and this is where I first came across this brilliant star.

And what a star it was - just imagine a cover bearing a pin-perforated pair and a single of the 2-annas stamp of the first issue, on European paper, plus an imperforate 1-anna always of the first issue. The result is simply staggering and so are the unique features:

- the only cover known bearing pin-perforated 2-annas of the first issue;
- the only registered cover bearing pin-perforated stamps of the first issue;
- the only cover bearing a combination of pin-perforated and imperforate stamps of the first issue;
- the earliest registered cover of Nepal (October, 1881).

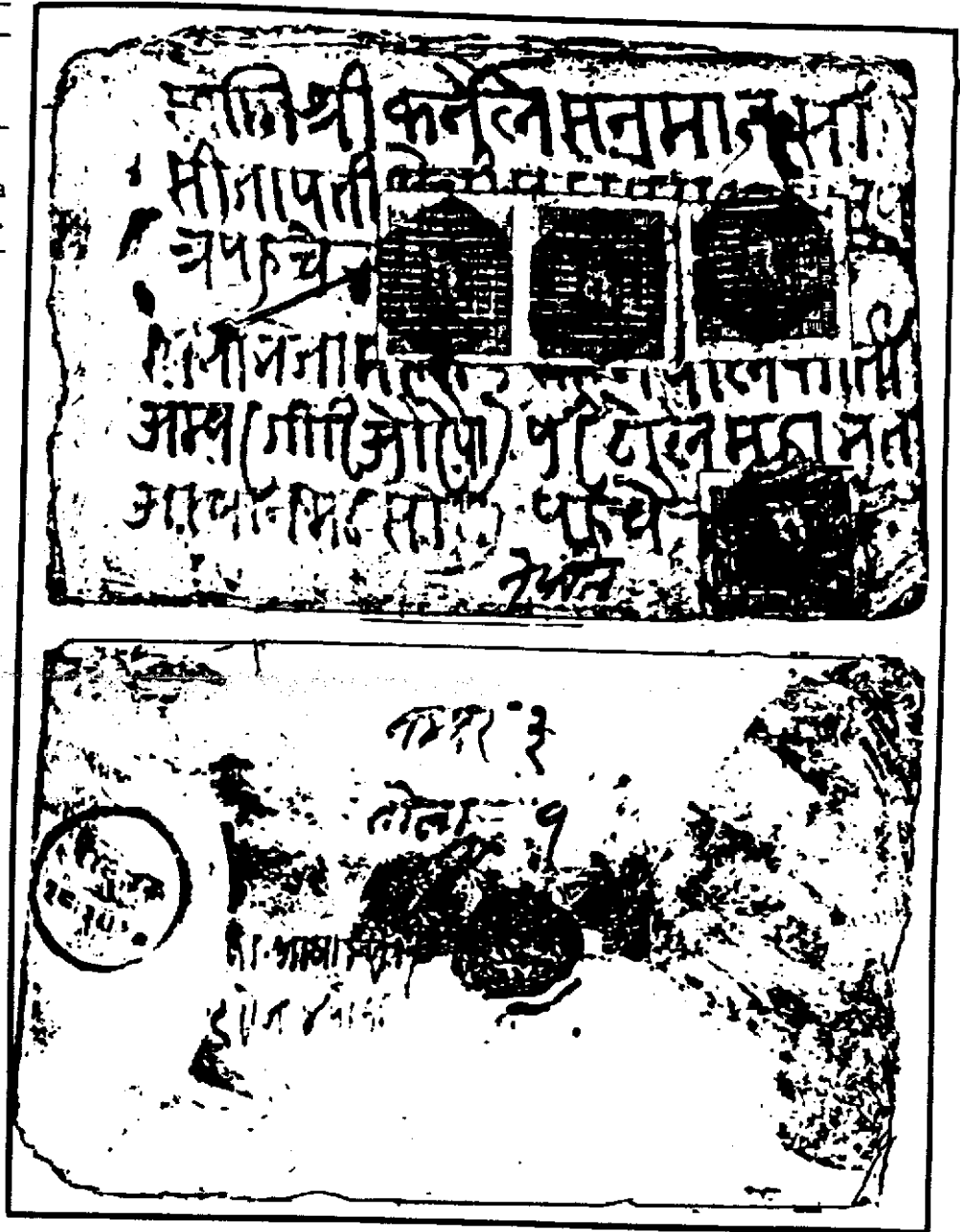
Judging by this record, I would have no hesitation in calling a cover of this calibre as probably the most important as well as the rarest cover of classic Nepal. It would indeed be the absolute highlight of any collection.

There is really only one test that a cover of this order has to pass before entering the "hall of fame" and that is, it must be genuine. To cut a long

story short, more than one feature of this cover aroused my immediate suspicion, so much so that I was convinced that the three 2-annas stamps were added later in a fraudulent attempt to convert a (either double-rate or A/D) registered cover.

At this stage, I took the proud owner of this cover - a collector of Kathmandu -

aside and informed him of the various reasons for my suspicions. I also explained to him that to purchase such an absolute star item of Asian postal history just on good faith was purely his personal business, but to show it at a



world exhibition, was an entirely different matter that could not be left at that. I added that if I ever saw this cover exhibited again, by whoever, I would immediately inform the Jury. I felt sure that, if the cover were taken out of the frames and examined on the spot, I could prove that it was a fake. (concluded on next page)

Some time after this episode, I received a letter from the furious Patan dealer who had supplied this cover and who was desperately trying to defend the bona fides of himself and his star item. At any rate, he sent me a photocopy of both sides of this cover which enables me to change my earlier suspicion into certainty: the cover is definitely a fake, as proven by the following facts:

- it is not a registered cover at all (there are no wax seals and no m/s endorsements of registration, etc.), hence the 7-annas rate is wrong;
- the weight of the letter being 1 tola (as stated at the back), the correct rate is 1 anna. Had the cover been registered, the correct rate would have been 6 annas, not 7, since A/D was not requested;
- the cancellations centred on the 2-annas stamps are not properly tied to the cover, although some attempts were made to add portions of the killers;
- there are further clues such as the placing of the 2-annas stamps over the address details despite the fact that there was ample free space at the back.

Both the owner and the dealer have been fully informed of the situation. Should this particular cover re-appear at a world exhibition, I shall have no option but to inform the Jury that it is not genuine.

To make matters worse, there is a second doubtful cover in the same exhibit and it was handled by the same dealer. It bears imperforate 1, 2 and 4 annas stamps of the first issue, genuinely cancelled with the standard hexagonal Jaleswar type. The stamps appear to have been "tied" to the cover by the additional strikes of what I consider to be a forged Jaleswar cancellation. The date of the backstamp appears to have been fraudulently altered (from 1889? to 1881). A definite opinion on this second cover will only be possible after a careful examination of the reverse. Thus, I have offered to expertize this item free of charge. In the meantime - and in view of the fact that there have been recent offers to purchase this item - I must warn prospective buyers that this is almost certainly a fake.

I am of the opinion that the exhibition of key items that are faked, or even doubtful, is extremely detrimental to our hobby and cannot be tolerated under any circumstances.



FRANK & MAE VIGNOLA SURVIVE EARTHQUAKE!

An inquiry, sent by mail, brought one of Frank's 'up-beat' letters, plus a photocopy of his experiences during the October 17 earthquake. I now quote:

"Mae & I were reading a menu on a window of a restaurant when the quake started. The window began to gently wave and Mae said, "Look, it must be an earthquake". She no sooner said that than the street and sidewalk began rising and falling in big waves. I couldn't believe it, as I have lived here all my life and never felt or saw such an earthquake in action. Then the windows in the stores and restaurants on this street began cracking like pistol shots and crashing. I looked overhead and saw signs above us shaking, so grabbed Mae's arm and we made our way to the curb -- about 10 feet from the buildings. Mae started to fall, but I caught her and we both held on to each other. In-the-meantime, motorcycles parked nearby started falling over and there were lots of crashes within the stores and restaurants as people ran out of the stores and buildings. Then, the quake stopped, although the ground continued shaking, but less violently. The autos had all stopped in the street and were bouncing like rubber balls -- I couldn't believe it. The overhead wires were wildly swinging, so we made our way across the street where there were no overhead 'things' to fall on us. Mae sat down, and I leaned on a parking meter. There were several mild afterquakes for several minutes but we were able to walk home a few blocks away. Our place was a mess inside, but the only damage was broken lamps and some crystal decanters, glassware, etc. Fortunately there was no structural damage to our place, but many were not so fortunate." (The scare headline is mine, but the story is Frank's and his words are so graphic that we thought they should be shared with you, our readers.--Ed.)