

## THE EXPANSION OF SERBIA 1876 TO 1921

This exhibit documents through contemporary postal material the tumultuous story of the expansion of Serbia in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The events depicted were triggered by an uprising against the Ottoman Empire by the Christian Slavs in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1875, which provoked an unsuccessful Serbian attack on Turkey. Subsequently, the intervention of Russia in the war against the Turks rescued the Serbs and enhanced their territory. Later, additional wars were fought against both the Ottoman Empire and against its Balkan neighbors in conflicts over the division of the spoils of Turkey's lost possessions in Europe. Following the end of World War I, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia) was created, with the Serbs playing a dominant political role.

The exhibit is laid out chronologically as it runs through the various conflicts, including the Serbo-Turkish & Russo-Turkish Wars of 1876-1878, the war against Bulgaria in 1885, the First & Second Balkan Wars in 1912-1913 and, finally, World War I from 1914 to 1918 as well as its aftermath. As a result, the bulk of the material shown is either mail from the Serbian forces participating in the various campaigns or civil mail from newly liberated or occupied territories. Thus, the story of the expansion of Serbia in the 45-year period under review can be told.



Very early Serbian military mail, used during the Serbo-Turkish War.

Has boxed marking "Vojena Posta" (Military Mail) with cancellation of FPO 4 dated 5 October (1876). Postage was uprated by 10 para because of foreign destination. Military usage to Samara, Russia in this period is extraordinary. Note transit mark of Moscow on 14 October and receiving mark applied in Samara on 23 October.

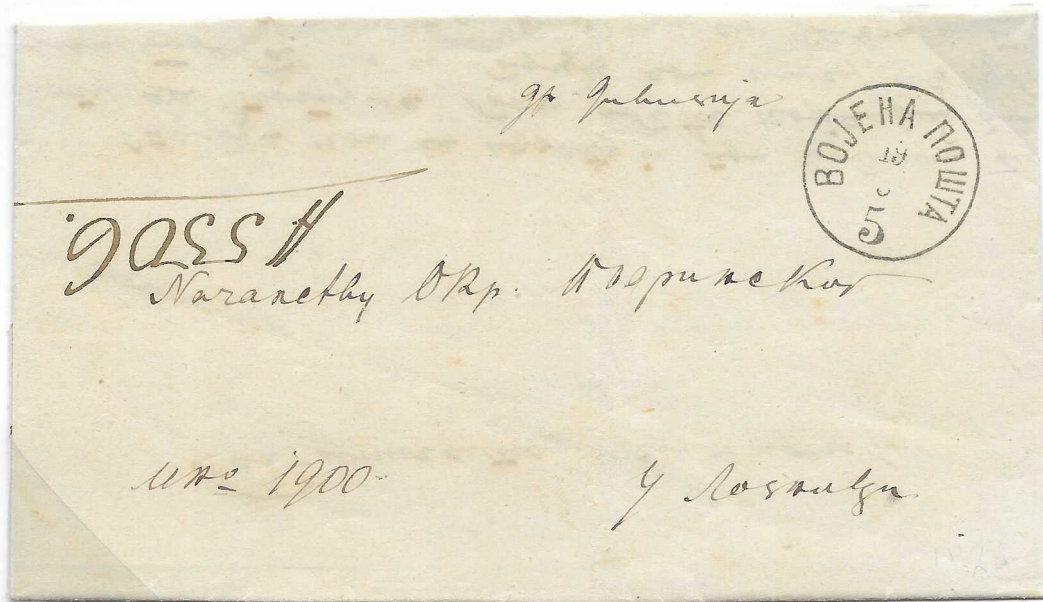
Due to the low level of literacy of the Serbian troops and a high rate of destruction of philatelic material during subsequent wars, the availability of fieldpost cards and covers is necessarily limited, especially from the earlier campaigns. Indeed, some can be considered as quite elusive. As a result, the items shown in the exhibit have been gradually accumulated over several decades, mostly one at a time and largely from sources in Europe. The condition of the material shown is considered to be well above average for the subject being studied.

## SERBO-TURKISH WAR

In mid-1876, Prince Milan of Serbia, desiring to support a Christian insurrection in Bosnia, declared war on the Ottoman Empire. However, the Serbs were not up to the task, as the army was ill-prepared and the Turks won a major battle at Aleksinac. Following a Russian ultimatum, the Turks granted an armistice to the Serbs, which was followed by a peace agreement signed on 1 March 1877 confirming the *status quo*.

FPO 5  
19 August 1876

FPO \_  
25 September 1876



Military mail from this campaign is seldom seen because of its short duration and the low literacy rate among the troops. Internal mail was postage free as shown by the upper cover which is a request from the commander of the Drinska unit to district authorities in Loznica for money to buy boots for the soldiers. Lower postal card shows unusual usage to Moscow, requiring uprating to cover the 20 para international postage. It is of special interest as the sender was the Commander of the Russian military observers serving with the Serbian forces.


SERBO-TURKISH WAR

FPO 1  
28 September 1876

FPO 2  
14 October 1876


4. 24                      4. 342                      Тошковић

Министру просвете и црквених дела  
 у Београду  
 од Ташковића Рудничке бригаде  
 II класа



Београд

Тошковић  
 Министарство  
 просвете и црквених дела.



Military mail from this conflict was free of postage and normally cancelled with postmarks reading "Vojena Posta (Military Post)" and a number. Upper cover from FPO #1 was sent from the HQ of the Rudnik Brigade to the Minister of Education & Ecclesiastical Affairs in Belgrade. Lower cover from FPO #2 is a private letter from a soldier to his high school professor in Belgrade.

SERBO-TURKISH WAR

FPO 8  
14 September 1876

Krusevac  
1 November 1876



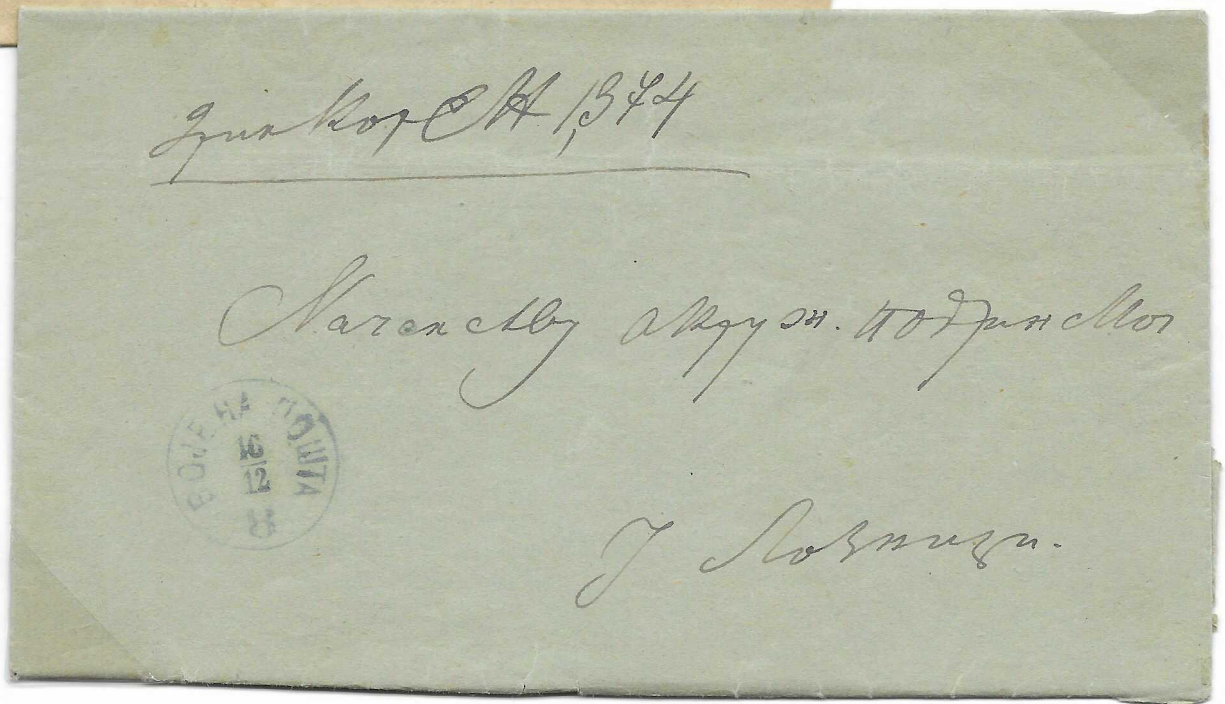
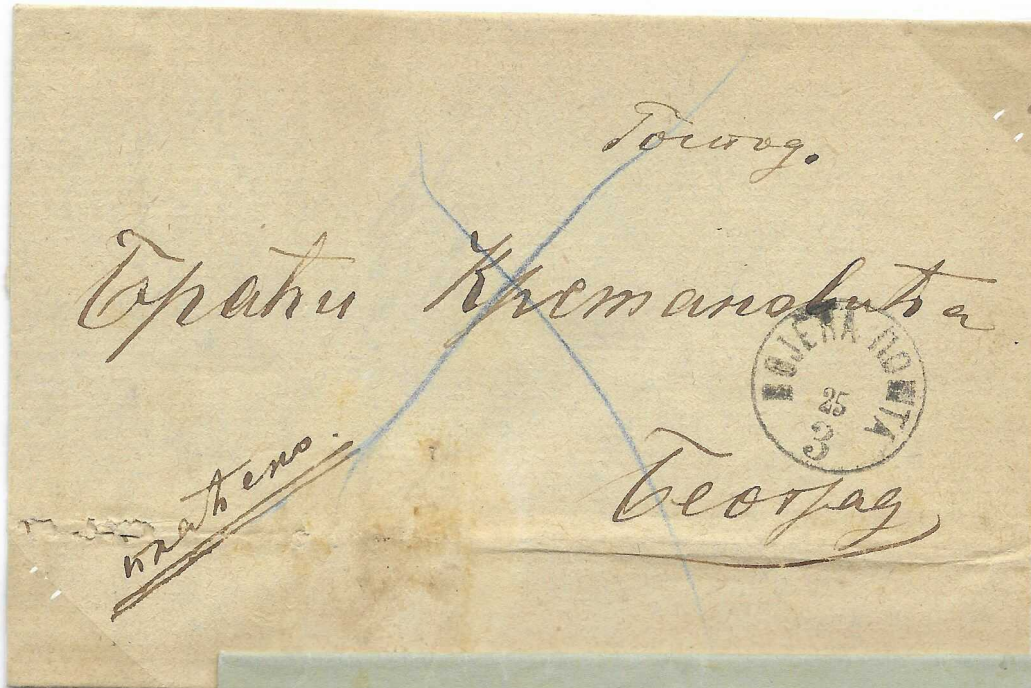
Postal cards with boxed "Military Mail" handstamps were given to the troops during the Serbo-Turkish War. Upper card from FPO #8 is datelined Kulijou and sent to Belgrade. Lower card sent from Krusevac, where it was postmarked in the civil post office. Transit time to Belgrade was four days in each instance.

## RUSSO-TURKISH WAR

Following the Serbo-Turkish War, relations between Russia and the Turks continued to deteriorate and eventually resulted in war being declared on 24 April 1877. The Serbs eventually joined in, although under the terms of their previous peace agreement with the Turks, they remained aloof from the fighting until 15 December. Thus, their forces played only a minor role in the war and received little reward, while Austria ended up in control of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sandjak of Novi Bazar, and Bulgaria became an independent principality.

FPO 3  
25 February 1877

FPO 8  
16 December 1877

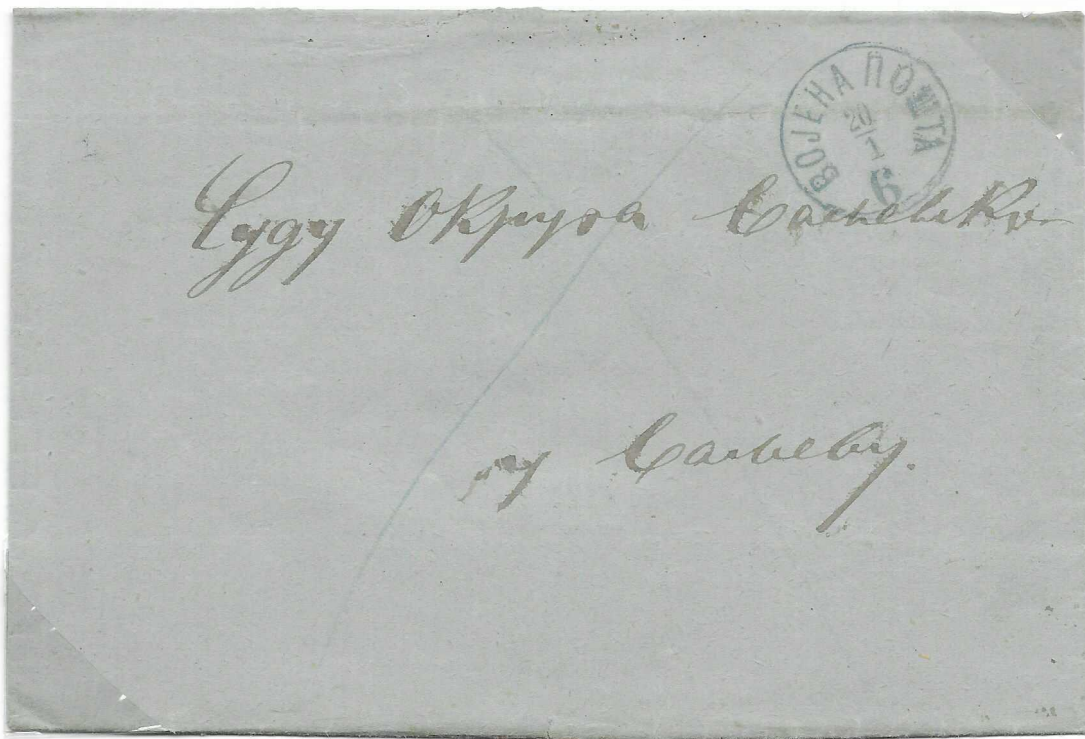
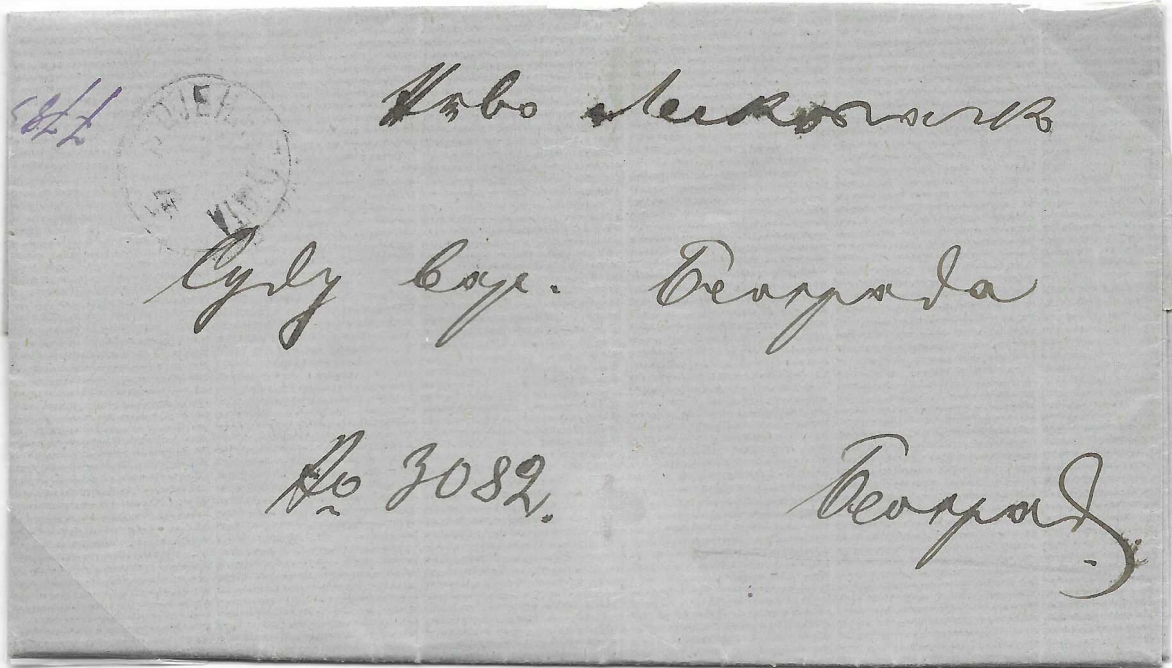


During the "twilight" period between the wars and after hostilities resumed, the Serbians used the same numbered FPO markings as in the earlier conflict. Upper cover mailed from FPO #3 at Boljevac to Belgrade in February 1877. Lower example shows FPO #8 used at Lesnica (sent to Loznica) on the day after the war was resumed by Serbia. Both of these markings are extremely elusive.

RUSSO-TURKISH WAR

FPO 4  
10 October 1878

FPO 6  
20 January 1878



Upper example used from FPO #4 at Leskovac to Belgrade, where it arrived four days later. Lower cover used from FPO #6 at Kusic to Valjevo. Both of these markings are highly elusive.

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U Beogradu, 21. IV 1988.

**POTVRDA O ISPITIVANJU**  
PRÜFUNGSBESTÄTIGUNG — LE CERTIFICAT DE L'EXAMINATION  
CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Broj 86/88

Kao ispitivač maraka i celina registriran pri Udruženju filatelističkih saveza Jugoslavije pregledao sam amanetno (vrednosno) pismo upućeno iz Uba (1877) u Blace, Krusevac i Rašku (post. žig Raška 27/3 /1878/) i vraćeno polaznoj pošti Ib neuručeno no države: Kneževina Srbija koj. u katalogu: za godinu: nos. br. vrednosno pismo sa žigom NALLAČE-NO, što označava da je taksa u gotovom naplaćena. te sam ustanovio:

da su opisani elementi originalni i da je pismo adresovano na Aksentija Stepanovića, vojnika I brdske baterije Moravske artiljerijske brigade jer je to vreme Ratova za oslobodjenje (II srpsko-turski rat 1877-1878. godina).  
Der Brief ist echt.

Na mark ~~XXXX~~ — celin...U sam otisnuo svoj ispitivački znak  ljubič. bojom.

*Prim. dr Brislav Novaković*  
(Prim. dr BRANISLAV NOVAKOVIĆ)

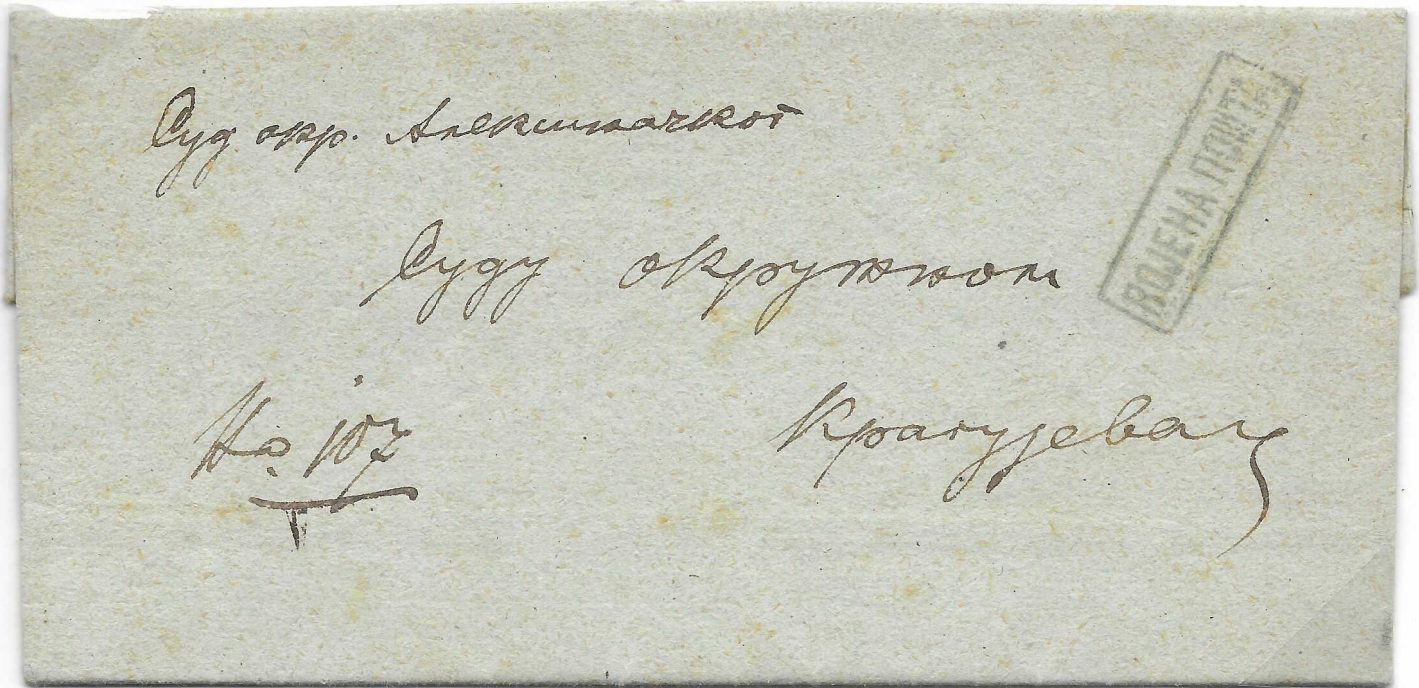
Prim. dr BRANISLAV NOVAKOVIĆ iz Beograda upisan je u „Registar stručnih ispitivača maraka UFSJ”.

UDRUŽENJE FILATELISTIČKIH SAVEZA  
JUGOSLAVIJE



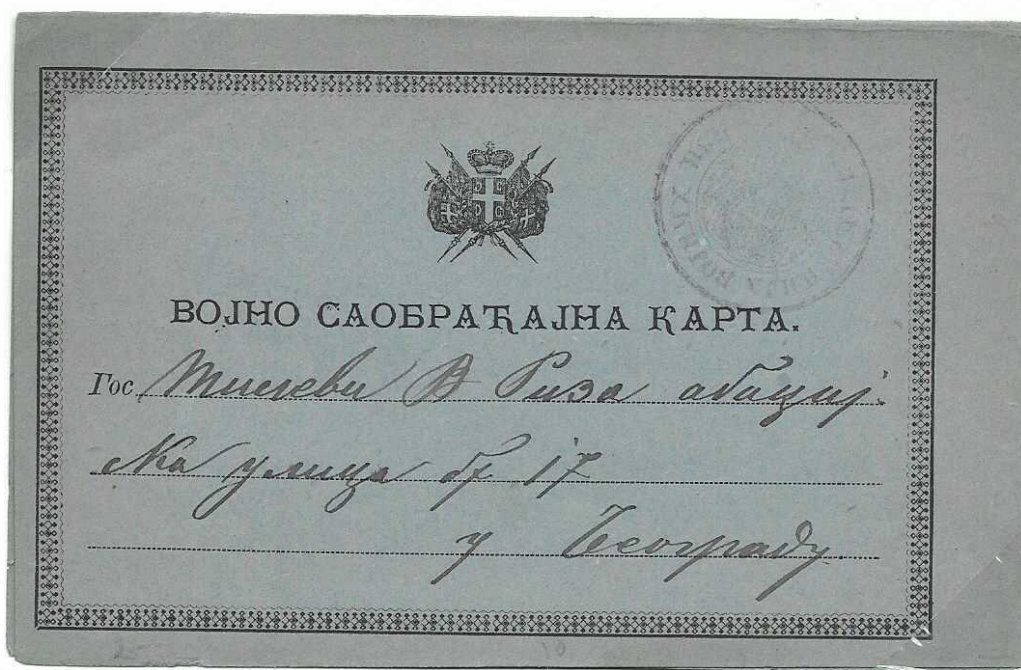
A money letter for 60 dinars sent to soldier Aksentija Stepanovica of the 1st Battery of the Morava Artillery at Bavlacu near Raska. However, in spite of a considerable effort to find him, the letter had to be returned to the sender. Note the forwarding cds of Raska dated 27 March (1878), a marking rarely seen from this period.



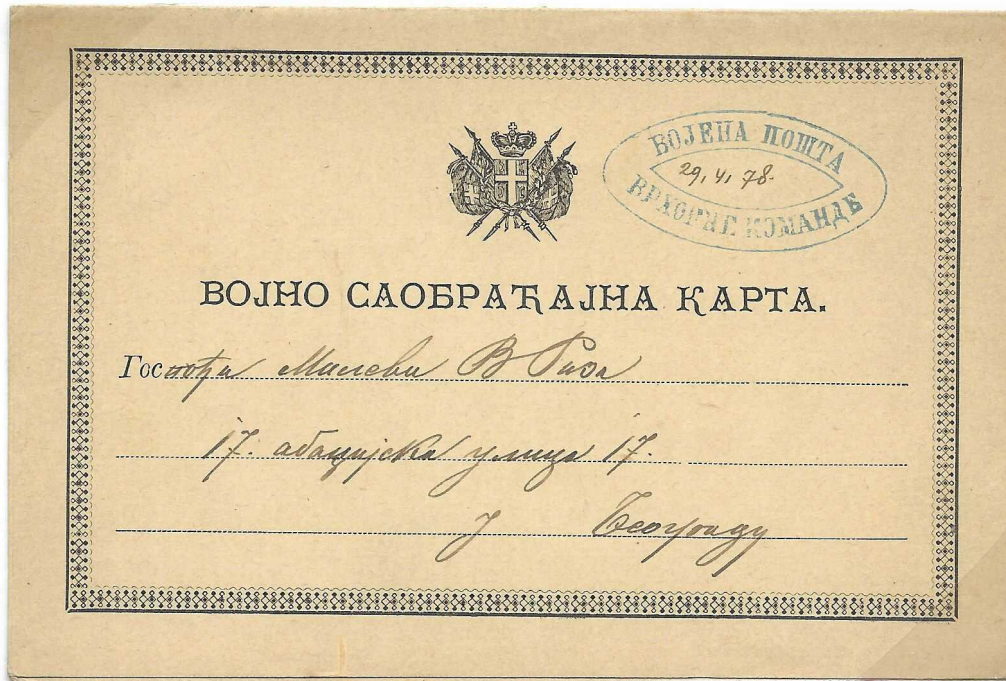


One additional type of military marking was used during the Russo-Turkish War era, i.e. the rectangular box inscribed "Military Mail" that was in service two years earlier.

Examples shown are folded letters: the upper item sent from Alexinac to Kragujevac was unfranked due to its military origin. Lower item was franked with 20 paras in Prince Milan stamps and is written in Greek. It is a commercial letter from the firm of Christodulo & Son and was subject to censorship, as attested by manuscript "Vidio (seen)" and signature on reverse.



Special military stationery was issued to provide free franking for the Serbian soldiers. Upper card mailed from Pirot to Belgrade. Lower card has undated single-circle marking with coat of arms and inscription "Inspectorate of Military Posts," introduced in early 1878. It was sent from Nish and backstamped at Belgrade on 26 February.



Mail sent from Serbian Headquarters received special fieldpost cancels inscribed "Military Post/Headquarters." This oval marking is recorded in blue and purple and is considered quite elusive.



Upper card shows an example of the circular postmark used at Headquarters. Lower card mailed by a member of the Shumadia Division to an address in Nish in the liberated territory.

Mail From "Italian Legion" Volunteer

*La mia direzione volontaria  
nell'armata della Brzna -  
Legione Italiana - Belgrado  
Carisf. A. Achille -*



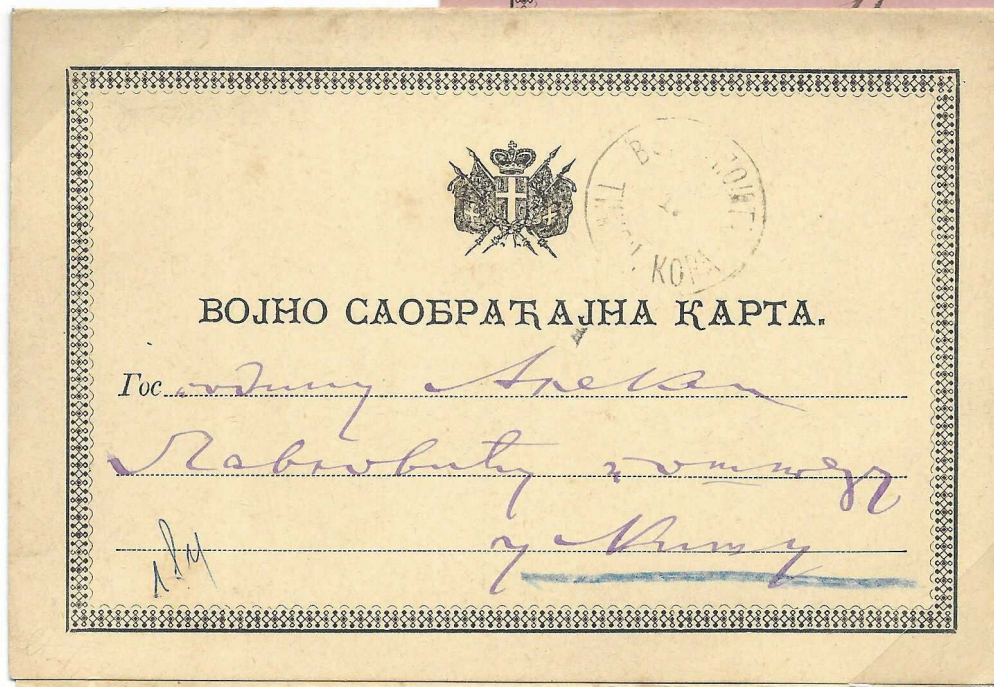
Serbian postal card with added 10 para franking for foreign destination. Boxed marking reads "Military Mail." The return address indicates extraordinary usage by Italian volunteer with the "Army of the Brzna, Italian Legion, Belgrade" who was undoubtedly motivated by sympathy for the Christian Serbs against the Muslim Turks. Message describes difficulties of the campaign and expresses hope for an end to the fighting in the near future. In fact, the Treaty of San Stefano was not signed until 3 March 1878.

RUSSO-TURKISH WAR

Vojna Posta/Moravska Division  
5 August 1878

Vojna Posta/Shumadia Division  
1 November 1878

Vojna Posta/Timok Division  
17 July 1878



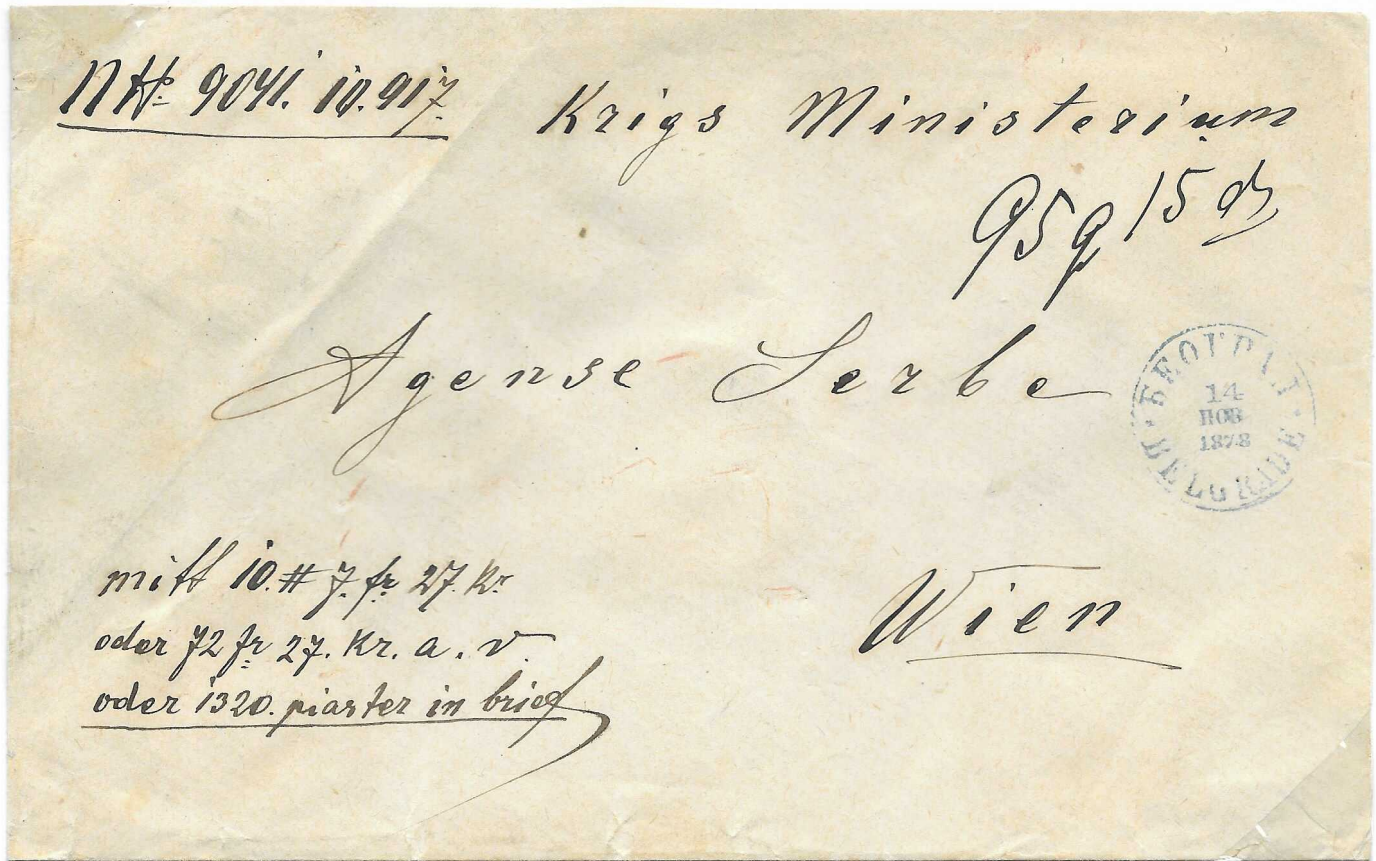
In three cases, the military postmarks were inscribed to show the specific unit to which it was assigned, as shown above for the divisions.

Military Mail to Foreign Destination



Although internal military mail was free of postage, this did not apply to items addressed to foreign countries. Because of the destination in Mauer (near Vienna), Austria, a 20 para Prince Milan stamp was duly affixed to this military letter card. Backstamped with transit markings of Military HQ and the civil P.O. in Belgrade, it was received in Mauer on 24 September 1878.

From the Royal Serbian War Ministry



Official letter from the War Ministry in Belgrade involving the transfer of funds to the Serbian Agency in Vienna. It weighed over 95 grams and contained a value of 72 francs or 1320 piasters. This cover has a docketing number at the top left but no transit or receiving marks, indicating that it was sent by diplomatic pouch. On the reverse are five wax seals of the Ministry of War. A most unusual piece of military mail related to the war just concluded.



**RUSSO-TURKISH WAR**  
**Mail To & From Annexed Territory**

Vojena Posta/Vrh. Komande  
12 January 1879

Royal Serbian Post/Nish  
22 September 1880



As a result of the successful intervention by Russia in the fighting against the Turks, Serbia was able to occupy former Ottoman territory inhabited by ethnic Slavs. By the decisions taken at the Congress of Berlin, the Serbs were allotted only the districts of Nish and Pirot. Upper cover was mailed from Valjevo to Nish and backstamped for receipt at Serbian HQ as Nish did not receive a civil postmark until 1880. An example of this latter is shown on the postal card below, which was sent from the British Consulate at Nish to Pancevo, Hungary.