

Wituland Revisited

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AN ARTICLE BY JACOB VON UEXKULL, ‘The Witu Sultanate,’ appeared in the December 2018 issue of *THE LONDON PHILATELIST* (Uexkull, 2018). The article illustrated 23 covers with a variety of colourful stamps supposedly issued in 1889-90 by the Sultanate of Witu, sometimes known as ‘Wituland’ or ‘Swahililand,’ an area of some 3,000 square kilometres along the coast of what is now part of Kenya. All the stamps were neatly tied to cover with a W-and-bars obliterator or a ‘Wito’ cds. The stamps were a local issue, only valid in the Sultanate and to the islands of Lamu and even Zanzibar. They were issued in 12 denominations in five regular and three official series with repeated changes in design. Denominations were indicated only by the colour of the paper, with the result that there are a total of 96 different stamps plus 16 more (the two and seven Pesa values each appear in two shades in all eight series), for a grand total of 112 different stamps (see Figure 1). The 96 basic stamps are listed in the *Michel Deutschland-Spezial Katalog* under ‘Witu-Schutzgebiet’ (i. e. Witu Protectorate), numbers 1-60 (regular stamps) and 1-36 (officials) (Michel, 2021). Stamps are priced unused and used on piece, the latter ranging from €120 to €450. Covers bearing these stamps have sold for far greater amounts.



Figure 1. Examples of Wituland stamps.

In the January-February 2019 issue of *THE LONDON PHILATELIST* comments appeared on the Wituland article. Chris Harman RDP FRPSL noted that he has ‘always concluded [the Witu labels] to be bogus stamps although [he had] never before seen them on a cover.’ The stamps did not ‘look like they had done postal service in a tropical territory over 100 years ago’ and ‘just seemed too good to be true.’

In ‘The Witu Sultanate’ – a Response’ (Katz), I pointed out that there was an extensive literature on the Wituland stamps, including articles in *THE LONDON PHILATELIST* in 1892 and 2012, most of which was highly critical of the stamps but none of which had been mentioned in the original article. I raised a number of problems with the stamps including the following facts:

(1) that their creator, Clemens Denhardt, a German adventurer in east Africa, was essentially dishonest and had created other bogus stamps (the so-called Malakote fakes) to defraud the German government,

(2) there were too many denominations of stamps with multiple changes in design to be anything other than philatelic creations,

(3) distinguishing the denominations of 12 stamps only by colour, often minor shade variants, was unrealistic, and

(4) the pristine condition of the stamps, supposedly having travelled on covers in tropical Africa, was problematic.

Even more concerning, the postage amounts on the illustrated covers bore no relation to the supposed official rate schedule, the postage on some of the covers corresponding to weights that were plainly impossible, as much as 2 Rupies, corresponding to 315-320g, or over 11 oz!

The author replied in the same issue (Von Uexkull, 2019). He stated that a court trial in 1934-38 had produced evidence, including affidavits, that the stamps were genuine. He added that they are accepted by German experts and listed in Michel and that they bring high prices at auction. He also stated that 'Over-franked covers exist from many German colonies,' tacitly acknowledging that the Witu covers do not fit the rate schedule

Since writing the response, I have had time to further study the stamps and covers. That has confirmed my initial impression that the covers, as well as the stamps, are fantasies. As will be seen, the covers are genuine stampless covers that were carried privately in Wituland, to which bogus stamps were later added to enhance their appeal, and the numerous 'used' stamps on piece are similar philatelic creations.

Von Uexkull's article illustrated 23 covers with Wituland stamps. Those same covers plus two additional items (both with first period official stamps) were included in Heinrich Köhler's auction No. 368 in March 2019, totalling 25 in all (Köhler). The auction also included an extra lot, 1599A, consisting of some 370 Wituland stamps, unused and used, and an album specially made for them by Walter Behrens, a stamp dealer in Leipzig. It is instructive to examine the Köhler covers closely which have images of both fronts and backs.

One is a folded lettersheet; the rest are commercially made envelopes. Although there are 24 envelopes, there are fewer unique examples as many are identical. There are six envelopes, four of which are identical, made of a slightly yellowish 'linen paper' with threads running in cross directions, forming a distinct pattern (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 11-15, 21). These six are addressed in what appears to be the same distinctive handwriting to Clemens Denhardt. There are two examples of long envelopes with end flaps (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 5, 20), two that are green and squarish (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 10, 20), two light-brown with diagonal laid lines (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 16 & 23) and two, possibly three, envelopes with a distinct curved top flap (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 9, 18 & 7). There are thus about 18 unique envelopes in all.

The colour range of the envelopes is limited, most are shades of light brown or cream, some with a grey or yellow cast to them. Two covers (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 10, 20) are green. The paper in most is wove, but there are several with diagonal 'laid' lines (see Figure 2).

These envelopes raise additional questions. The six envelopes sent by one person to Clemens Denhardt, for example, were received within a short period in August and September 1889 and although their contents apparently are no longer present, we would expect them to have had similar weights, postage and stamps (see Figure 3). But they are all over the place:

We should compare these covers to the schedule of rates for postage and special services (see Table 2), published by stamp dealer Robert Lerche in his 1930 article (there are 64 Pesa in a Rupie, see Sandruck).

The covers make no sense. The postage ranges implausibly from 14 Pesa to 32 Pesa for envelopes that likely had similar if not identical contents and weight. If they were all island mail, then the postage indicates weights from 30-35g to 75-80g, or a range from about 1 oz to 2.6 oz, a very heavy letter. But there is reason to think the last two covers are mainland mail, in which case 32 Pesa would correspond to a weight of 155-160g or about 5.5 oz, an impossible weight. The three that are marked '*eilig*' (rapid) have the lowest postage, so that has nothing to do with the franking. No two covers bear identical stamps, unusual for ordinary correspondence, but highly desirable philatelically. Four are officials and



Figure 2. Sample envelope papers used in Wituland in 1889, from Von Uexkull's 2018 article Figures 2-10, 12, 16-17, 19 and 22, as illustrated in Heinrich Köhler Auction no. 368, lots 1574-76, 1578-79, 1577, 1580-81, 1583-84, 1590, 1592, 1594, 1597.



Figure 3. Six envelopes made of similar paper, sent to Denhardt by the same writer, the bottom four being identical. Von Uexkull, 2018, Figures 11-15, 21; Heinrich Köhler Auction no. 368, lot nos. 1582, 1584, 1587-89, 1595.

Table 1. Covers addressed to Denhardt between 2 August-16 September 1889.

Von Uexkull article Fig. / H Köhler Lot no.	Date received, per docket	Period and type of stamps	Franking	Addressed to	Where received	Comments
VU Fig. 13, HK Lot 1587	2 August 1889	Second period, Official. 23 July 1889	8P (x2) + 2P = 18P	Lamu	Lamu	ms 'sehr eilig' (very rapid)
VU Fig. 14, HK Lot 1588	5 August	Ditto	8P + 6P = 14P	Lamu	Mkonumbi	'eilig' (rapid)
VU Fig. 21, HK Lot 1595	7 August	Third period, Official. 2 August 1889	$\frac{1}{2}$ R = 32P	Lamu	Witu	Witu cds 4 August 1889 'R'
VU Fig. 15, HK Lot 1589	7 August	Ditto	8P (x2) = 16P	Lamu	Witu	'eilig' (rapid)
VU Fig. 11, HK Lot 1582	24 August	Fifth period, Regular. 17 August 1889	8P + $\frac{1}{4}$ R = 24P	Witu	Witu	
VU Fig. 12, HK Lot 1584	16 September	Ditto	$\frac{1}{2}$ R = 32P	Witu	Witu	

Note. VU = Von Uexkull, *THE LONDON PHILATELIST*, December 2019. HK=Heinrich Köhler Auction No. 368.

Table 2. 'Official postage rate chart.'		
Weight	'Within the mainland'	'To the islands'
Up to 5g	1 Pesa	2 Pesa
5-10g	2 Pesa	4 Pesa
10-15g	3 Pesa	6 Pesa
15-20g	4 Pesa	8 Pesa
20-25g	5 Pesa	10 Pesa
25-30g	6 Pesa	12 Pesa
30-35g	7 Pesa	14 Pesa
35-40g	8 Pesa	16 Pesa (i. e. $\frac{1}{4}$ Rupie)
Each additional 5g	1 Pesa	2 Pesa
Registered Mail	8 Pesa	16 Pesa
Express mail (delivered to residence of addressee)	10 Pesa	20 Pesa. Special Charge

two bear regular stamps. Why would the same writer use both?

Another pair of identical envelopes, addressed in a different hand to Denhardt, presents similar problems (see Figure 4). One was addressed to Witu, where it was received on 9 August 1889. It bears two official stamps totalling 10 Pesa. The other is postmarked Witu on 22 August and arrived in Lamu on 28 August. It bears regular stamps totalling 1 Rupie. Assuming the second cover represents island postage, then the corresponding weights are 45-50g and 155-160g, the latter an impossible weight. How could these letters vary so much in weight? And why is the same person sending some letters with regular stamps and others with official stamps?

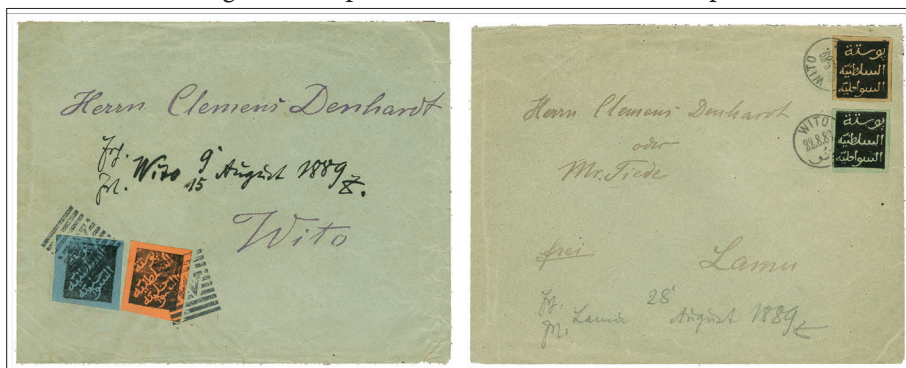


Figure 4. Two identical envelopes sent to Denhardt by the same writer. (In Von Uexkull, Figures 20 and 10; Ex Heinrich Köhler Auction no. 368, Lot numbers 1591 and 1583.)

Not only do the stamps not fit the rate schedule, some covers are so excessively overpaid that they cannot possibly be genuine. Consider, for example, the cover with 2 Rupies postage (Von Uexkull, 2018, Figure 2). Likely, it weighed half an ounce for which the postage, assuming double island rate, would be 6 Pesa. Assume, for sake of argument, that it weighed 1 ounce for which the postage was 12 Pesa. That means the letter was 'over franked' by more than $1\frac{3}{4}$ Rupies. That was a huge amount in 1890, over half of the daily pay of government teachers in Cameroun, 'among the best-paid employees' in that colony or about three days' pay of a skilled worker (see Note A). Obviously, no one in Wituland paid for those unnecessary stamps.

Ten of the 25 stamped covers are addressed to Clemens Denhardt in German handwriting. This is hard to reconcile with his statement that use of the Wituland postal system by Germans was close

to non-existent and he himself 'often used [his] own messenger to transport mail in the Swahili country' (Küppers).

All this tells us that these covers had been privately carried by messengers and the stamps and cancellations were later additions.

Besides the covers, a great number of used Wituland stamps exist. In 1934, Robert Lerche, a stamp dealer who was involved in the 'discovery' of the Wituland stamps, discussed below, published a lengthy study of the stamps (Lerche, 1934). Based on his review of auction catalogues and his knowledge of the stamp trade, he counted some 2,330 used Wituland stamps, including many examples of every issue and denomination. A later census carried out in 1950 by Dr. Eduard Ey, a German philatelist, counted 3,357 used Wituland stamps (Ey), as follows (I have combined the two shades of the two and seven Pesa stamps):

Table 3. Dr Ey Census of used Witu stamps.									
Value	Regular Series					Official Series			Average
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	First	Second	Third	
1 Pesa	27	35	37	29	37	25	42	26	32
2 Pesa	29	48	41	44	57	41	42	31	42
3 Pesa	36	45	45	45	47	35	37	39	41
4 Pesa	37	37	28	31	41	40	45	35	37
5 Pesa	40	45	38	45	53	36	40	35	42
6 Pesa	38	45	34	49	36	38	52	29	40
7 Pesa	40	36	44	40	47	37	49	42	42
8 Pesa	35	36	38	34	35	44	54	23	37
¼ Rupie	38	27	40	33	44	44	51	29	38
½ Rupie	37	44	45	37	40	38	50	22	39
¾ Rupie	37	40	44	35	38	48	54	20	40
1 Rupie	34	37	35	31	38	26	51	28	35
Average	36	40	39	38	43	38	47	30	39

The total number of used stamps of 3,357 represents nearly that number of covers (as we shall see, virtually all used stamps are singles on piece). The very existence of such a vast number of used stamps is tantamount to proof they cannot be genuine. As Denhardt wrote in 1893, there was negligible use of the Wituland post office by Europeans:

Of the Europeans (Germans) residing in the Swahili Sultanate in 1889 and 1890, whose number was about six to seven, only three to four likely made use of the Sultanate's postal system, because postal service did not take place on a daily basis and probably was irregular ... (Küppers, 1894)

Nor could the local population account for these thousands of letters; there were 'few literate natives' at the time (Schrey, 1961), the average education of the 1890 population in what is now Kenya being estimated at about two-tenths of a year or only a few months (Van der Ploeg, 1977). The town of Witu and six surrounding main villages, moreover, had a population in 1884 of only about 6,000 (Ylvisaker, 1978). So, who supposedly wrote these thousands of letters and how did Denhardt obtain these covers? Unless he obtained most of the letters that had been mailed (how?), there must have been tens of thousands more that existed. Plainly, we are in a fantasyland.

In fact, Lerche offered a fantastic explanation for the 2,330 used Wituland stamps that he knew of (Lerche, 1934). Those came entirely from letters sent to Denhardt during a 100-day period in the summer and fall of 1889! The letters, he contended, resulted from activity in Wituland relating to the German Emin Pasha Expedition. That expedition, led by the infamous and brutal Dr. Carl Peters, a founder of the German East Africa Company, was launched to rescue Emin Pasha. Emin (Eduard Schnitzer) was the governor of the Egyptian province of Equatoria in the Sudan but had

been forced to flee by Muhammad Ahmad's forces (Peters). Peters spent July 1889 in Witu where he met with Denhardt and enlisted his support for the expedition. On 26 July, Peters left Witu heading west to the Tana River which he followed northward. Denhardt kept a few of the covers he received intact, but for some reason, supposedly tore or cut off the cancelled stamps from the thousands of other letters he received and carefully preserved them.

Lerche claimed the existence of 2,330 – or even 2,500 – used stamps was no great problem, since that represented simply 'an average daily consumption of no more than 25 stamps' (Lerche, 1934). The idea that the expedition's needs would have generated some 2,500 letters over 100 days is simply nonsense; impossible to reconcile with Denhardt's statement that use of the postal system by Europeans was minimal as 'postal service did not take place on a daily basis and probably was irregular' (Küppers, 1894).



Figure 5. Examples of Dr. Carl Peters' handwriting.

But there is more evidence to consider. As we have shown, the six covers with distinctive handwriting discussed above (see Figure 3) were carried by private messenger, and the stamps were added after the fact. The handwriting on some if not all those covers is that of Carl Peters (see Figure 5). Peters thus communicated with Denhardt by sending a few letters marked 'eilig' (rapid) by private messenger, not through the unreliable Wituland postal system (assuming it even existed).

The docketing shows those covers were received by Denhardt from 2 August to 16 September 1889. During that time, Peters was travelling up the remote Tana, from Engatana (August 1889) to Massa (12 September). There certainly were no 'post offices' of any authority along his path and he left the furthest reaches of the Witu Sultanate at Malalulu (10 September) (see Figure 6)

One would expect that the survival rate of used examples of 96 different stamps used briefly in tropical Africa more than half a century before would vary considerably among denominations and issues. The higher values should have seen much less use than the lower values and would survive in much smaller numbers. But this is not what we see. The quantity existing of each individual used stamp, whether regular and official, is remarkably similar, regardless of denomination or issue. The average number of each denomination in all issues ranges from 32 to 42, clustering right around

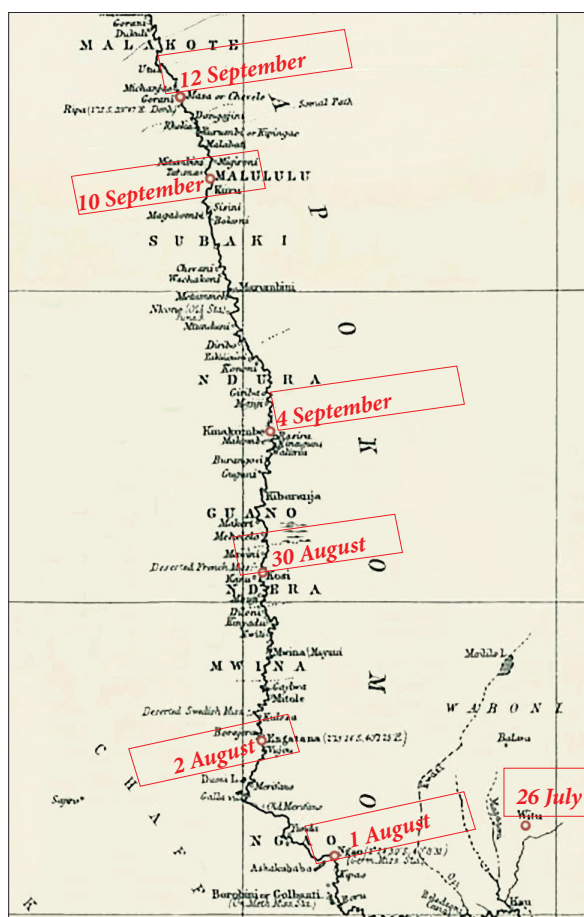


Figure 6. Map of Wituland and the Tana River, showing Dr. Carl Peters' locations in July-September 1889

their average of 39. The average number of different stamps in a single issue ranges from 30 to 47, also clustering around their average of 39. No single stamp has fewer than 20 or more than 54 used copies surviving. The higher values are just as plentiful as the lower ones. The stamps include at least 20 complete sets of all 96 Wituland stamps in used condition. How is it possible that so many complete sets of used stamps survive? These do not appear to be an actual sample of genuine stamps that had carried letters; rather they look like complete sets that were made for collectors.

These numbers raise even more problems. According to Lerche, when Wituland began issuing stamps, the Sultan was dissatisfied with the initial issue. He demanded a series of rapid changes in design, text and size (Lerche, 1934). Michel states the date that each stamp was issued and how long it remained valid (Table 4), although I am not aware of their source for the terminal dates.

Table 4. Validity dates for each issue.		
Issue	Dates of validity	Validity (days)
First regular	1 July-8 August 1889	38
Second regular	26 July-8 August 1889	13
Third regular	3 August-8 August 1889	5
Fourth regular	15 August-18 August 1889	3
Fifth regular	18 August, 1889-24 July 1890	340
First official	13 July-24 July 1889	9
Second official	24 July 1889-24 July 1890*	365
Third official	8 August 1889-24 July 1890	350

*Based on consistency with the other issues, it seems likely that the expiration date of 24 July 1890 might be more accurately something like 8 August 1889, in which case the stamps would have been valid for 15 days

If this information is correct, the survival rate of these stamps has no relation to the amount of time they were in use whether an issue was valid for a few days or for nearly a year, essentially the same number of used copies remain, averaging 39 for every stamp. In fact, in many instances the number of stamps of one issue that was in use for nine days or less exceed the number of an issue that was used for nearly a year! Just to mention two examples, 49 used copies of the 6 Pesa, fourth issue, valid for three days, survive compared to 36 copies of the 6 Pesa, fifth issue, valid for 340 days; 44 used copies of the 8 Pesa first official issue, valid for 9 days, survive compared to 29 copies of the 6 Pesa third official issue, valid for 350 days. There are many more similar examples. Surely, this is not possible.



Figure 7. Pages from album for Wituland stamps made by Walter Behrens in 1936.

Courtesy of Tim Harrison.

We should therefore take a closer look at these used Wituland stamps on piece. Fortunately, images of a good number are online. Heinrich Köhler's Auction No. 368, lot 1599A, included a Behrens album, many additional pages with complete or nearly complete sets of all issues, unused and used on piece, and an informal 'certificate' from Richter with images of used stamps. A second

Behrens album, in the collection of Tim Harrison, includes 32 used stamps (see Figure 7). Both albums contain a 'Certificate and Opinion' that the stamps are genuine, signed by Lerche and dated 20 March 1936. The albums also included black and white photographs of additional individual stamps. Other auctions included smaller numbers of used stamps. Taking all these into consideration, we have 244 different used stamps, either original or in photograph, every one of which has the W-and-bars cancellation or the Wito cds, neatly tying the stamp to the paper:

Table 5. Sample of used stamps.	
Source	No. of used stamps
Heinrich Köhler Auction 368 lot 1599A, Behrens Album	63
ditto, stamps on pages	111
ditto, Richter certificate photographs	22
Harrison Collection Behrens album	32
Burda Auction 41 (12 Jan. 2017), lot 153	11
Robert A. Siegel Auction 1130 (16-17 Nov. 2017), lot 1795	1
Reinhard Fischer Auction 140 (14 Nov. 2014), lots 6317, 6319	3
Auction Galleries Hamburg (12-13 Jan. 2017), lot 3608	1
Total	244



Figure 8. Examples of used Wituland stamps on piece, from Heinrich Köhler Auction no. 368.

There are a number of strange things about these stamps (see Figure 8). Every one is on paper, with a single oddball exception (a first series 2 Pesa, with a Wito cds in bright purple ink instead of black, which has bled through to the reverse, in Auction Galleries Hamburg, January 2017, lot 3608.). In other words, used stamps do not exist except on piece, a curious fact. Consistent with this, Michel lists and prices used stamps only on piece.

Nor do the fragments look like they come from genuine Wituland envelopes for several reasons. First, almost all the paper fragments are cut or torn very close to the stamps. Although a few are larger, only one piece bears any obvious writing on it – a few words in Arabic. By comparison, three of the 25 covers have writing close enough to the stamp (two under the stamp) that even a cutting with close margins would show evidence of writing.

This raises the question, what purpose would these cuttings serve? We know that Denhardt wanted to 'document' the existence of a postal system in Wituland to recover money from Germany (Lerche, 1930 and 1934, Schrey, 1961). But the clippings are worthless as documentation. Because of their uniform small size, however, they do fit nicely on the Behrens album pages.



Figure 9. Examples of different value stamps on pieces, including one mixed issues (left, second row from bottom).

Second, all the stamps on piece are clean and fresh looking, quite surprising if they saw postal use in tropical Africa. In addition, the 25 Köhler covers (but not the stamps) show stains, wrinkles, and tears, as would genuine used covers, but the 244 fragments of envelopes, without exception, are clean and unblemished.

It gets even more problematic when we look at pieces with more than one stamp. Among the envelope fragments, there are some 16 pieces with two stamps of different denominations (see Table 6 and Figure 9). Each is a unique franking; the same two stamps do not appear together on any other piece. One piece has mixed issues. Moreover, the total postage on each fragment forms no pattern and ranges randomly from as little as 4 Pesa to as much as 1 Rupie 3 Pesa, corresponding to a letter mailed regular rate (it is not island mail since the total postage is odd, not even), weighing some 330-335g or about 12 oz.

If these were genuine stamps used for mailing letters, we would expect to find postage amounts clustering around the average weight of the letters and probably see some common combinations to make up those rates. But we do not find that; instead, we see postage corresponding to implausible or impossible weights, as much as 12 oz. These fragments do not make sense as actual usages, they make sense only as philatelic productions, each a different, colourful combination, many with high denomination stamps.

Table 6. Used multiples recorded on piece.

Issue	Stamps	Total postage	Source
First Regular	2 Pesa + 3 Pesa	7 Pesa	Siegel
Second Regular	3 Pesa + 5 Pesa	8 Pesa	Köhler
Second & Third Regular mixed	2 Pesa + 4 Pesa	6 Pesa	Köhler
Third Regular	1 Pesa? + ¼ Rupie	17 Pesa?	Köhler
	1 Pesa? + 3 Pesa?	4 Pesa?	Köhler
Fourth Regular	6 Pesa + 2 Pesa	8 Pesa	Köhler
Fifth Regular			
First Official	2 Pesa + 6 Pesa	8 Pesa	Köhler
	¾ Rupie + 2 Pesa	50 Pesa	Köhler
	6 Pesa + 3 Pesa	9 Pesa	Burda
Second Official	4 Pesa + ¾ Rupie	52 Pesa	Köhler
	3 Pesa + 1 Rupie	1 Rupie 3 Pesa	Köhler
	5 Pesa + 1 Pesa	6 Pesa	Köhler
	2 Pesa + ½ Rupie	34 Pesa	Köhler
	6 Pesa + ½ Rupie	38 Pesa	Köhler



Figure 10. Examples of tête-bêche pairs and blocks.



Figure 11. Examples of paper fragments bearing 'used' Wituland stamps, from two Behrend albums.

Von Uexkull illustrated one cover with an uncut pair of stamps. The cover bore a tête-bêche pair of 1 Rupie stamps paying the impossibly large postage of 2 Rupies. He stated that tête-bêche pairs were 'rare errors' (Von Ueskull, 2018, Figure 3). But such pairs are in fact rather common. I have found two pieces with an uncut pair of used stamps on both. All are tête-bêche pairs: a 4 Pesa pair from the fourth regular issue (Fischer Auction no. 140, Lot 6319) and a ½ Rupie pair second regular issue (Köhler Auction No. 368, Lot 1599A). In addition, I have found one unused pair of stamps and two blocks of four: an 8 Pesa pair from the first regular issue (Köhler 368, lot 1599A), a 5 Pesa block from the second regular issue (same) and a 2 Pesa block from the third regular issue (Fischer Auction no. 6318, Lot 140). All of those have tête-bêche stamps (see Figure 10). Michel lists tête-bêche pairs for every one of the eight issues of stamps, 17 in all. However, it does not list the tête-bêche pair

illustrated in Von Uexkull's article (1 Rupie, first issue) or four of the five additional tête-bêche stamps I have located, so it appears that tête-bêche pairs exist for at least 23 of the 96 basic stamps. Likely more exist. Thus, all uncut pairs or blocks of stamps that exist, whether unused or used, on cover or not, are tête-bêche! All this tells us we are looking at philatelic productions, not survivals of 'rare errors'.

Finally, unlike the 25 envelopes in the Köhler auction which had a limited colour range, mostly buff and a few green, the fragments display a wide spectrum of additional colours: bright white, off white, light blue, dark blue, orange, brown, yellow, grey, cream, light grey with blue fibres and many intermediate hues (see Figures 8, 9 and 11). Although many of the covers were on brownish laid paper, only one fragment appears to be laid paper and that is grey, a paper not present in the sample. Did such a great variety of envelopes exist in Wituland in 1889-90? Taking the papers of the covers in the Köhler sale as representative (see Figure 2), we can fairly conclude that the paper fragments on which individual stamps are pasted likely did not exist in Witu near the end of the nineteenth century. Apparently, we are looking at fragments of envelopes or other paper from Germany sometime between 1892 and 1930.

The source of the covers and stamps

This leads us to ask where did these stamps and covers come from?

Schrey's Appendix on the Wituland stamps has a detailed history of the source of the Wituland stamps and covers (Schrey). In October 1890, the British invaded Witu and destroyed the palace and some of the town, ending the Sultanate, with which it had been at odds for years (Ylvisaker, 1978). In 1891, Clemens Denhardt left Africa as a result of the Swaheli uprising and returned to Germany. In 1892, he sent anonymous letters to *THE LONDON PHILATELIST* and the *Illustriertes Briefmarken-Journal*, with samples of Wituland stamps. Through these publications, philatelists learned of the existence of the stamps and avidly sought them. Denhardt, however, 'now and then gave them away very sparingly in the early 1890s, repeatedly emphasising that he only owned a few pieces himself'. 'For decades one could not find out anything specific about this stamp issue,' which remained a mystery (Schrey, 1961, pp114-115).

Denhardt died on 7 June 1929. According to Lerche, Denhardt's safe deposit box at the Deutsche Bank in Berlin was opened on 20 August 1929 and found to contain 'a few envelopes' with handprinted Wituland stamps, but also 'a large number' of used stamps on pieces, or 'Briefstücken,' plus unused handprinted stamps. On 6 October 1929, a group of stamp dealers was invited to search the attic of Denhardt's house in Bad Sulza. They went through many old, dusty boxes, but found no stamps. After they left, Lerche, in the presence of Denhardt's son, Clemens Jr., and lawyer Fuhrmann, found a smaller box in a corner. When opened, the box contained 12 covers with cancelled Wituland stamps. In addition, 'a number' of complete sets of the stamps were found, many cancelled, but most unused (Lerche, 1934 and Schrey, 1961). Besides the Wituland stamps, unused 'stamps' of Malakote, were found. Those are known to be bogus creations of Denhardt's (Farrant, 2016).

Just before these discoveries, in June 1929, Denhardt's son opened his father's safe at the home in Bad Sulza and found numerous Wituland stamps. Those 'private reprints' were not hand-printed in thick two-tone ink but were lithographed. Based on documents in the estate, Lerche concluded that Denhardt had those stamps printed in Germany in 1894 for his own purposes, including pasting them on pieces of paper, cancelling them and giving them to 'the ever-pressing enthusiasts [who] wanted to have postmarked examples of such strange stamps.' Apparently Denhardt's son sold these stamps to a stamp dealer and some appeared in auctions (Lerche, 1934). (These should not be confused with cheap forgeries which are widely available online and may date from the 1980s.)

Lerche's study, published in 1930, focused, in great detail, on the production of the stamps in Wituland and quoted letters from the Sultan regarding the stamps. In 1934, Lerche published a lengthy study of the stamps, focusing on their discovery in Germany after Denhardt's death (Lerche, 1934). Lerche participated in selling the stamps to the public. Many of the stamps and covers bear his signature and he signed certificates of authenticity that were part of the Wituland stamp albums

made in 1936 by Walter Behrens. Lerche described the Wituland stamps as comparable to the Post Office stamps of Mauritius 'in every respect.'

Although Schrey diplomatically described Lerche as 'immaculately honourable as a man and philatelist,' he was in fact deeply suspicious of him. Schrey repeatedly used scare quotes in referring to Leche's supposed 'find' of the stamps, and outright accused him of lying (Schrey). Schrey rejected Leche's claim that there was a complex, operating postal system in Wituland:

A genuine need for such a varied public postal service could not have existed in Wituland given the small number of Europeans living there and the few literate natives. There was especially no need to stock special issues of official and express stamps. The previous transmission of messages, by messenger post, had met all the prior needs without stamps (Schrey, 1961, pp117-118).

Lerche certainly is suspect for many reasons. Among these is his claim that when he examined documents of Denhardt in September 1929, he found 'a whole number of letters from the most diverse senders, in which was casually written about the effectiveness of the post of the Swahili Sultanate - in July, August, September 1889 etc' (Lerche, 1934). Thus, not only did the Post of the Suaheli Sultanate exist, but it was renowned for its efficiency! (If such letters do exist, they presumably were made by Denhardt to support his claim for compensation from Germany.)

Schrey generously acknowledged that there may have been some rudimentary postal operation and '[t]here probably were Swahili stamps in the early days of the post office but only in such a small amount that they have not survived.' (Schrey, 1961, p122). The thousands of Wituland stamps Lerche supposedly found in 1929 and that are plentiful today, however, were printed in Germany around the end of the nineteenth century, and a few were attached to genuine stampless covers:

Except for a few envelopes self-addressed by [Denhardt] most of the stamped envelopes were genuine, that is, envelopes for commercial letters which, as usual, were carried by messengers. For the purpose of deception, the Swahili stamps were only later glued on to them and cancelled with the two stamps which Gustav [his brother] had allegedly sent to Clemens in Germany after the Swahili uprising of 1891. (Schrey, 1961, pp117, 122-125.)

These conclusions are not affected by the court case Von Uexkull noted. That case was brought by stamp dealer Walter Behrens, who marketed the Wituland stamps and handmade albums, against three stamp dealers who had stated that the Wituland stamps were not genuine issues. The litigation supposedly resulted in an order that the stamp dealers could not call the stamps 'false or reprints' (Lerche, 1934). Schrey, however, stated that the trial was inconclusive (Schrey, 1961). I am not aware of any record of the trial evidence or court's decision other than a summary Behrens published (which I have not seen) and some references to it by Schrey.

We do have some idea, however, of the key witnesses' likely testimony. In 1934, Lerche wrote that Ernst von Carnap-Quernheimb, a German major, was 'the only surviving [German?] witness' who had been in the sultanate from July 1889 to February 1890. Carnap supposedly signed a statement (presumably some 40 years after the fact) that reads suspiciously like a precis of Lerche's articles, from the old sultan's desire for a postal system, to the new sultan's appointment of Denhardt to carry out the plan, to the carving by an 'Indian' of a series of handstamps for approval by the sultan, the creation of regular and official stamps and the use of multiple colors of paper for the stamps. The one difference, perhaps, is that the Emin Pasha Expedition not only made use of the stamps, but its presence actually led to the creation of the postal system. Major Carnap claimed personal knowledge that the stamps were used and received stamped letters himself, although he and the other Germans 'didn't pay any attention to them ...' (Lerche, 1934).

In 1932, Rear Admiral Ritter von Höhnelt signed a statement that in 1892 in Zanzibar, an individual showed him ten stamps with 'Arabic inscriptions on different coloured paper, which were made with primitive handstamps'. Although he then 'was not in the least interested in philately', he deciphered the text and 'inferred that they were postage stamps issued by the Swahili Sultan' (Lerche, 1934).

According to Schrey, Wilhelm Pieper, a missionary in the sultanate, wrote in 1934 that he had seen a letter in the years in question which bore two stamps. The stamps had a normal format, the

paper was white, and otherwise they were very dirty (Schrey, 1961).

Schrey also tells us that Louis Senf, a stamp dealer in Leipzig, submitted an expert report to the court, presumably concluding that the stamps were genuine.

The evidence thus appears to have been in conflict, based on memory of events 40 years old that were of little or no interest at the time and made by persons with significant financial interests in the outcome. At most, some of the evidence might support the existence of some type of provisional postal system in the sultanate, as Schrey noted. There is no reason to think, however, that the court even saw, let alone considered, let alone even saw, the questionable covers with inconsistent, inexplicable and impossible frankings or the thousands of stamps on dozens of different pieces of paper, each perfectly and identically tied to cover, all as clean and fresh as the day they were made. In any event, whatever the court did or did not rule upon has no significance in deciding the technical questions presented here, which can only be resolved by philatelic analysis of actual material.

Conclusion

The Wituland stamped covers are philatelic fantasies, made in Germany by pasting exotic colourful 'stamps' on genuine stampless covers that had been carried in Wituland. Similarly, individual stamps were pasted on thousands of small pieces of paper, cut or torn from envelopes or other sources, the so-called Briefstücken. Two different fake cancellations were carefully applied to the stamps, perfectly tying them in every case. The covers, stamps on piece, and 'unused' stamps including dozens of 'rare' tête-bêche pairs and blocks, were sold in the philatelic market and in beautiful hand-made albums including complete sets of every issue.

Much still remains unknown including

- (1) whether the supposed original handprinted stamps were made by Clemens Denhardt or someone else and when;
- (2) who pasted these stamps to covers and fragments of envelopes and when?
- (3) what, if anything, is true in Lerche's lengthy and detailed story of the history of the Wituland stamps, including letters from the Sultan, a chart of postal rates, and other documentation?

Notes

1. All translations from German originals are by the author, except as noted.
2. Regarding the real cost to the locals of the Witu stamps: teachers, for example, were paid 100 Marks a month, equivalent to 3 Rupies per day. (Sandrock gives a Mark to Rupie exchange rate of 1.33:1). I divided the monthly rate by 25 to get a daily rate, assuming a six-day working week. It is possible that my calculations understate the value of Rupies at the time. See also Furley, O.W. and Watson, T. (1978). *A History of Education in East Africa*, p54, NOK Publishing, New York, who note that the German government paid the teacher at the central school near Lake Victoria 10-15 Rupies per month.

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London 2022 FEPA Seminars and FIP Commissions Meetings

THE EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF PHILATELIC ASSOCIATIONS, FEPA will hold two seminars during the Exhibition. These are as follows:

Sunday, 20 February, 12-2 pm: John Davies FRPSL – *Best Practice in Youth Philately*.

This seminar is aimed at those who either actively work in youth philately or have a role in marketing or sponsoring youth philately. Of course, anyone who is considering how to get involved in youth philately or is simply interested in what's going on in that field is welcome.

Friday, 25 February, 10 am-12 pm: Dr Eric Scherer – *Digitalisation and Social Media in Philately*.

This seminar is ideally suited for those who are seeking advice on how to connect philately and social media and are planning to explore the opportunities. Hopefully participants who can share their experiences will make this seminar more meaningful. Anyone who is broadly interested to learn about digitalisation in philately will certainly find this seminar helpful.

In addition, FIP (International Federation of Philately) Commissions Meetings are to be held on the following dates:

Monday, 21 February: Astrophilately; Wednesday, 23 February: Traditional;

Wednesday, 23 February: Revenues; Thursday, 24 February: Literature;

Thursday, 24 February: Postal History and Friday, 25 February: Postal Stationery.