

THE POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBANIA 1900 - 1935

This exhibit documents through contemporary postal material the tumultuous geopolitical changes that took place in this small country during the first three and a half decades of the Twentieth Century. It had a long history as a part of the Ottoman Empire, which continued for the first dozen years studied here, followed by the declaration of independence from Turkey on 28 November 1912. For the purpose of illustrating this initial period, the Ottoman postal markings are shown as well as those of the Post Offices Abroad operated in the area by Austria-Hungary and Italy.

Although its boundaries are essentially the same today as when first determined by an International Commission meeting in London in 1913, various parts of Albania have been occupied by foreign troops on numerous occasions. In fact, when independence was declared during the First Balkan War, Greek, Montenegrin and Serbian forces controlled much of the area and had to be "persuaded" to evacuate by the European Powers, which then sent in their own military to restore order. Unlike most other Balkan states today, Albania has no ethnic minorities. In fact, its problem is the opposite, with many ethnic Albanians living in neighboring Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia (Kosovo).

With the outbreak of World War I, the situation became even more confusing as the Prince, who had been set on the throne by the Powers, departed and the Greek, Montenegrin and Serbian occupation forces returned. For a while, there was no central authority, so local "warlords" took over certain areas and provided government services, including postal operations. Eventually, Austria-Hungary occupied northern and central Albania, with Italy controlling the southwest and France the southeast portion. After the war, the external geopolitics settled down, while internally the country experienced a series of governments, including a second provisional period, a Republic and a Kingdom, with the latter two being headed by the same man when President Ahmed Zogu declared himself King Zog I.

Because of the enormous complexity of all of the above, a plan of the exhibit is provided on the next page, with 22 distinct "chapters" describing the different postal administrations. The order of the chapters is based on the start of each episode. Within each chapter, the presentation is chronological when the various stamp issues are the main subject and alphabetical when postmarks (such as those of the occupation forces) are being reviewed.



High value Turkish stamps on a piece of a parcel address card cancelled with the Ottoman postmark of "Elbassane." The postage shown was 60 piasters, which was an enormous amount of money in Albania at that time, so that one wonders just what had been shipped.

THE POSTAL HISTORY OF ALBANIA 1900-1935

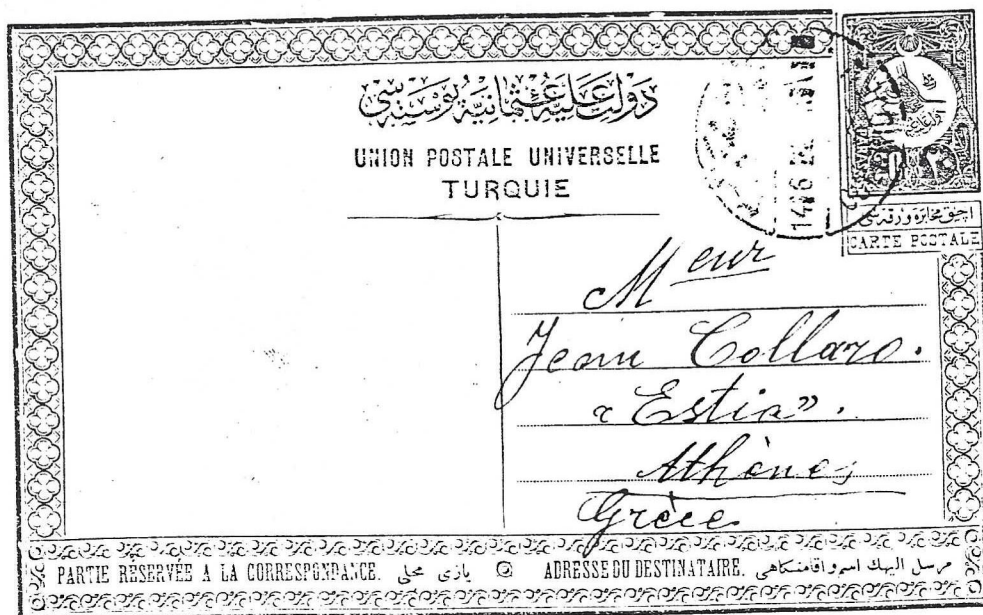
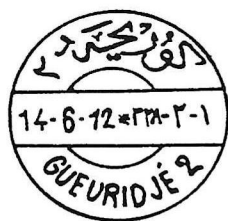
Plan of Exhibit

Although it is a small country with a limited population of less than 3 million, the philatelic story of Albania is sufficiently complicated in the period under review that 22 distinct "chapters" were required to describe the various authorities providing postal services in that troubled country.

The order of presentation of these chapters is essentially chronological based on when each administration came into force. Born in the First Balkan War of 1912-1913, much of its territory was occupied by troops from neighboring countries, which were then replaced by military representatives of the European Great Powers.

Occupied again during World War I, Albania did not emerge as a unitary state until into the 1920s, and even then the form of its government continued to change. The chapters covering the various aspects of postal history are set forth in the order shown below, starting with the Ottoman postal service and the post offices abroad of Austria-Hungary and Italy at the beginning of the last century.

Ottoman Post Offices	Regional Administration – South
Austrian Post Offices Abroad	Greek Occupation – Epirus
Italian Post Offices Abroad	World War I – Greek Occupation
Provisional Government	World War I – Montenegrin Occupation
Balkan War – Greek Occupation	World War I – Serbian Occupation
Balkan War – Montenegrin Occupation	World War I – Austrian Occupation
Balkan War – Serbian Occupation	World War I – Allied Occupation
International Control Commission	Post-World War I Yugoslav Occupation
Principality	Provisional Government II
Regional Administration – North	Republic
Regional Administration – Central	Kingdom



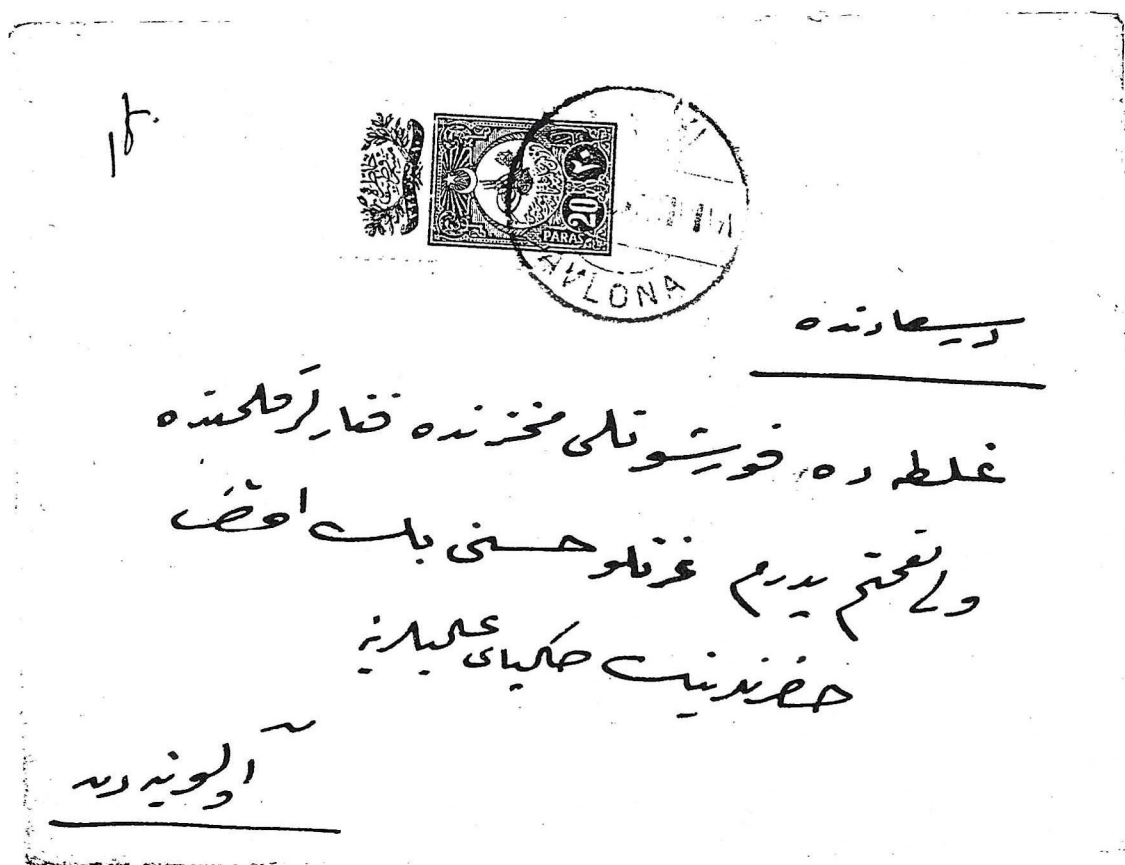
Postal card sent from branch #2 of the Korytsa post office to Athens, Greece on 14 June 1912. It is cancelled with the very elusive small Ottoman cds inscribed "Gueuridje 2" which is unlisted in the Coles & Walker handbook.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

The Albanian national hero, Skanderbeg, successfully defended the country from the Turks until his death in 1468. Subsequently, Turkey took control of the entire country, which it held for over four centuries. However, once the allies inflicted major defeats on the Ottoman forces in the Balkan War, an opportunity was created, and the Albanians were able to declare their independence on 28 November 1912.

By the beginning of the 20th Century, except for some of the smallest villages and officially designated branch post offices, the Ottomans used bilingual Arabic/French postmarks. These will be shown in this exhibit in alphabetic order based on the French names used in the cancels. Bear in mind that each location had multiple names, which were used depending on who was in authority at any given time. (Thus, in addition to Turkish and French, the towns could also have English, Greek, Italian and/or Slavic names, in addition to their present-day Albanian ones. For example, Avlona in French is Valona in Italian and Vlore in Albanian.)

Avlona
31 January 1909



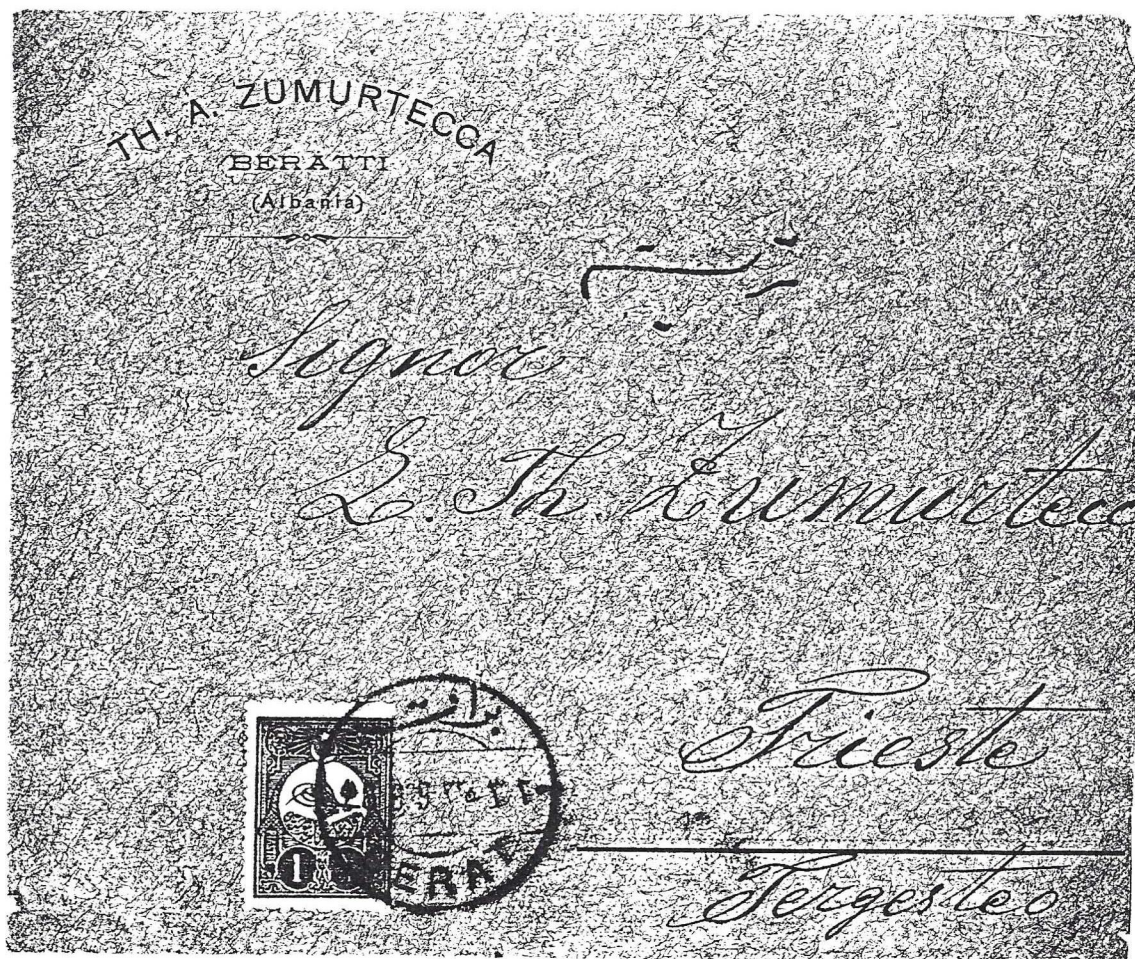
This cover sent from Valona is franked with one of the stamps commemorating the new Constitution of 1908.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

Beichta
1905



Berat
2 June 1909



Ottoman postmarks are recorded from 21 different towns in Albania in the period 1900-1912. Examples of all but two are shown in the exhibit, plus six that are unrecorded in the literature. Except for a few places that had considerable commercial activity, these markings range from scarce to rare in the Coles & Walker handbook. In a few cases, cancels are shown on piece or, if necessary, on loose stamps, because covers are either unknown or unavailable on the philatelic market.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

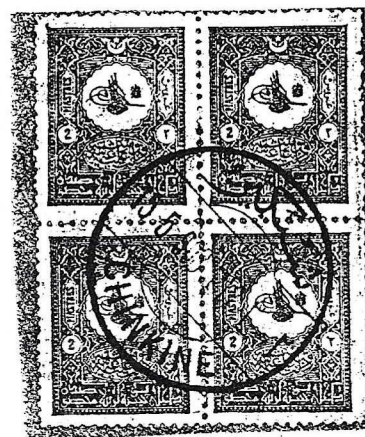
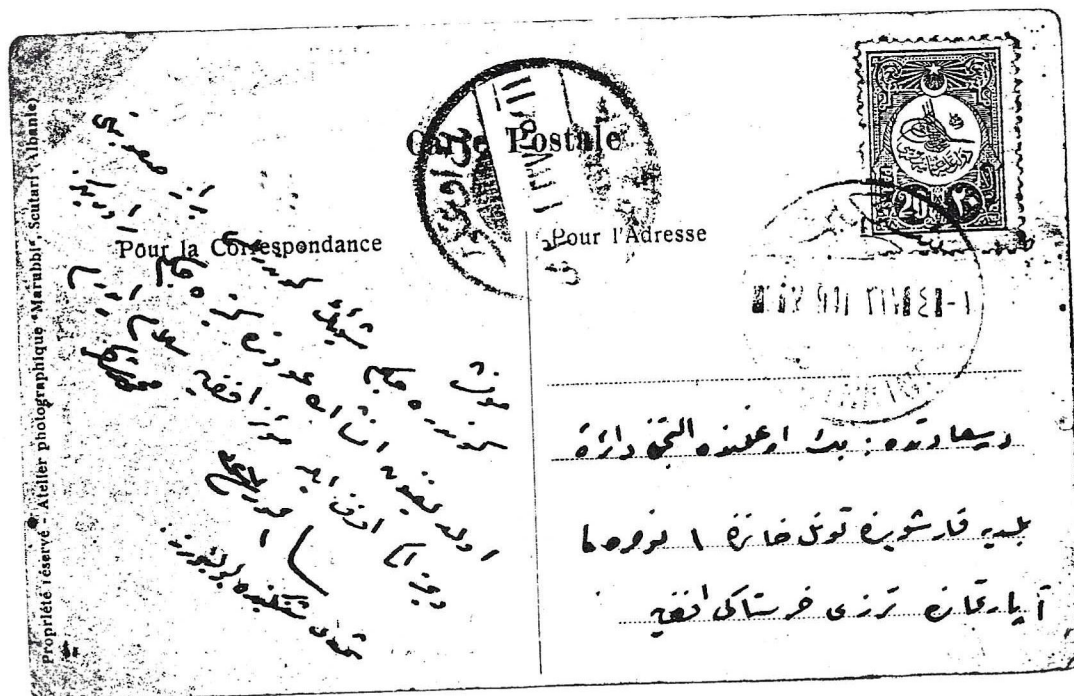
Chinkine (San Giovanni di Medua)

15 May 1908

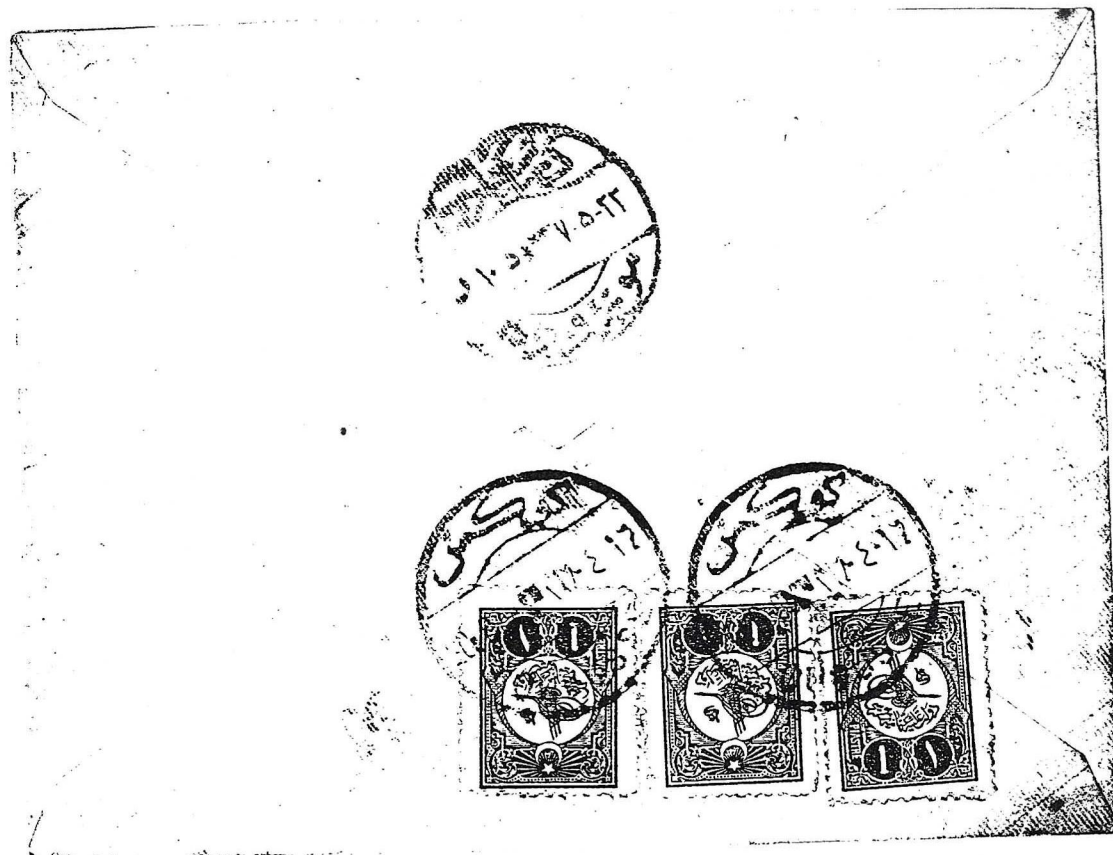
February 1911

Cucusse (Kukes)

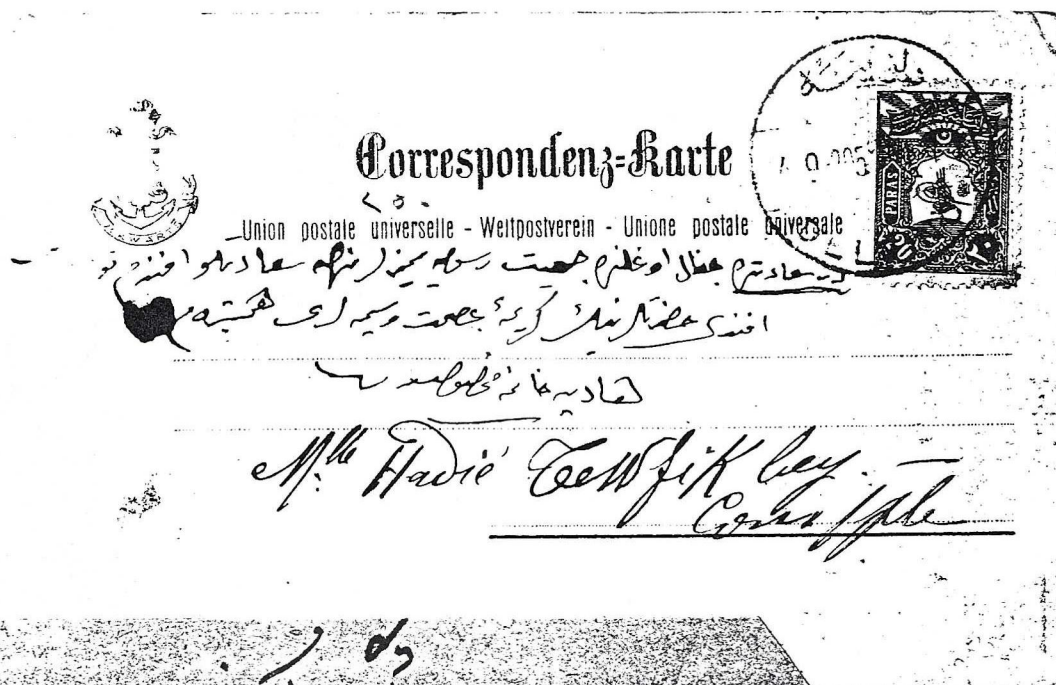
7 August 1911



Registered cover sent from the town of Cucusse in northeast Albania. This is the only recorded cover from this location.



Dukat
1905



Dukat still used the old negative seal postmark at this time. This cover to Constantinople is one of only two examples recorded.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

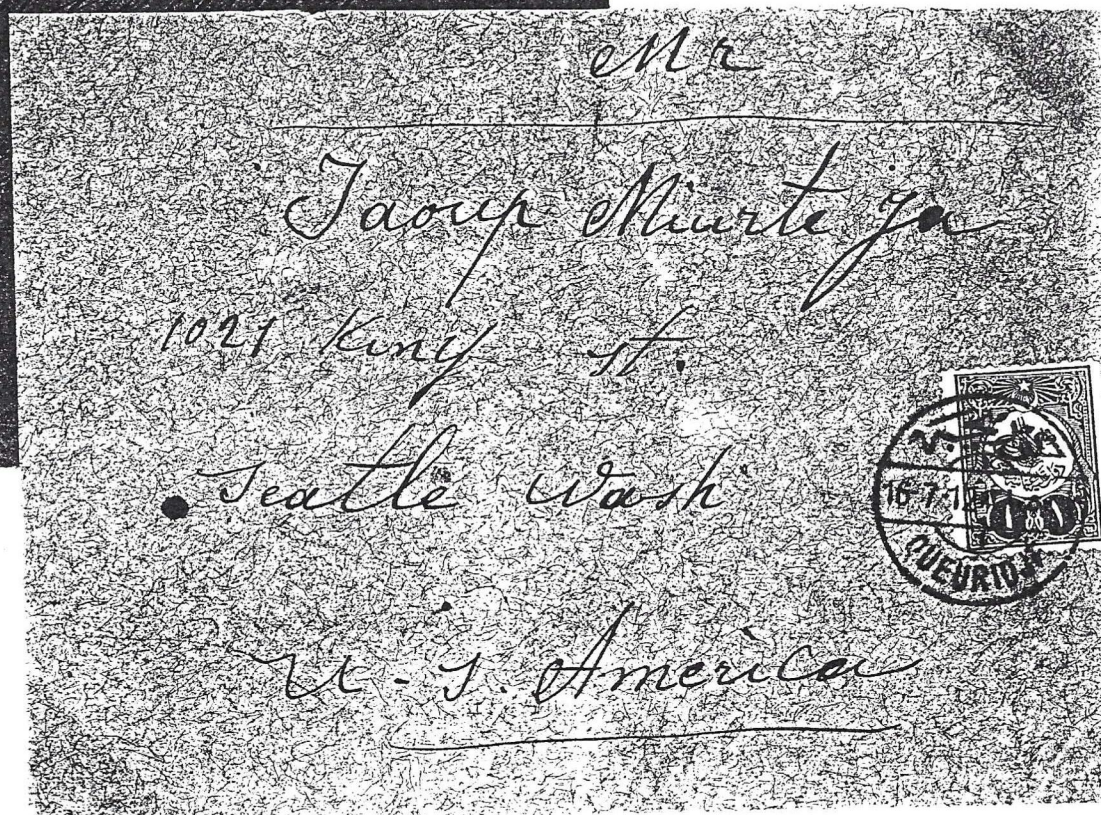
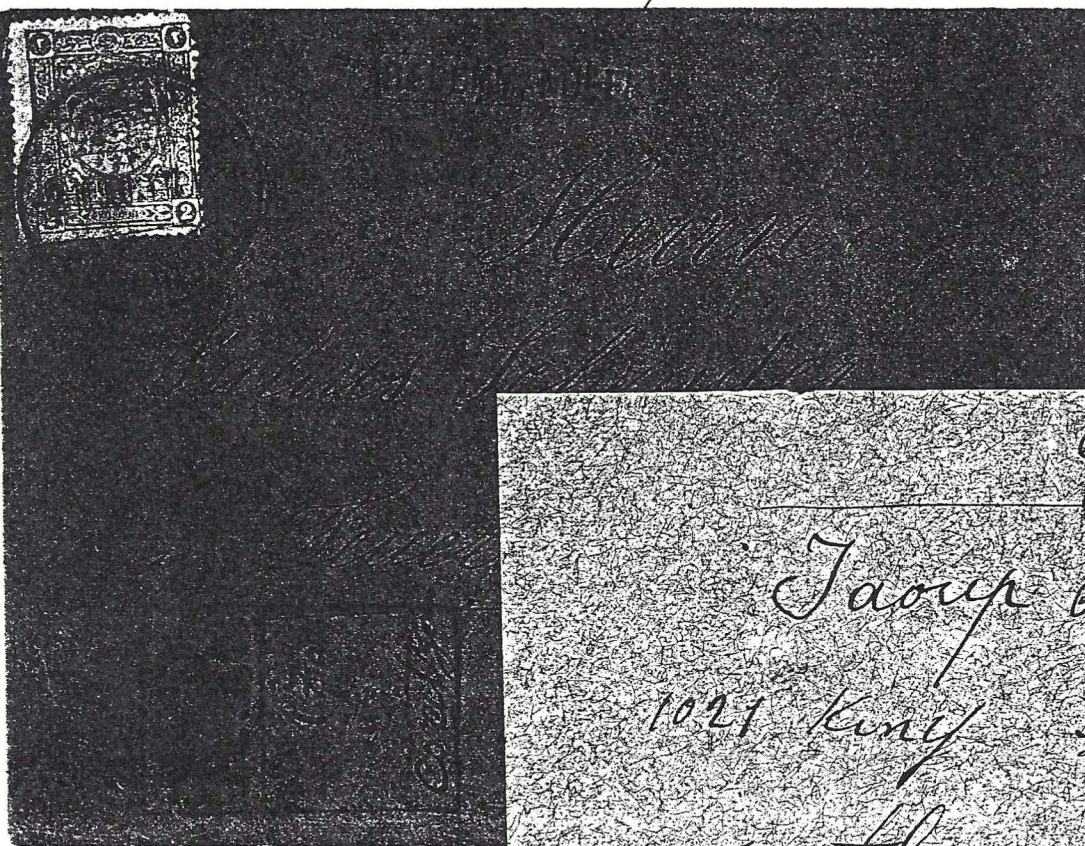
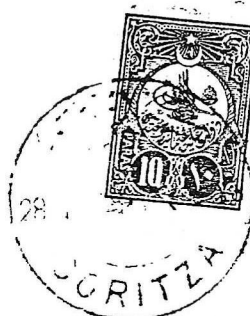
Coritza
1908

Gueuridje
2 October 1900

Queuridje
16 July 1912

Epirus

Minaretsi Mavri



As shown above, postmarks with three different spellings for the same town were used at Korce in southern Albania (northern Epirus) during the Ottoman period. The Queuridje version is unlisted in the Coles & Walker handbook and is a very elusive marking. Note Gueuridje cancel on registered return receipt cover but "Coritza" in manuscript in the AR box.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

Durazzo (Dradj)
15 May 1905
4 January 1912
3 October 1912



Elbassane
8 April 1908



Propriété réservée — Atelier photographique "Marubbi", Scutari (Albanie)

Carte Postale

Pour la Correspondance

Durazzo 3/12
heute haben wir
unser altes
nachalbanien
gemacht & dabei
eine ganz türk.
Stadt gesehen.
Herzliche grüsse
Johann

Pour l'Adresse

Wolgeb.
Herrn
Johann Eigelreiter
Wien III/4
Gerlgasse
Austria II/18



The town of Durres had three different postmarks during the Ottoman times. Two of them in different sizes and styles were inscribed "Durazzo" and the third "Dradj." The small Durazzo type is unlisted in Coles & Walker.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

Erguiri (Gjirokaster)
7 January 1909

Fir (Fier)
14 July 1906
1909

ITALO BERNASCONI

Ingenieur

Arghirocastro

Albania - Libe Shkiperi
N° 785

Signore

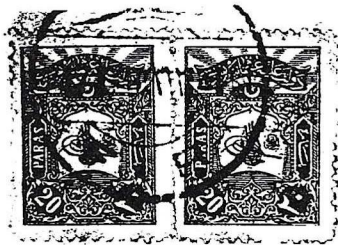
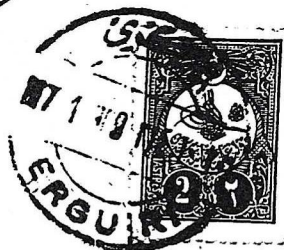
Sp. Ing. L. Uboldi
Direttore della RFO

Doc. Larini, Nathanael & C.

34 Strada Algaia Pavese 34



Milano



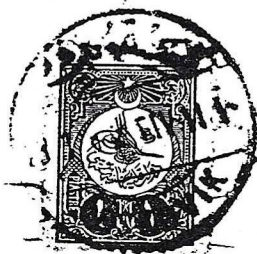
Erguiri is also located in southern Albania in the area often in dispute with Greece. The registered cover shown above is the only recorded one from the Ottoman period.



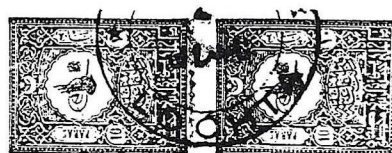
Haimara
12 August 1909



Leskovik
18 January 1912



Lochta



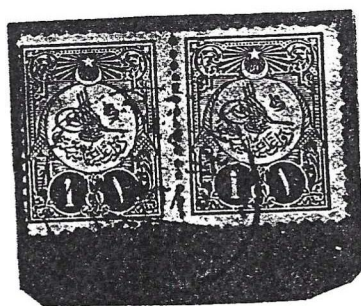
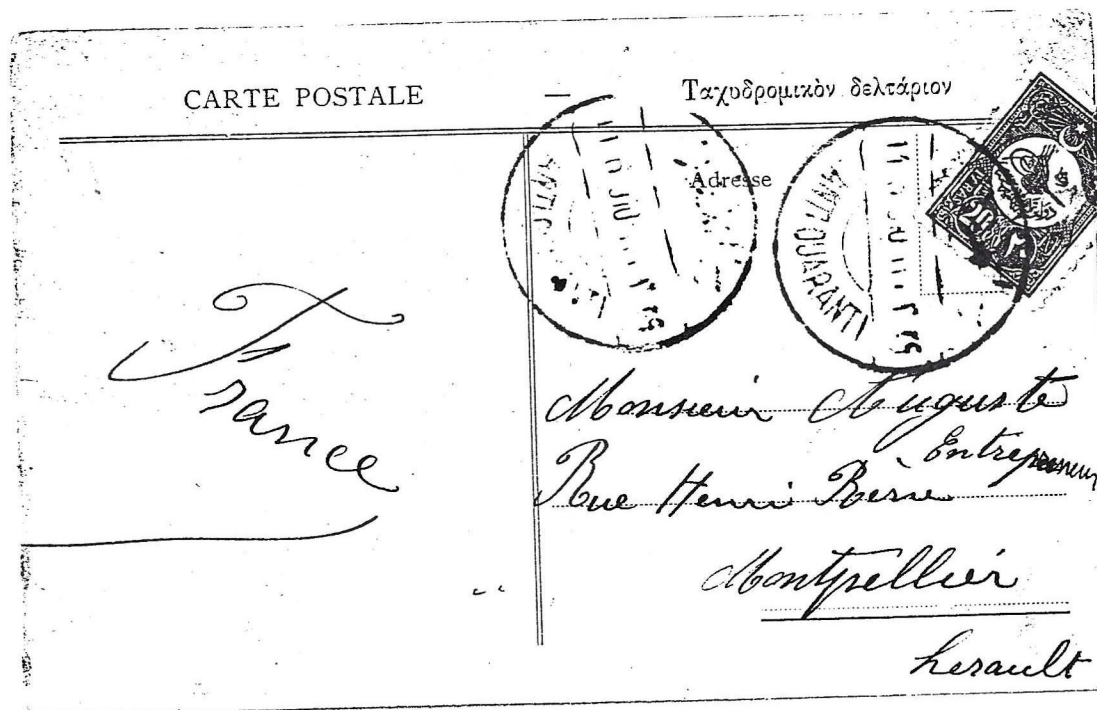
Lovichne
28 January 1909



None of these post offices would have been considered significant during Ottoman times, with the possible exception of Kolonia.

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

Sarandos (Santi Quaranti)
11 May 1905
11 June 1910
7 July 1912



The most interesting variety of Ottoman postmarks comes from Sarande, the southernmost post office in Albania. This small port on the lower Adriatic was generally called Santi Quaranti, which translates to "40 Saints." To confuse matters, the markings are also inscribed Sarandoz, Sarandos and Ayi-Saranda.

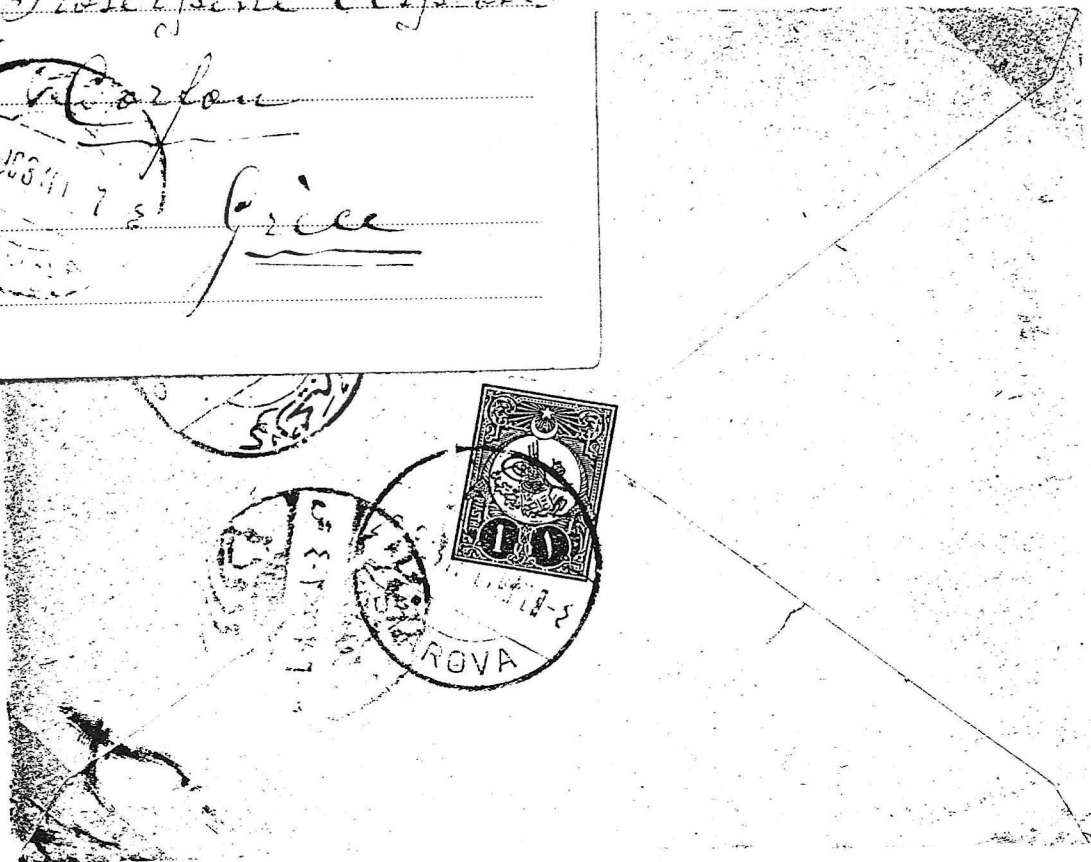


Scutari d'Albanie (today Shkoder) was the major commercial center of the province during Ottoman times. (The use of the terminology "of Albania" as part of the name was to prevent confusion with another Scutari, which was an Asian suburb of Constantinople.) This registered return receipt cover to Italy franked with several values of the set commemorating the new Constitution of 1908. The small size postmark cancels a 5 piaster high value on a fragment of a parcel address card.

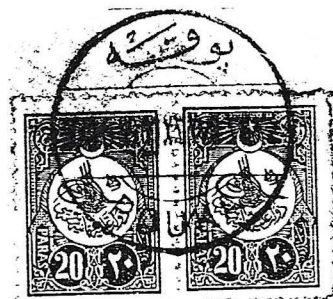
OTTOMAN POST OFFICES

Permedi (Permet)
18 June 1904

Starova (Cerave)
24 June 1910



Pouka
4 May 1909



Tiran
21 May 1910

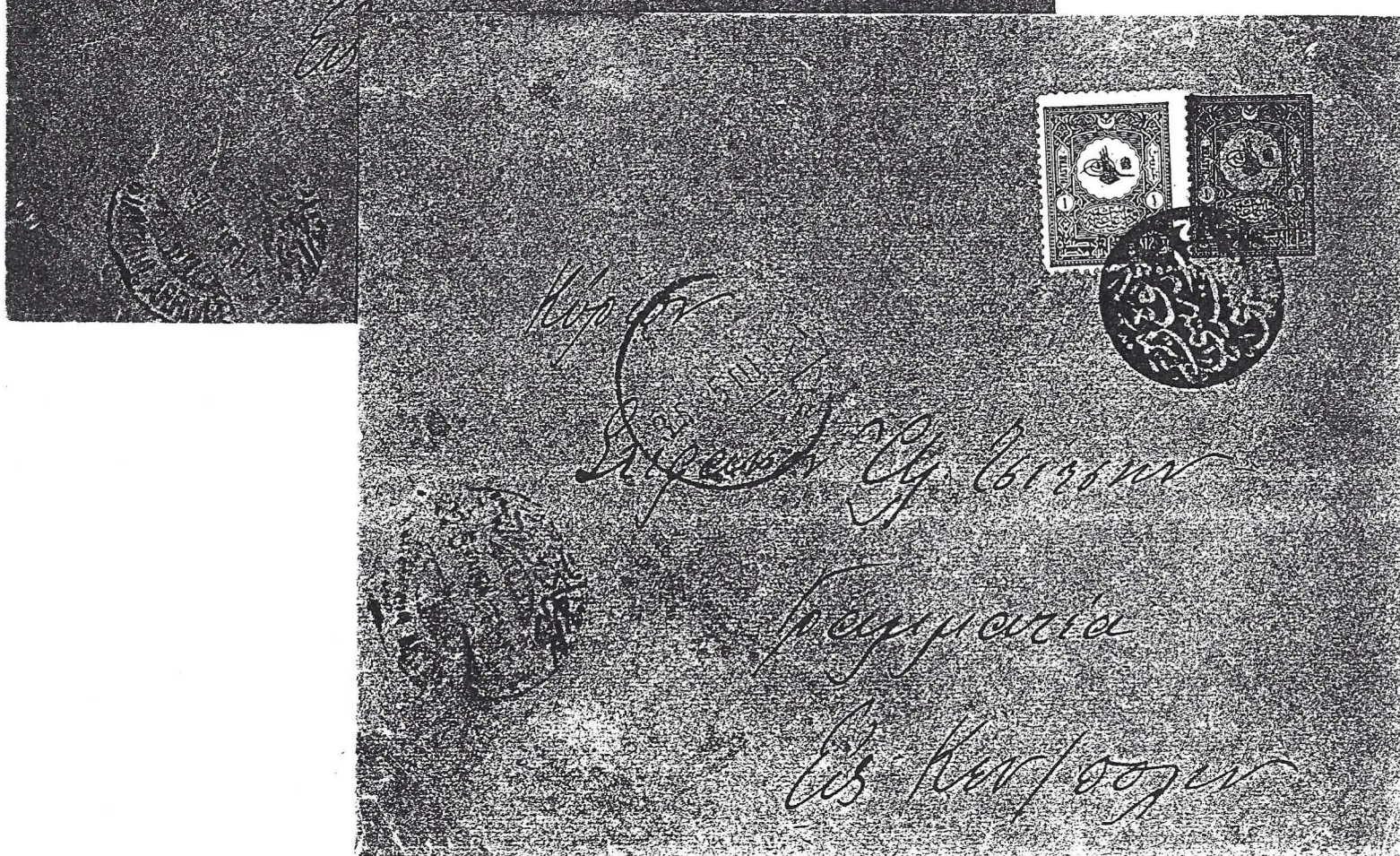
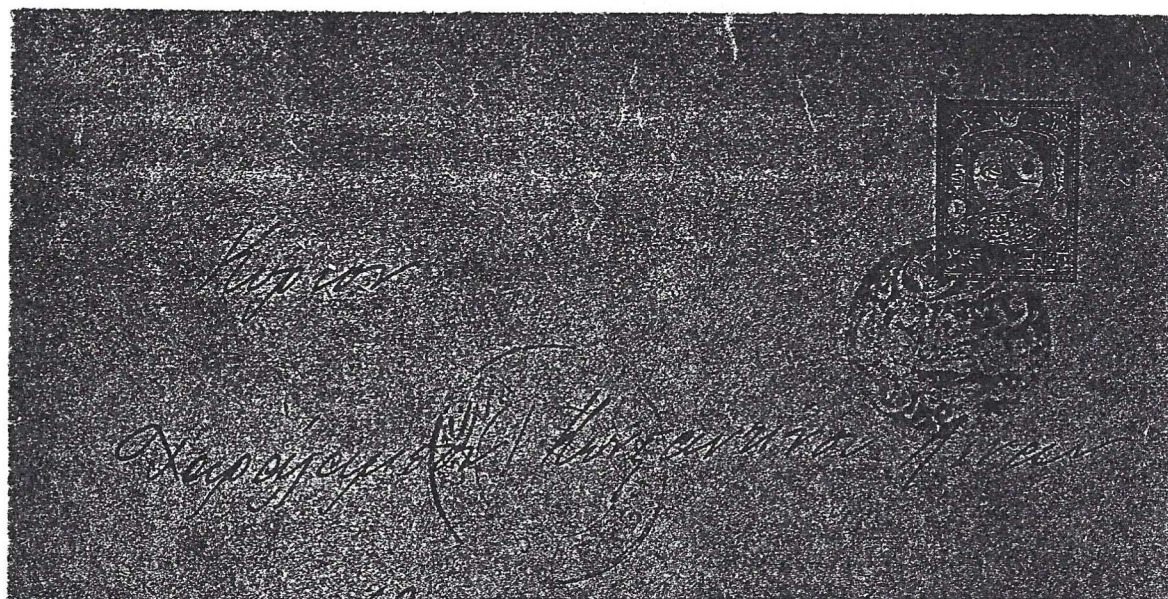


Although Tirana was a relatively insignificant location during the Ottoman times, it eventually became the capital of Albania, primarily because of its central location and the lack of a dominant local "warlord."

OTTOMAN POST OFFICES
Branch Postal Agencies

Ji Kariyesi
1905

Labovai-zir Kariyesi
1905

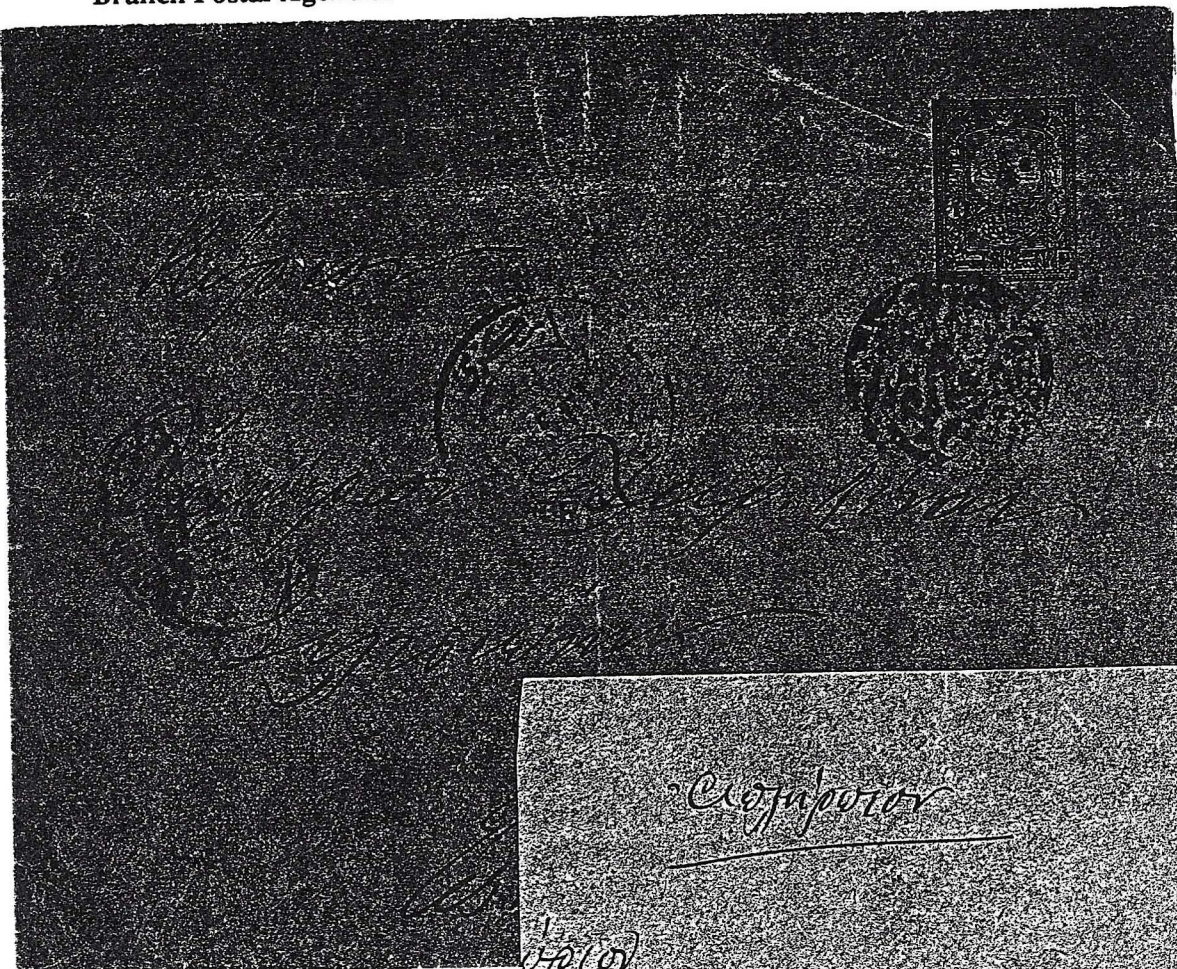


The Ottoman authorities opened a number of designated branch postal agencies. Their postmarks were of the older type with a negative seal in Arabic, which included the wording "Poste Shubesi (Postal Branch)." Most of such examples are very elusive and seldom seen.

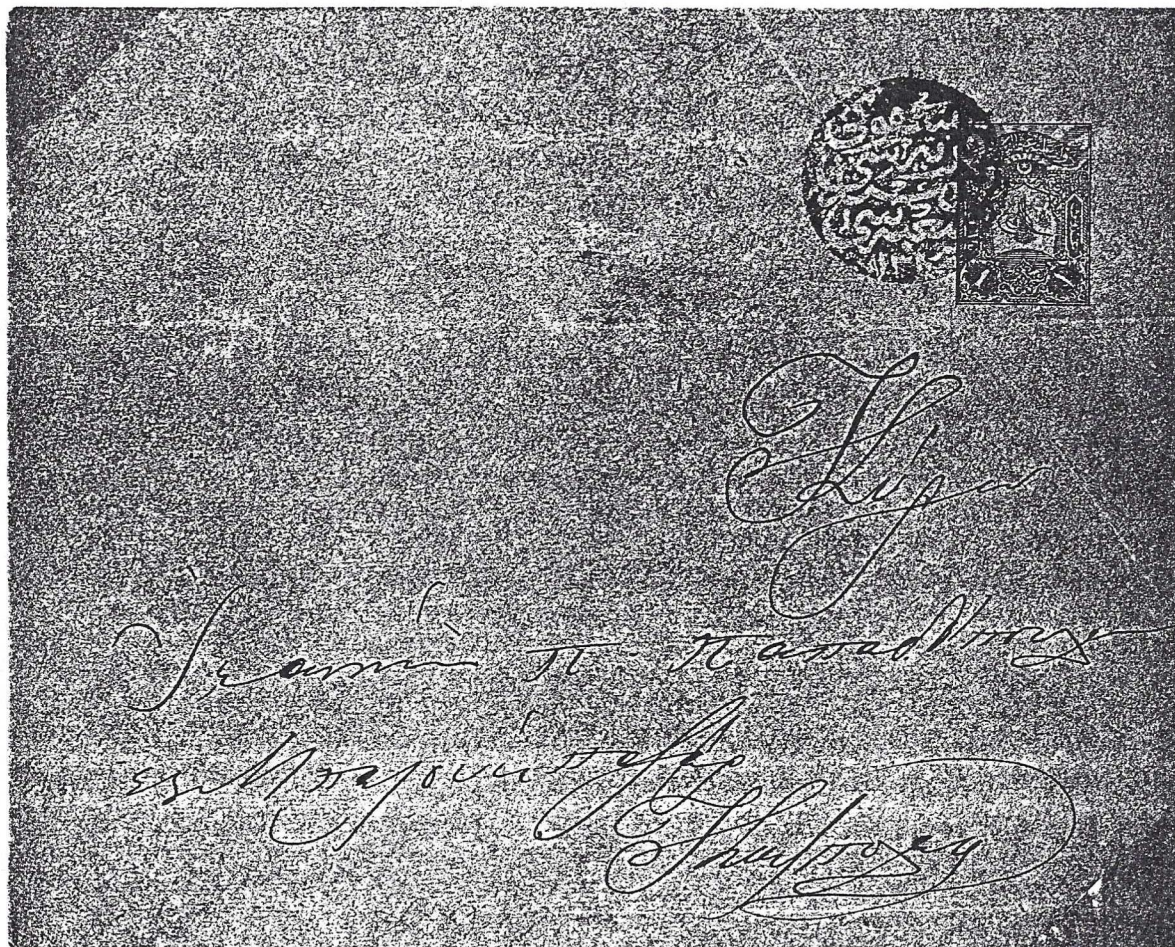
OTTOMAN POST OFFICES
Branch Postal Agencies

Selcika Kariyesi
1905

Serakenuste Kariyesi
1905



Additional examples of branch office markings. These have transit markings of Erguiri and were addressed to Constantinople.



The covers from the five branch offices shown in the exhibit were addressed in Greek and transited Erguri. This suggests that these branches were opened in northern Epirus by the Ottomans to serve the large number of ethnic Greeks living in the area.