

Collecting Forerunner Mail from the Holy Land to Uncommon Destinations – A Complex Endeavour

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I. Introduction

One of my passions is collecting covers sent from the Holy Land to "Uncommon Destinations". For a number of years, I published a series of articles in the Israel Philatelist on "Mail Sent from Palestine During the British Occupation: December 1917 – May 1948" and presented one or more webinars on the subject for the Society of Israel Philatelists (SIP), the American Philatelic Society and the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada. During 2024, I delivered a number of webinars for SIP on "Mail Sent to Uncommon Destinations from Israel During 1948-1960", the early Israel classic postal history period. In late 2024-early 2025, I did a series of webinars for SIP on "Mail Sent from the Holy Land to Uncommon Destinations during the UPU Forerunner Period: 1875-1918".

In all of the webinars and in the published articles on the subject, I define an "uncommon destination" ("Uncommon Destination") to be a place to which mail was seldom sent from the Holy Land, principally because of one or more factors such as population size, distance or lack of any apparent social or economic connections to the Holy Land. The Uncommon Destination may have been a sovereign state or a territory, colony, protectorate of a sovereign state. These sovereign states were typically members of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) as July 1, 1875 or during the later nineteenth century.

The article briefly discusses why the collection of material sent during the Forerunner Period beginning in 1875 (the "UPU Period") differs from collecting mail sent to Uncommon Destinations during the British Mandate or the early Israel classic postal history period. It outlines the challenge factors which are readily apparent when assembling and exhibiting the Forerunner Period postal history related to Uncommon Destinations.

The article shows a number of covers to Uncommon Destinations on different continents. First, it shows an example of a cover sent to one particular destination through one of the Ottoman Post Offices in the Holy Land or one of the foreign post offices operated by one of five sovereign states (Austria, Germany, France, Russia and Italy) which had concluded a "capitulations treaty" with The Ottoman Empire. These foreign post offices were open from the mid to late 19th century and closed on or before September 30, 1914 as a result of the repeal of these treaties. Consequently, between October 1, 1914 and until late 1917, only the Ottoman Post Office system functioned in the Holy Land.

Once the Egyptian Expeditionary Force ("EEF") of the Allied Powers began capturing territory in the Holy Land, the EEF military post offices carried civilian mail with or without postage and the Ottoman Post Offices progressively shut down in towns and cities which were captured by the EEF. This occurred in stages through late 1917 to late October 1918 (the "EEF Period") until the last of the Ottoman Post Offices shut down. Postage stamps were introduced by the EEF in February 1918 for use in certain EEF military post offices while Turkish stamps continued to be used in Ottoman Post Offices.

Therefore, between 1875 and 1918, civilian mail could be sent through one or more post offices to a particular destination.

II. Why Collecting Mail from the Forerunner Period Is Complex Before or After the Formation of the UPU Regardless of the Destination to Which Mail Is Sent

The postal history of the Holy Land Forerunner period is quite complicated – even for mail sent from the Holy Land to common destinations such as Germany, France, England, Switzerland, Egypt, the United States, Austria and Hungary. The postal history before 1875 (including rates and routes) of the mail sent prior to the formation and operation of the General Postal Union (the "UPU") was extremely complex. The first page of this article shows an example of a letter sent in 1872 from Jerusalem to the Bahamas West Indies through the Austrian Post via New York.

Once the UPU was operational in 1875, postal rules still remained complex. A study of mail sent from the Holy Land requires a detailed knowledge of stamps, postal rates, postal routes and postal markings to properly identify and describe material. Given the existence of both Ottoman and foreign post offices in the Holy Land in 1875 through to September 30, 1914, outbound mail could bear the stamps of various countries reflected Turkish or other currencies.

III. Why Is Mail Sent to Destinations During the UPU Forerunner Period More Challenging to Collect than Mail Sent From the Holy Land to Destinations During Later Periods?

Whenever a different postal system operates within a country or place, mail may bear different postmarks, various auxiliary markings, different censorship markings, different registration etiquettes and possibly even be subject to different postal rates. These differences were more profound during the UPU Forerunner Period than in later postal periods because of the number of operational postal systems throughout the Holy Land.

During the UPU Forerunner Period, mail could be dispatched from one of a number of Ottoman or foreign post offices until October 1914. After that, mail was sent either only from an Ottoman Post Office or from one of the two postal systems operating during the EEF Period.

During the British Mandate, mail was sent only through the British Mandate postal system until May 2, 1948 when there were post offices set up by the Jewish Provisional Government known as *Minhelet Ha'am*. Once the State of Israel was founded, mail was sent through the Israeli postal system and the postal systems of Egypt and Transjordan during the 1948-1949 conflict.

III. Why Is Mail Sent to Uncommon Destinations During the UPU Forerunner Period More Challenging to Collect than Mail Sent From the Holy Land to Uncommon Destinations During Later Periods?

There are a number of reasons. First, material mailed during the UPU Forerunner Period is older and may have been destroyed or damaged over the years. Second, methods of transportation were more primitive in the earlier periods. Mail principally travelled long distances by sea and possibly by land or by a combination of the two. During the later periods, airmail service was available and destinations far

Exhibit 1: Stamps Used in Various Foreign Post Offices



from the Holy Land could be reached relatively quickly without the higher likelihood of damage to the mail. Third, political instability, conflict and economic unrest contributed to the likelihood that mail in certain destinations was destroyed over the years.

These factors are generally applicable to the collection of postal material sent from the Holy Land to common destinations. The variable that makes collecting mail to Uncommon Destinations more challenging is the number of postal systems that were operational in the Holy Land during the UPU Forerunner Period. As mentioned earlier, whenever a different postal system operates within a country or place, mail may bear different postmarks, various auxiliary markings, different censorship markings, different registration etiquettes and possibly even be subject to different postal rates.

As such, the challenges of collecting postal history in this area are the following:

- Finding material related to a particular uncommon destination;
- Collecting all 5 foreign dispatching post offices to a particular uncommon destination;
- Collecting all 5 foreign dispatching post offices and an Ottoman post office to a particular uncommon destination;
- Collecting Ottoman and EEF post offices to a particular uncommon destination during the EEF Period;
- Collecting different postal rates charged for printed matter, letters, registration, postcards and parcels to a particular uncommon destination;
- Collecting many uncommon destinations on different continents; and
- Determining the transportation routes of mail by land and sea.

IV. Classifying Uncommon Destinations and Identifying UPU Affiliations

It is easiest to classify postal material sent to an Uncommon Destination by its destination, continent, political affiliation (sovereign state, territory, possession, colony or otherwise). Some destinations may or may not have been UPU members or connected to a UPU member. The UPU membership may not have always been applicable throughout the UPU Forerunner Period. For example, the Republic of China only became a UPU member in 1914. The determination of UPU membership might affect the analysis of the applicable postal rate and sufficiency of postage on the mail. One may also need to research whether the Uncommon Destination was affected or a party to a postal treaty or agreement with the dispatching sovereign state in the Holy Land from which the mail was being sent.

V. Some Examples of Uncommon UPU Forerunner Period Destinations on Different Continents

A. Asia



Exhibit 2: Japan – Ottoman Post – Bethlehem – 1909; Postmark: December 24, 1909 Transit: Port Said, January 9, 1910, Port Taufiq, January 9, Kobe, February 11 Arrival: Osaka February 12 and 13 (Japanese)



Exhibit 3: *Philippines – Austrian Post – Jerusalem, 1909; Postmark: December 3, 1909. Transit: Port said December 5, Singapore, December 25. Arrival: Manila January 7, 1910. 2 Piasters registered (1) single weight letter (1) rate*

Exhibit 4: *Strait Settlements (Singapore) British Territory – German Post – Rishon le Zion/Jaffa, December 11,1903 – 20 para pc rate Postmark: December 11, 1903. Arrival: Singapore, January 12, 1904 Transit: Suez (January 1, 1904)*





***Exhibit 5:** Federated Malay States – British Territory – German Post Jaffa 1913 – 10 centimes PC Rate Postmark: August 27. Transit: Port Said TPO August 29, via Suez Canal, Singapore, September 1. Arrival: Ipoh (Perak) September*

***Exhibit 6:** Sumatra – Dutch East Indies – Austrian Post – Jerusalem, 1908 – 5 centimes printed matter rate – Sigli in Atjeh (Achin) – Dutch government in Northern Sumatra*

B. Middle East

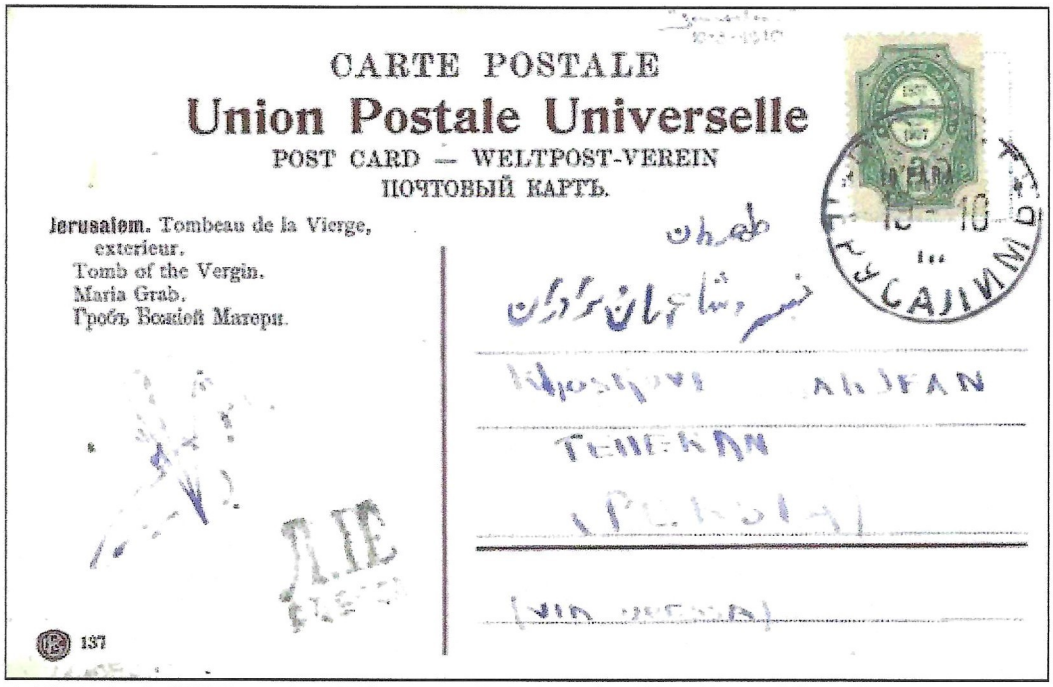


***Exhibit 7:** Persia (UPU September 1877) – Russian Post – Jerusalem 1910 – 10 para PC rate Postmark: March 10 – Russian Markings – Transit: Odessa*

C. South America





***Exhibit 8:** Argentina – Russian Post– Jaffa 1906 – 2 piasters paying the registered letter rate (No 67). Postmark (Russian): June 3, 1906 Arrival: Buenos Aires, July 15, 1906. Returned with Russian and Italian postmarks of Constan*

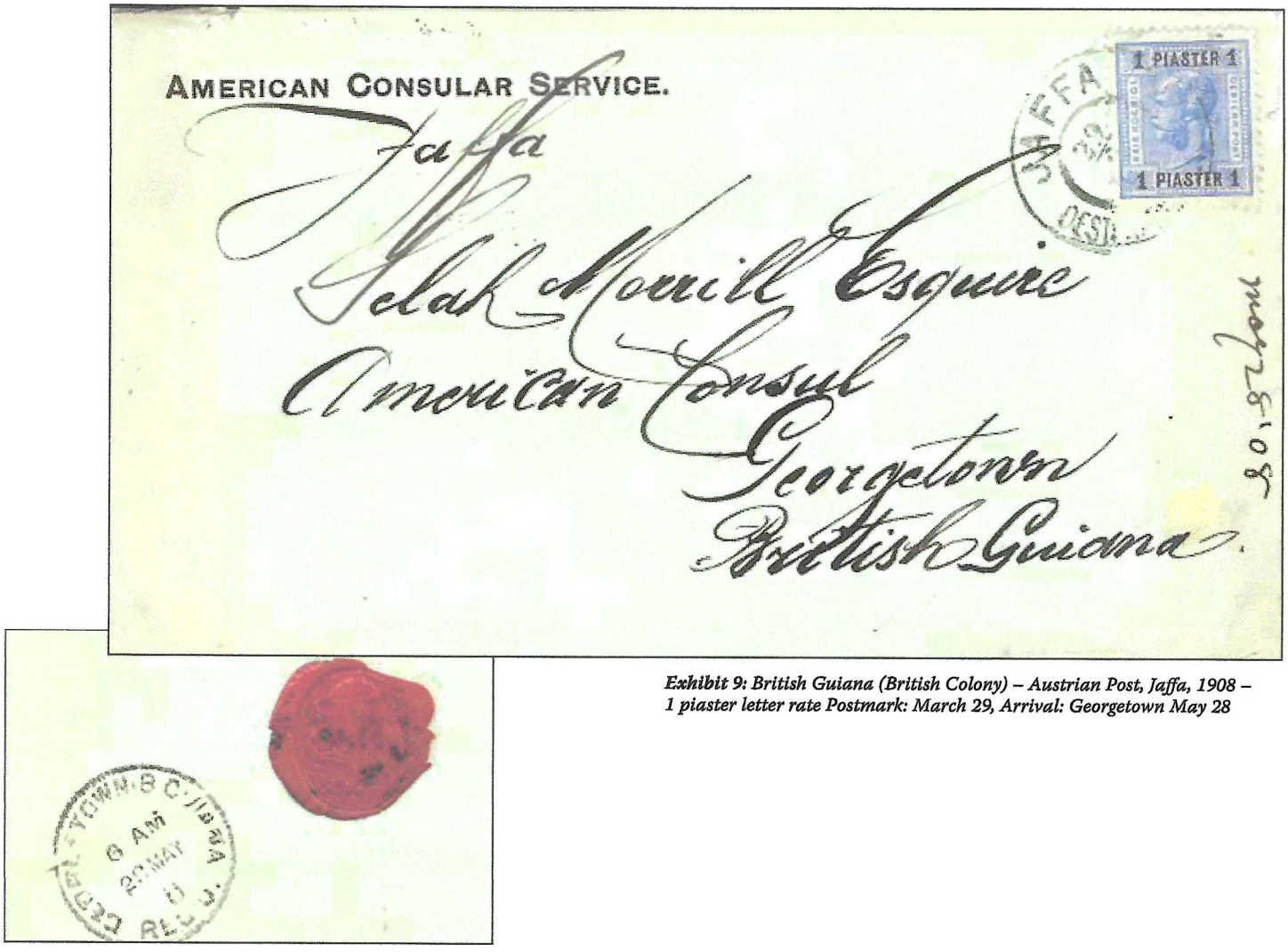


Exhibit 9: British Guiana (British Colony) – Austrian Post, Jaffa, 1908 – 1 piaster letter rate Postmark: March 29, Arrival: Georgetown May 28

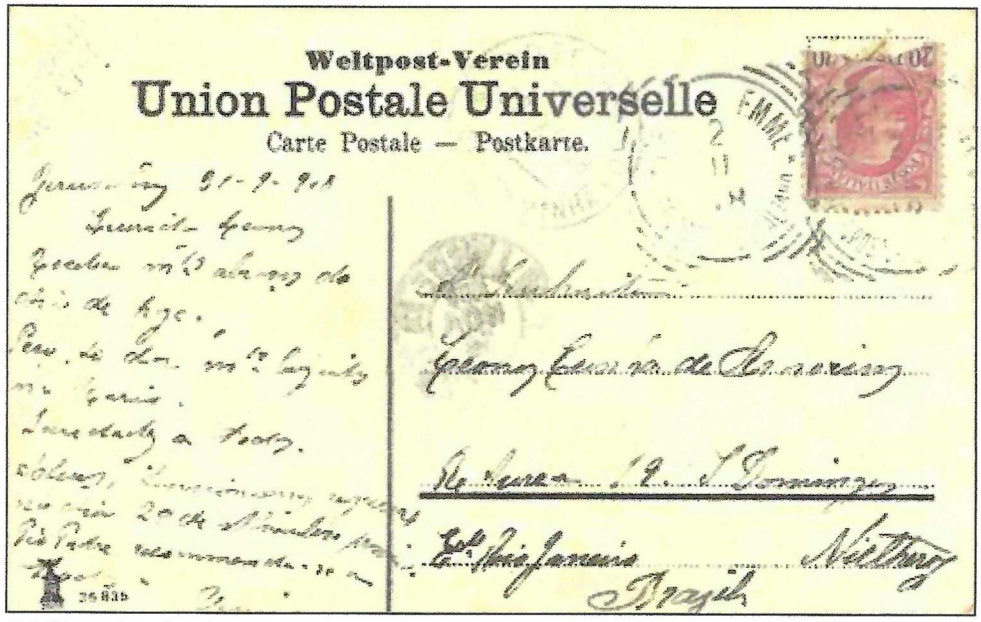
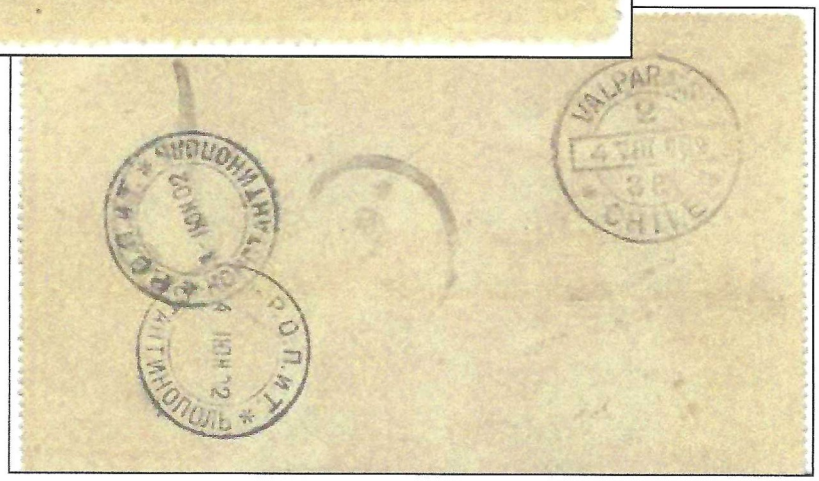


Exhibit 10: Brazil-Italian Post – Jerusalem 1908 – 20 para PC rate Postmark: November 2, Arrival: Rio de Janiero – November 28



Exhibit 11: *Chile – Russian Post – Jerusalem 1902 – 10 kopeck PC rate. Postmark: May 23, 1902. Transit: Jaffa ROPIT June 3 and. Arrival: Valparaiso, August 4 – 73 Days!!*



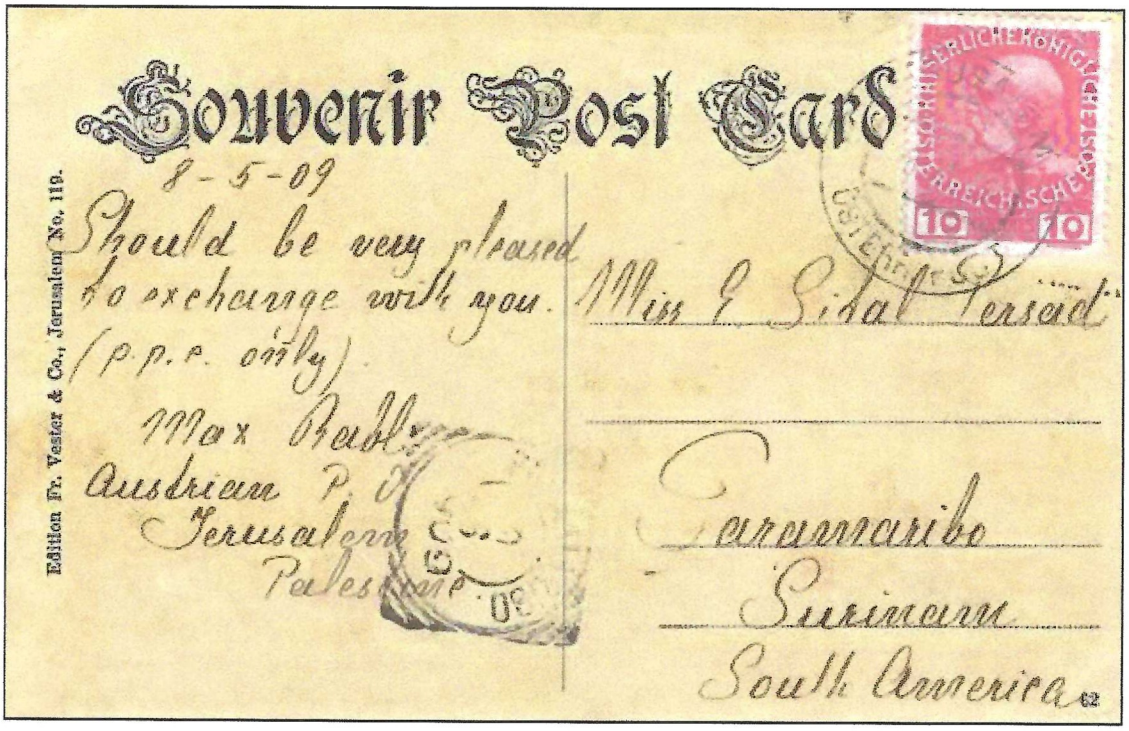


Exhibit 12: *Surinam – Dutch Colony – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1909 – 10 centimes PC rate Postmark: May 8 Arrival: June 9*

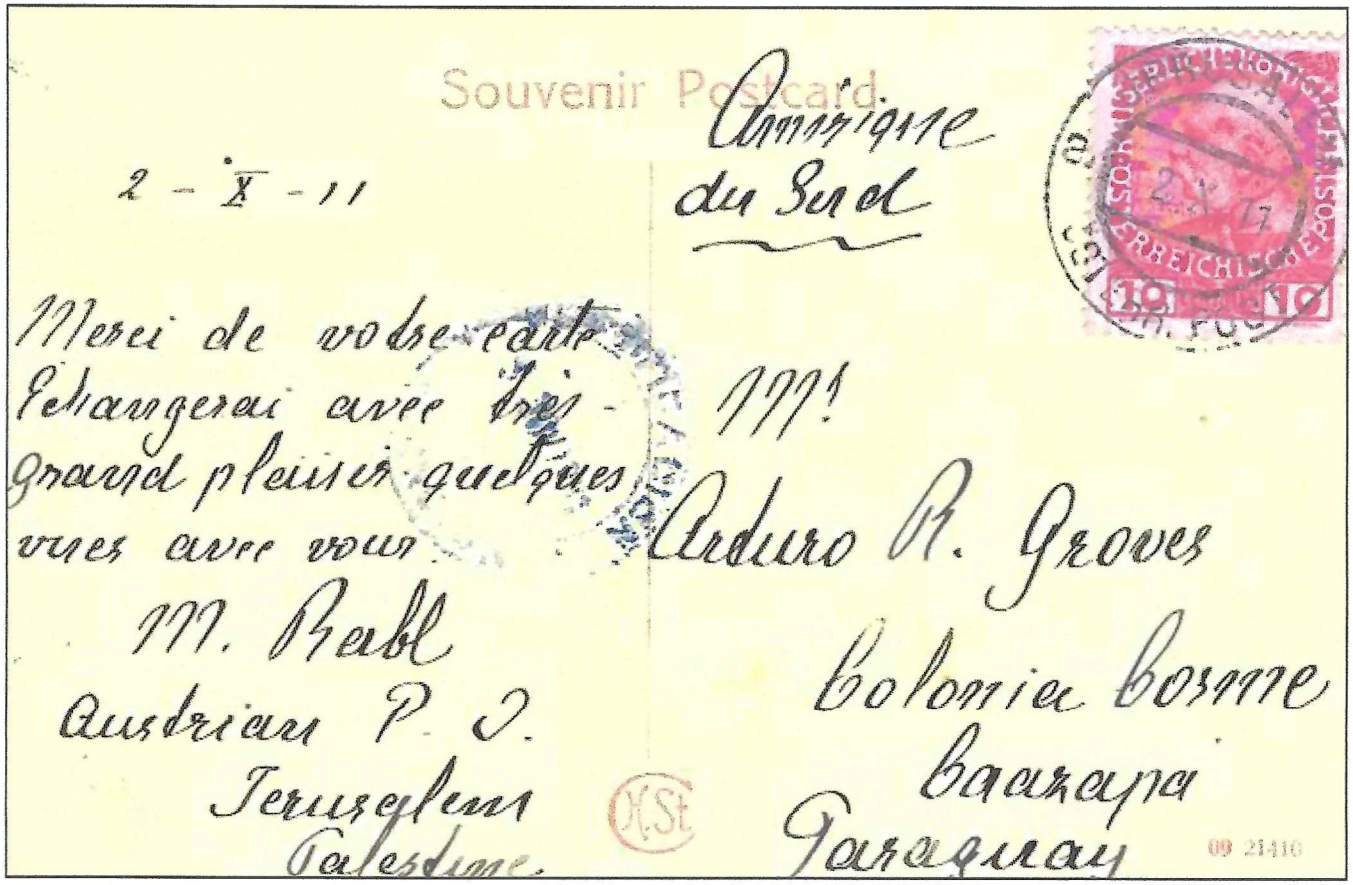


Exhibit 13: Paraguay (UPU July, 1881) – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1911– 10 centimes PC rate Postmark: October 2. Arrival: through Asuncion – November 9

D. North America

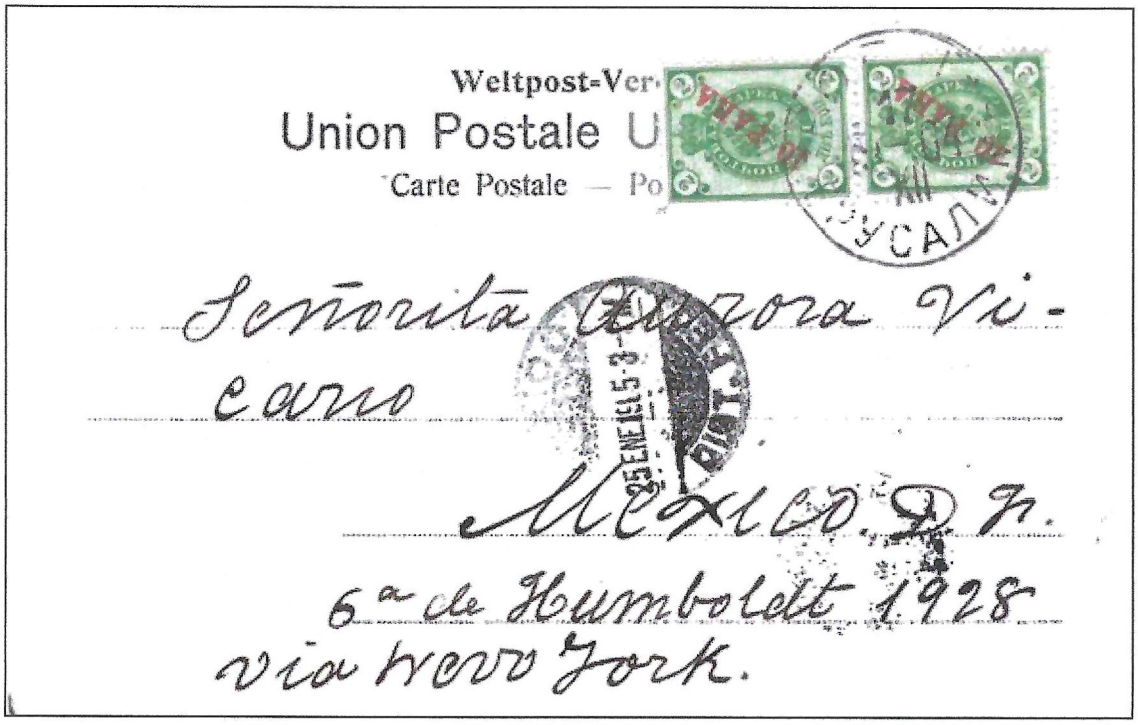


Exhibit 14: Mexico (UPU April 1, 1879) – Russian Post – Jerusalem 1904 – 20 para PC rate. Written: December 26,1904. ROPit Postmark December 27. Arrival: Mexico District FEW January 25, 1905 – ROPit steamship likely to Odessa, then by sea to New York (manuscript), then boat to Vera Cruz and overland to Mexico City



Exhibit 15: *Canal Zone (US Territory) – Austrian Post – Jerusalem – 1913. 2 piasters registered letter rate. Postmark: November 29. Transit: New York (Dec 18 & 19) – Arrival: Cristobal, December 30*

Exhibit 16: *Costa Rica – Ottoman Post – Jerusalem 1914 – 20 para PC rate Postmark: date unclear in 1914. Arrival: San Jose, May 12*



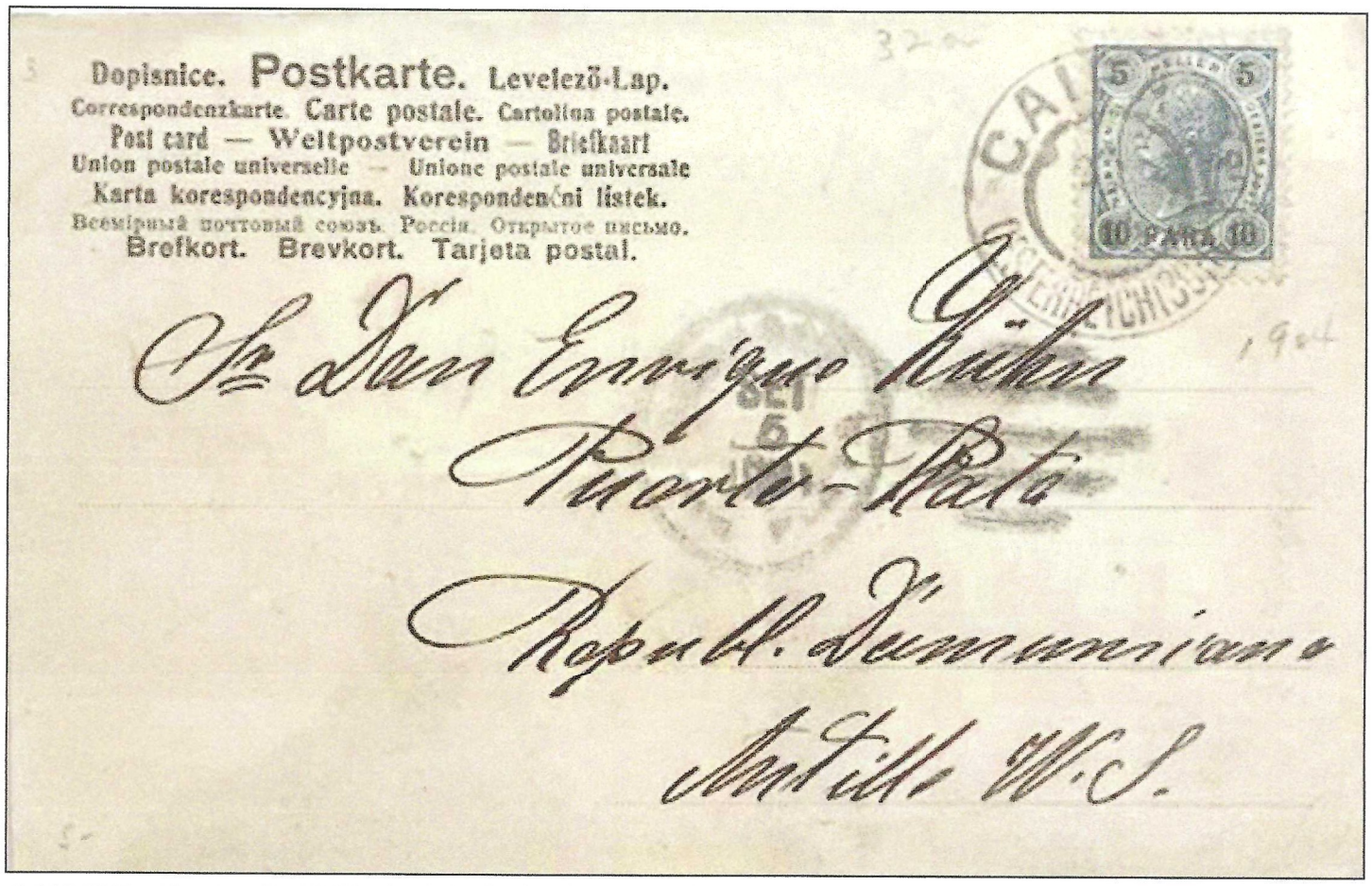


Exhibit 17: Dominican Republic (UPU October 1, 1880) – Austrian Post – Haifa 1904 – 10 para PM rate – Postmark: July 23 – Arrival: Puerto Plata, September 5, 1904



Exhibit 18: Canada – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1887– 5 soldi PC rate – Arrival: April 19. Written: March 21. Postmark: March 22. Transit: Alexandria: March 26, London, April 4

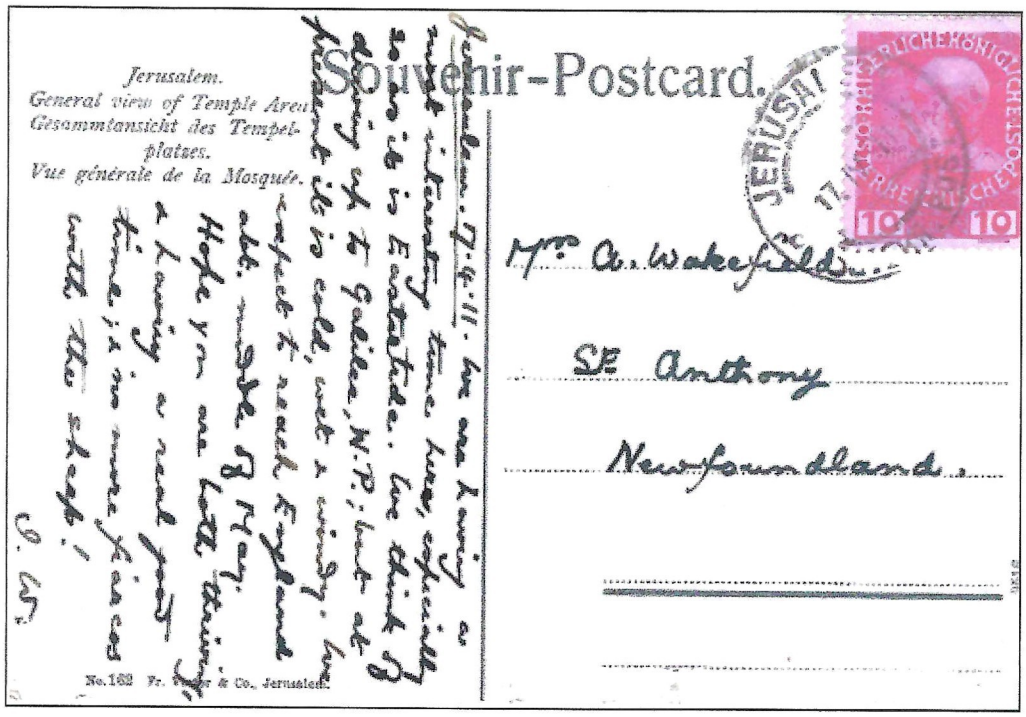


***Exhibit 19:** Dominion of Newfoundland – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1911– 10 centimes PC rate Written and Postmark: April 17, 1911*

E. Oceania

***Exhibit 20:** Australia – New South Wales – Ottoman Post – Tiberias 1906 – 20 para PC rate. Postmark: September 10, 1906. Transit: Port Said, Alexandria (Oct 2) and Suez (Oct 6)*

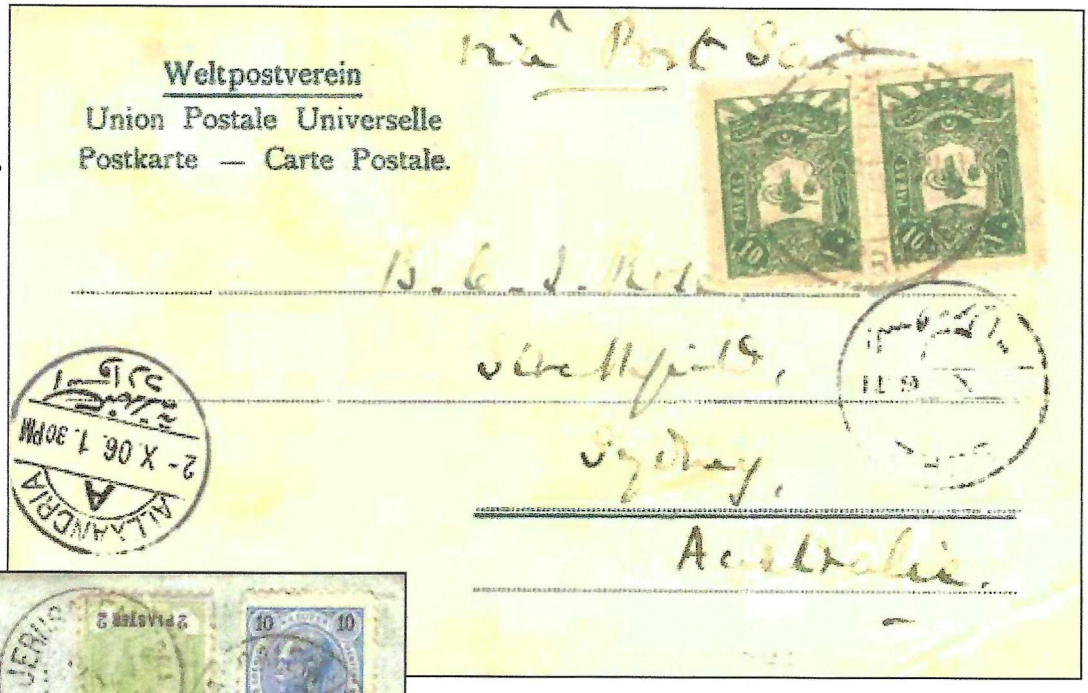




***Exhibit 21:** New Zealand – Pre UPU Membership (UPU October 1, 1907) – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1896.*
3 piasters pays the double weight letter rate (2 piasters) and 1 piaster registration rate. Postmarked November 2, 1896, Transit Port Said November 4, Wellington December 10, Arrival Nelson December 11

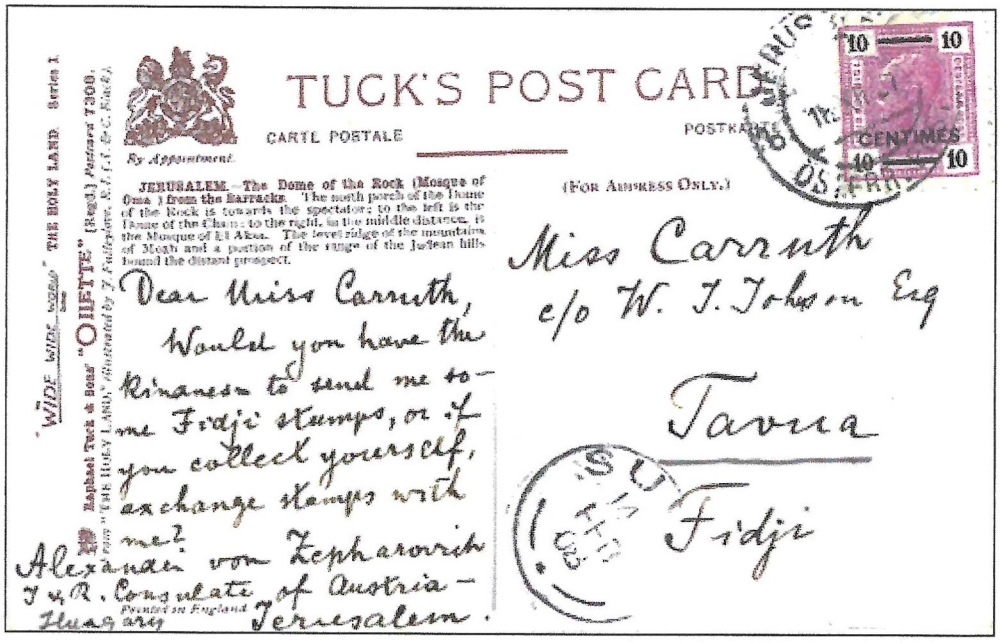


Exhibit 22: Fiji – British Crown Colony – Austrian Post –Jerusalem 1907
10 centimes PC rate. Postmarked December 18, 1907. Transit Suva, February 14, 1908. Delivered to Tavua

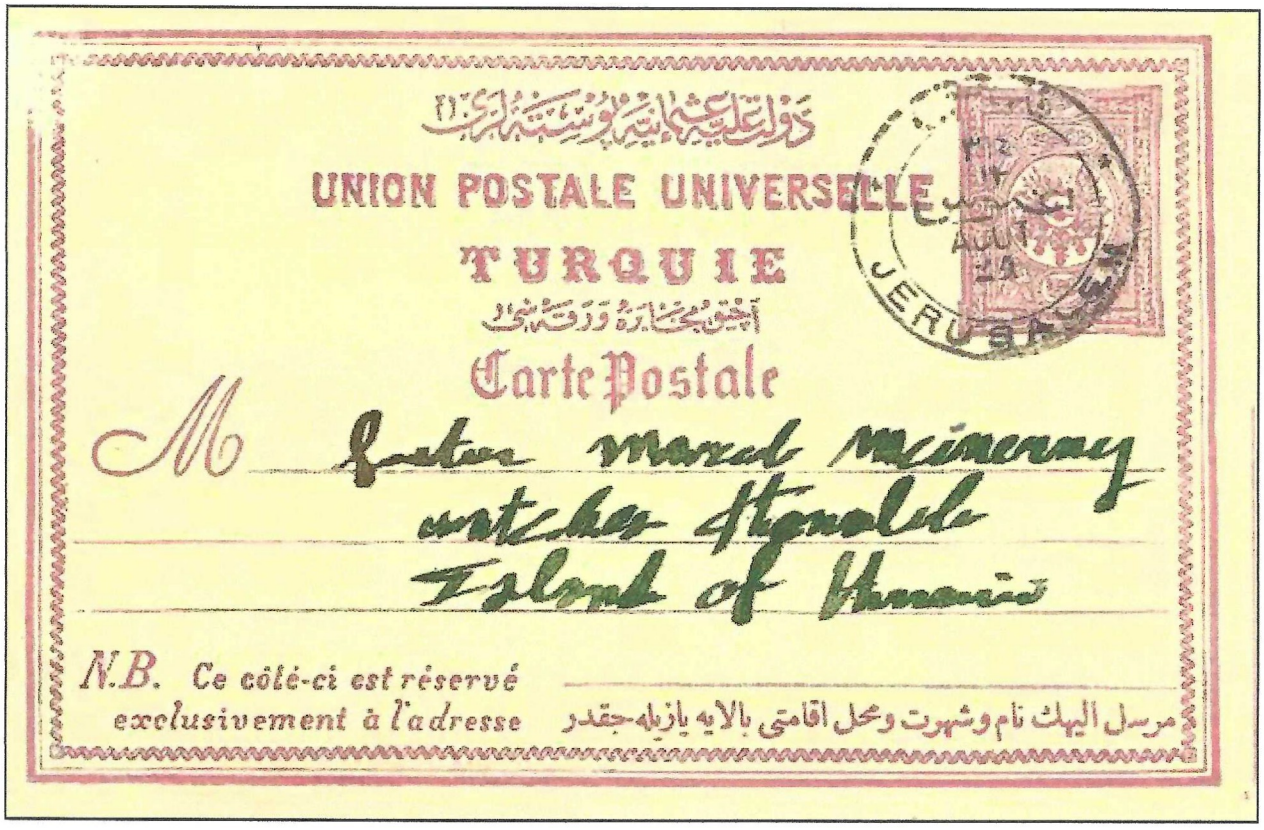


Exhibit 23: Hawaii (UPU January 1,1882) – Ottoman Post – Jerusalem 1892. 20 para PC rate. Written December 1892

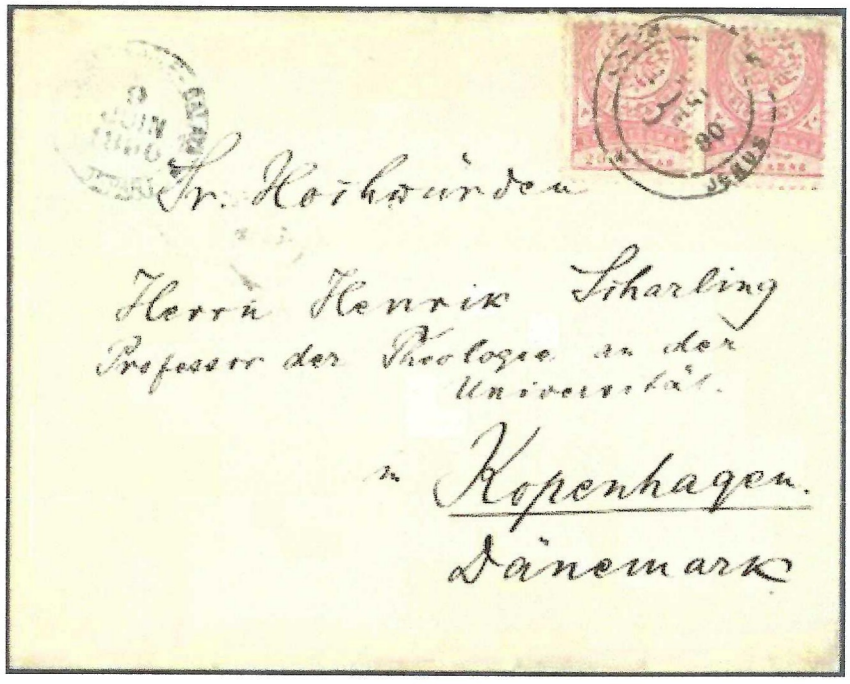


Exhibit 24: Denmark (UPU July 1875) – Ottoman Post-Jerusalem 1890. 40 para letter rate. Postmark: May Transit: Constantinople – Galata – June 9. Arrival: Kopenhagen June 13

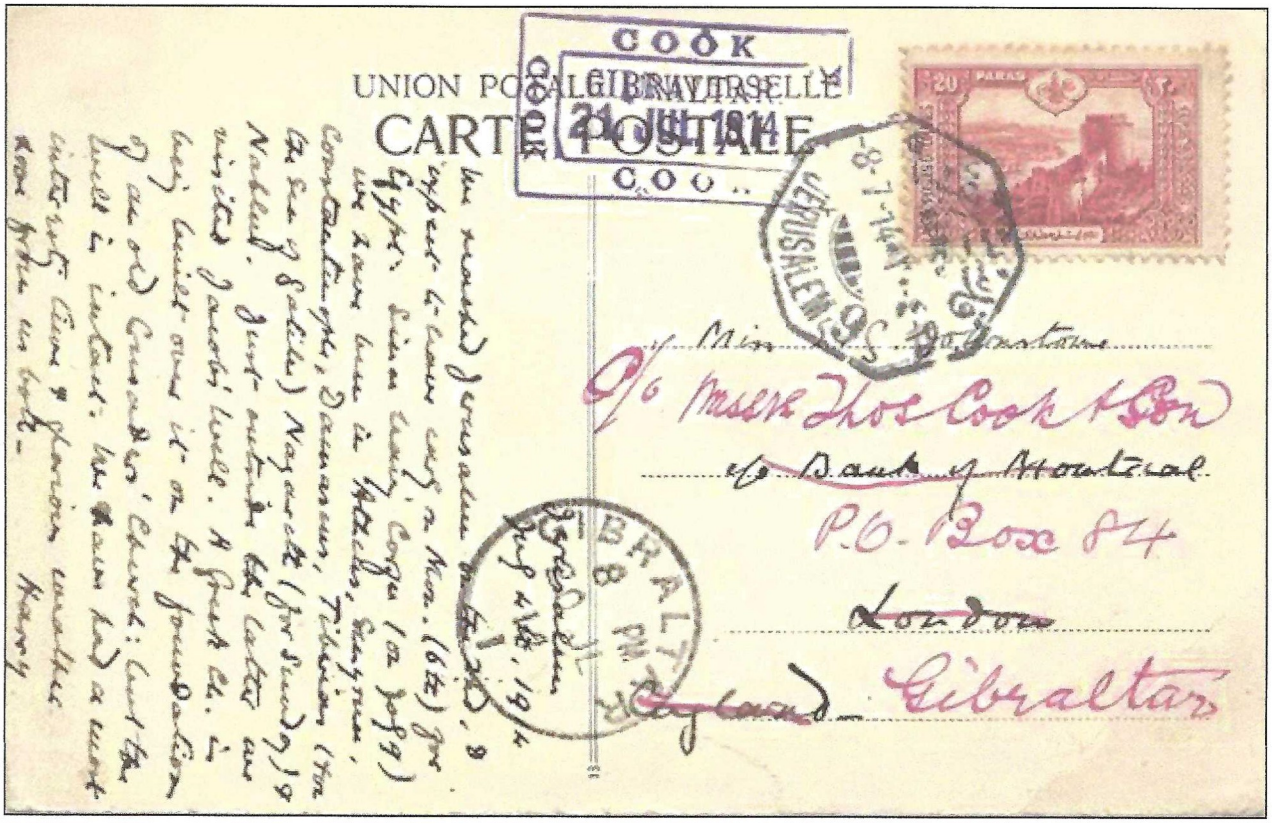


Exhibit 25: Gibraltar (British Territory) – Ottoman Post – Jerusalem 1914. 20 para PC rate. Postmark: July 4. Transit: London July 8 and July 20. Arrival: July 21 (Thomas Cook)

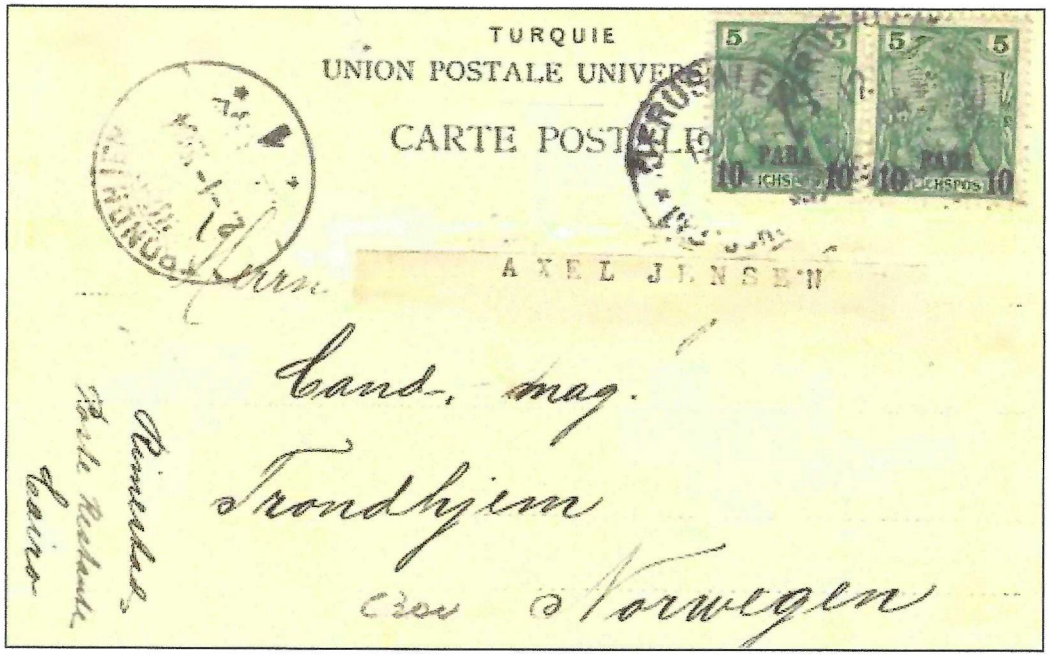


Exhibit 26: Norway (Sweden) – German Post – Jerusalem 1904. 20 para PC rate. Written: January 12. Postmark: January 12. Arrival: February 1

G. Africa



Exhibit 27: Cape Colony (British) – German Post – 1902. 10 Para and 1 Piaster overprinted stamps used to pay the correct rate for registered printed matter from Jerusalem. Postmarked February 21, 1902. Transit London March 5. Marked Registered in London on March 6, 1902. Arrival King William's Town

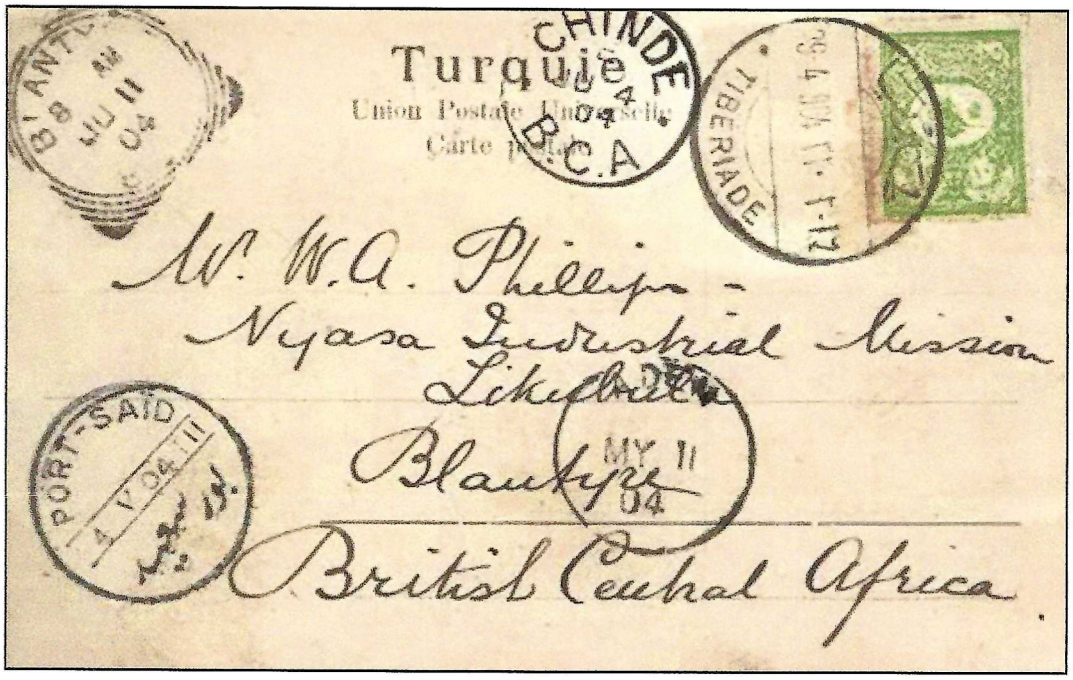


Exhibit 28: British Central Africa (BCA) British Protectorate (1889) – Ottoman Post –1904. Postmarked Tiberias April 29. Transit Port Said May 4, Aden May 11, Chinde BCA June 4, arrival Blantyre June 11

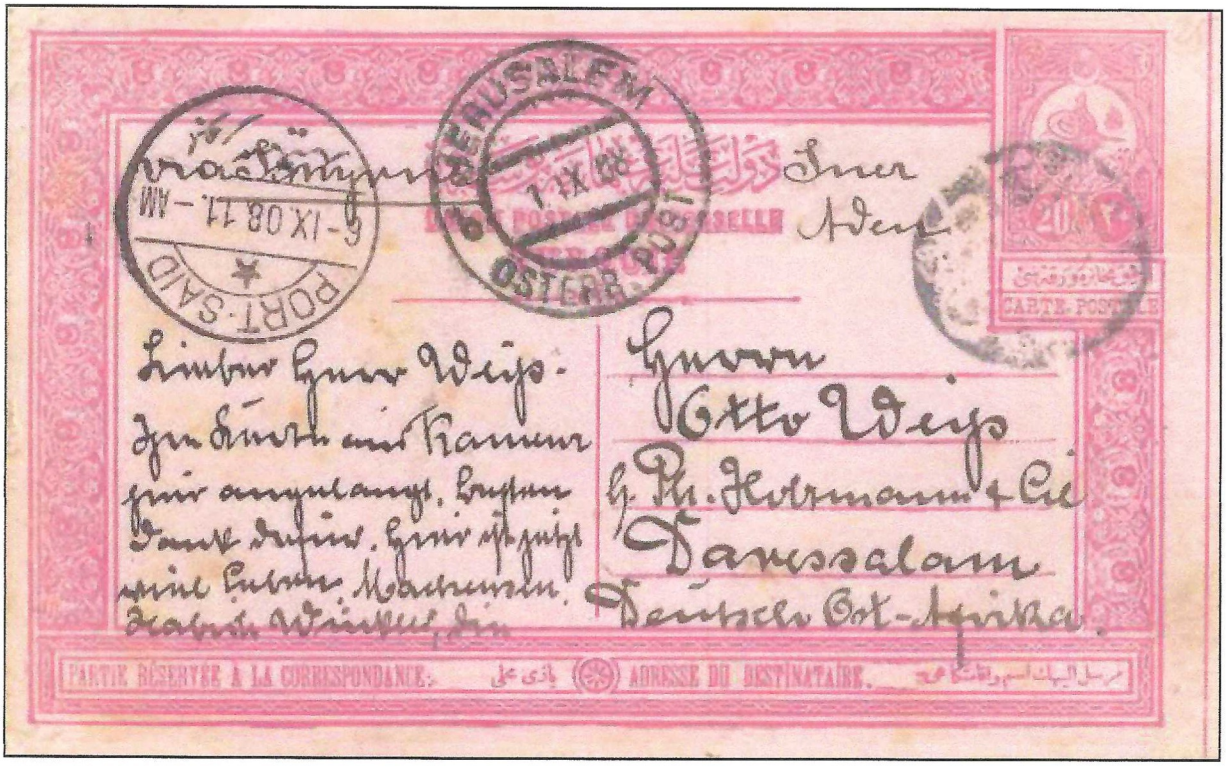


Exhibit 29: German East Africa – Ottoman/Austrian Post Jerusalem 1908. 20 para PC rate. Postmark: September 1, 1908 and transit September 8 Port Said. Arrival September 22

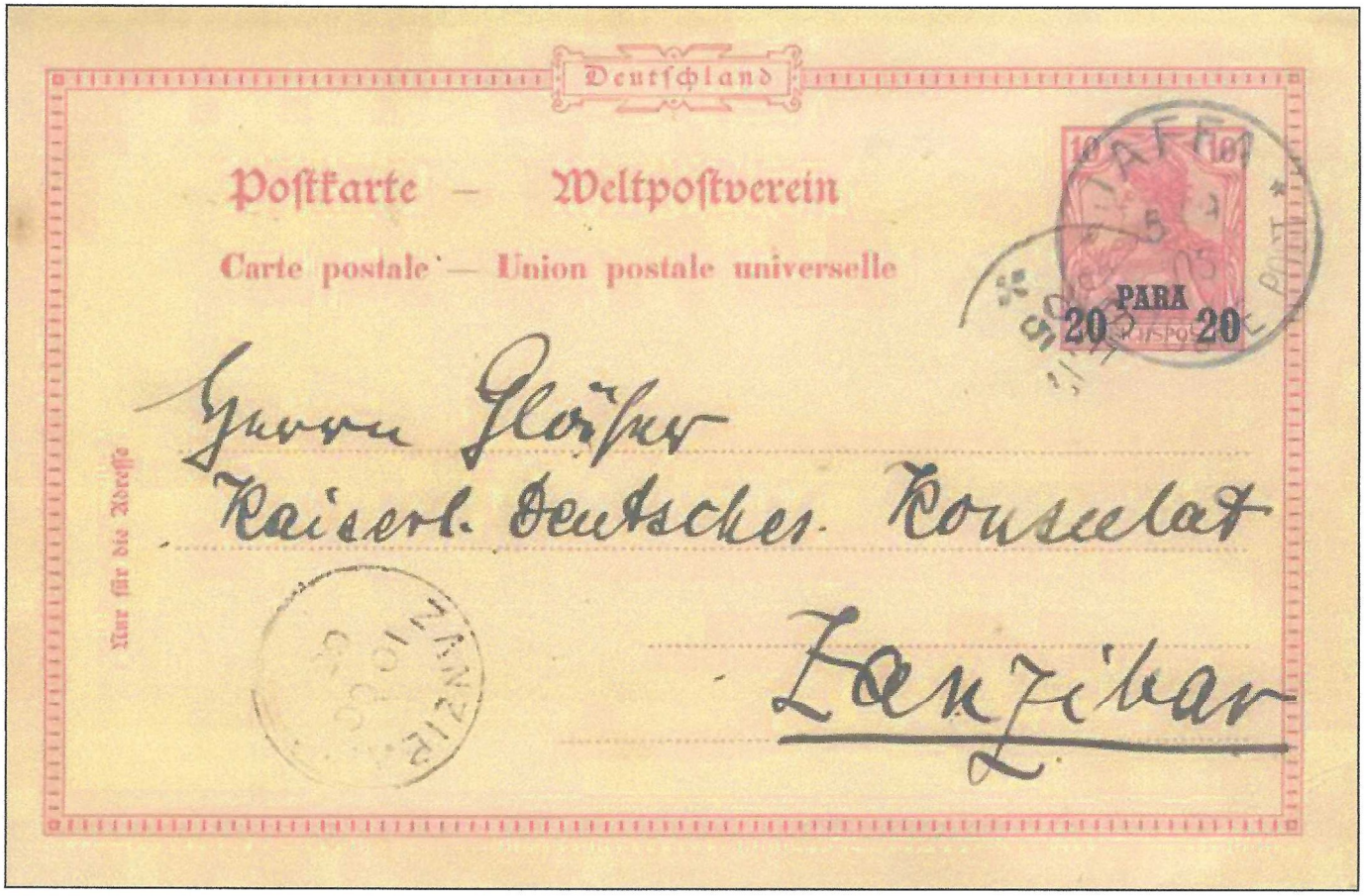


Exhibit 30: Zanzibar – German Post – Jaffa 1905. 20 para PC rate Postmark: September 9, 1905 Transit: Aden September 17. Arrival: October 10



Exhibit 31: German South – West Africa – German Post Jerusalem – 1901. 20 para PC rate. Postmark: January 21, 1901 Transit: Port Said January 23. Transit: Suez January 24. Transit: Aden January 30. Arrival: WINDHOEK April 14. 4 country postmarks and 3 month journey



***Exhibit 32:** Ivory Coast (French) – French Post – Jerusalem 1907. 5 centimes PM rate. Postmark: May 29 1907. Arrival: in Grand Bassam June 29, 1907. Rerouted to France. Transit and arrival postmarks Bouleone July 29, Beaumont July 31 and D'Isere July 31*



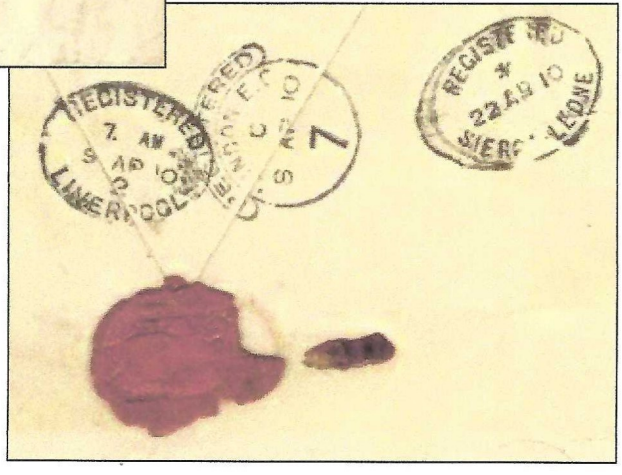


***Exhibit 33:** Sierra Leone(British) – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1910. 14 piasters and 25 centimes. Postmarked March 3, 1910. Transit: London and Liverpool April 9. Arrival April 22*



Exhibit 34: Chile – Austrian Post – Jerusalem 1902. 20 para PC rate – Postmark: June 4. Transit: Paris (June 15). Arrival: June 22 through the Straits of Magellan Arrival: Valparaiso

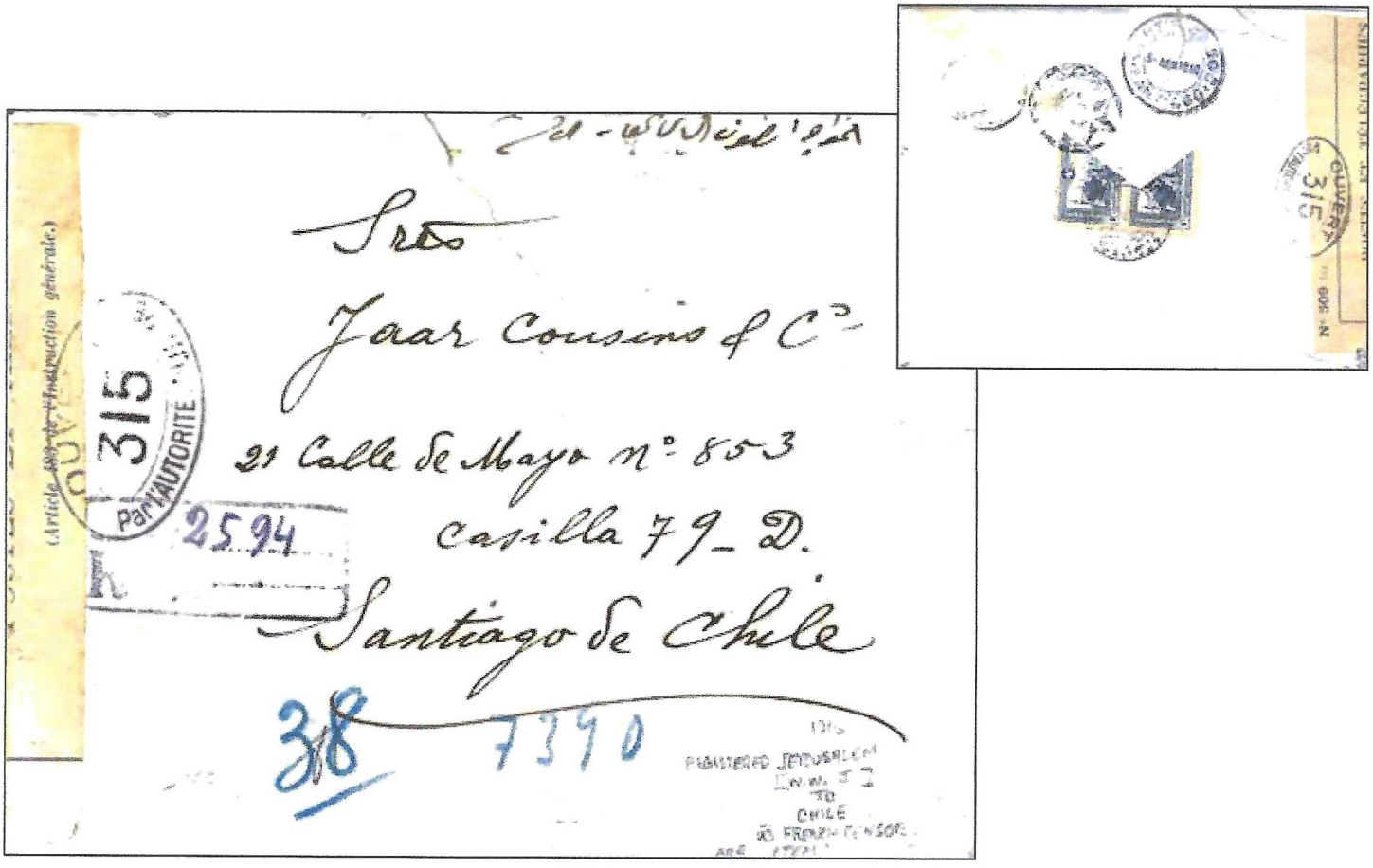


Exhibit 35: Chile – Ottoman Post – Registered – Censored. 2 piasters Registered Single weight Letter rate. Arrival: Santiago April, 1916



***Exhibit 36** - EEF Period – Earliest Recorded Free Civilian Mail – Jerusalem to Santiago Chile APO SZ44 17 DE 17, censor label #4213*

B. Find Mail Reflecting Multiple Services and Rates to A Particular Uncommon Destination



***Exhibit 37:** China – German Post Jerusalem – 1905. 10 para PM rate. Postmark: August 2, 1905. Transit: Hong Kong (August 29) Arrival: Tientsin September 9*

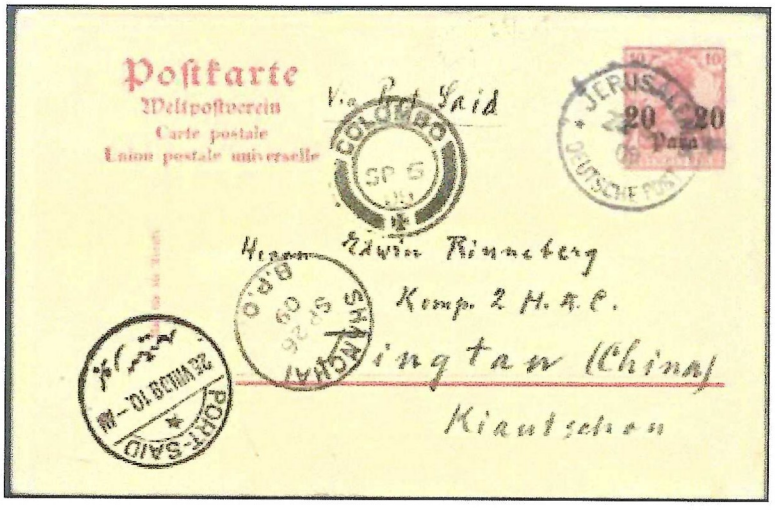


***Exhibit 38:** China – German Post – Jerusalem. 20 para PC Postmark: August 22, 1909. Transit: Port Said (August 25), Colombo (September 26), Shanghai (September 26). Arrival: Tsingtao/Kiautschou*



Exhibit 39a: China-Austrian Post, Jerusalem 1907. Single Weight Letter Rate – 1 piaster.

Exhibit 39b: Postmark: April 3, 1907. Transit: Suez April 7, Hong Kong May 2, Shanghai May 5. Arrival: Peking May 10

VII. Conclusion – Happy Hunting

It has taken me many years to accumulate the material in my collection. The chase is never-ending. There will always be mail sent to an Uncommon Destination through one or more postal systems that I have never seen. Perhaps there will be triple weight mail? Registered mail or Parcel cards? One can only hope. ■

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