

TURMOIL IN THE BALKANS 1876 TO 1918

This exhibit documents through contemporary postal material the tumultuous history of the Balkan Peninsula in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The events were triggered by an uprising against the Ottoman Empire by the Christian Slavs in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1875, which caused an unsuccessful Serbian attack on Turkey. Subsequently, the intervention of Russia in the war against the Turks resulted in the rescue of the Serbs, liberation of Bulgaria and expansion of Greece. Later, several additional small wars were fought, as the Balkan states essentially scrapped amongst themselves over the spoils of Turkey's lost possessions in Europe, with the loser in one conflict ready to take on the others in the next. All of this culminated in the spark which touched off World War I being struck at Sarajevo in 1914.

Much of the material shown is mail from the military forces participating in the various campaigns. However, examples of civil mail in newly liberated or occupied territories is included as necessary to tell the full story. In order to limit the material shown to an appropriate quantity, the exhibit has both geographic and time constraints. The items shown relate to the Balkan Peninsula as described by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* as extending from the tip of the Peloponnesus in southern Greece north to a line along the Danube and Save Rivers thence eastward to the Dalmatian Coast. Today, this area would include the countries of Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and Macedonia, but not Romania. The end of World War I seemed an appropriate time to conclude the exhibit as national boundaries remained relatively stable for the ensuing 20 years.



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.

With political opportunism being the thread which runs through the history of the period, rather than any unified plan for territorial expansion on the part of a particular country, the presentation should be viewed as an anthology of related short stories rather than as a novel. The organization of the material shown is basically chronological, with those items arising from a particular campaign being shown sequentially. In cases in which more than one set of operations was occurring roughly simultaneously, the material is presented geographically.

TURMOIL IN THE BALKANS 1876 TO 1918

PLAN OF EXHIBIT

- A. Serbo-Turkish & Russo-Turkish War, 1876-1878.
- B. Austro-Hungarian Administration of Bosnia-Hercegovina & Sandjak of Novi Pazar, 1878 on.
- C. South Bulgaria & Serbo-Bulgarian War, 1885
- D. Greco-Turkish War, 1897.
- E. Balkan Wars, 1912-1913:
- | | |
|------------|---------|
| Serbia | Albania |
| Montenegro | Greece |
| Bulgaria | Epirus |
| Thrace | |
- F. World War I, 1914-1918:
- | | |
|---|---|
| Austro-Hungarian Invasion of Serbia | Bulgaria |
| Serbian Resistance | Bulgarian Occupation Occupation of Turkey |
| Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Serbia | Bulgarian Occupation of Serbia |
| Montenegro | Bulgarian Occupation of Greece |
| Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Montenegro | Serbian Exile Government on Corfu |
| Albania | Serbians on Salonica Front |
| Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Albania | Serbian Liberation of Bitolia |



Military letter-card from Serbian officer during the Russo-Turkish War, postmarked "Military Post/Prokuplje/8 IX 78." Franked with 20 para Prince Milan stamp because of foreign destination (Mauer near Vienna, Austria). Receiving mark dated 24 September 1878.

SERBO-TURKISH WAR

SERBIA

Vojena Posta 5
19 August 1876

Vojena Posta _
25 September 1876

9. Jula 1876



9255 #

Narodny Otkr. Dopr. i Kuz

№ 1900

Y. Rasnitsyn



In mid-1876, Prince Milan of Serbia, desiring to support an insurrection in Bosnia, declared war on the Ottoman Empire. However, the Serbs did not fare well in the fighting, 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*.

Military mail from this campaign is seldom seen because of its short duration and the low literacy rate among the Serbs. Internal mail was postage free as shown by upper cover (ex Rasic) 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 international postage. It is of special interest as the sender was the Commander of the Russian military observers serving with the Serbian forces.

RUSSO-TURKISH WAR

SERBIA

Vojena Posta 8
16 December 1877

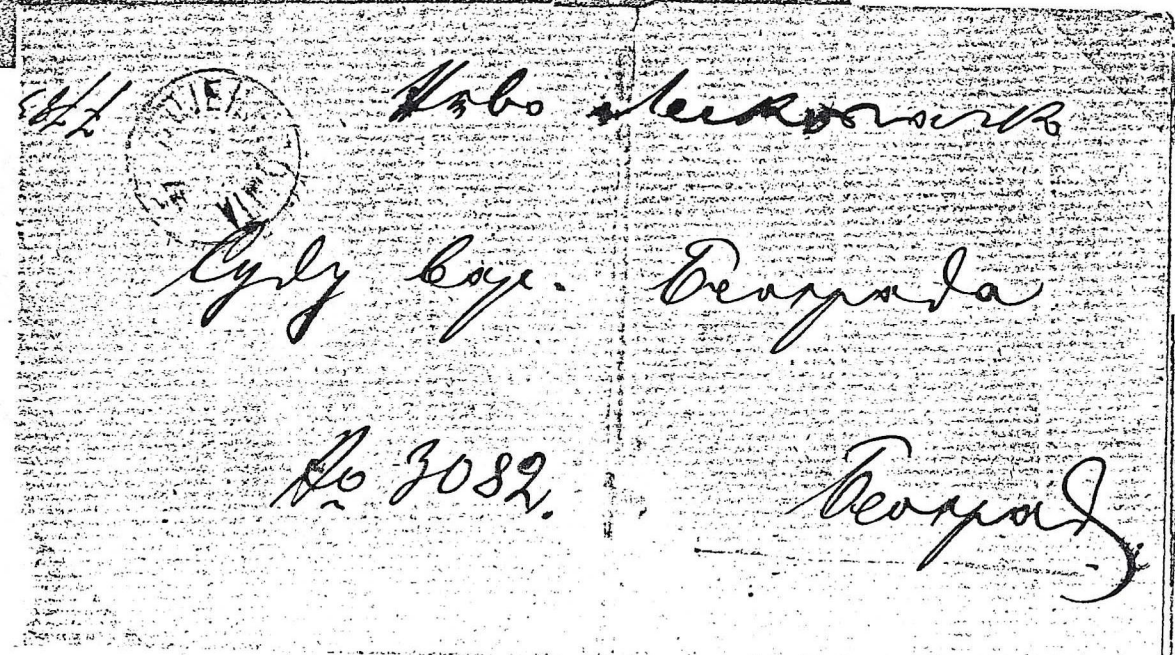
Vojena Posta 4
10 October 1878

Генерал А. В. Б. 4

Народног војског. војвода



Ј. Н. М. М.



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 its 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, while Austria ended up in control of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Sandjak of Novi Bazar, and Bulgaria became an independent principality.

Serbian troops utilized the same numbered FPO markings as in the fighting two years earlier. Upper example shows #8 used at Lesnica (sent to Loznica) on the day after war was declared by Serbia. Lower cover sent from #4 at Leskovac to Belgrade, where it arrived six days later.

SERBIA

K. Srb. Posta/Pirot
8 February 1878

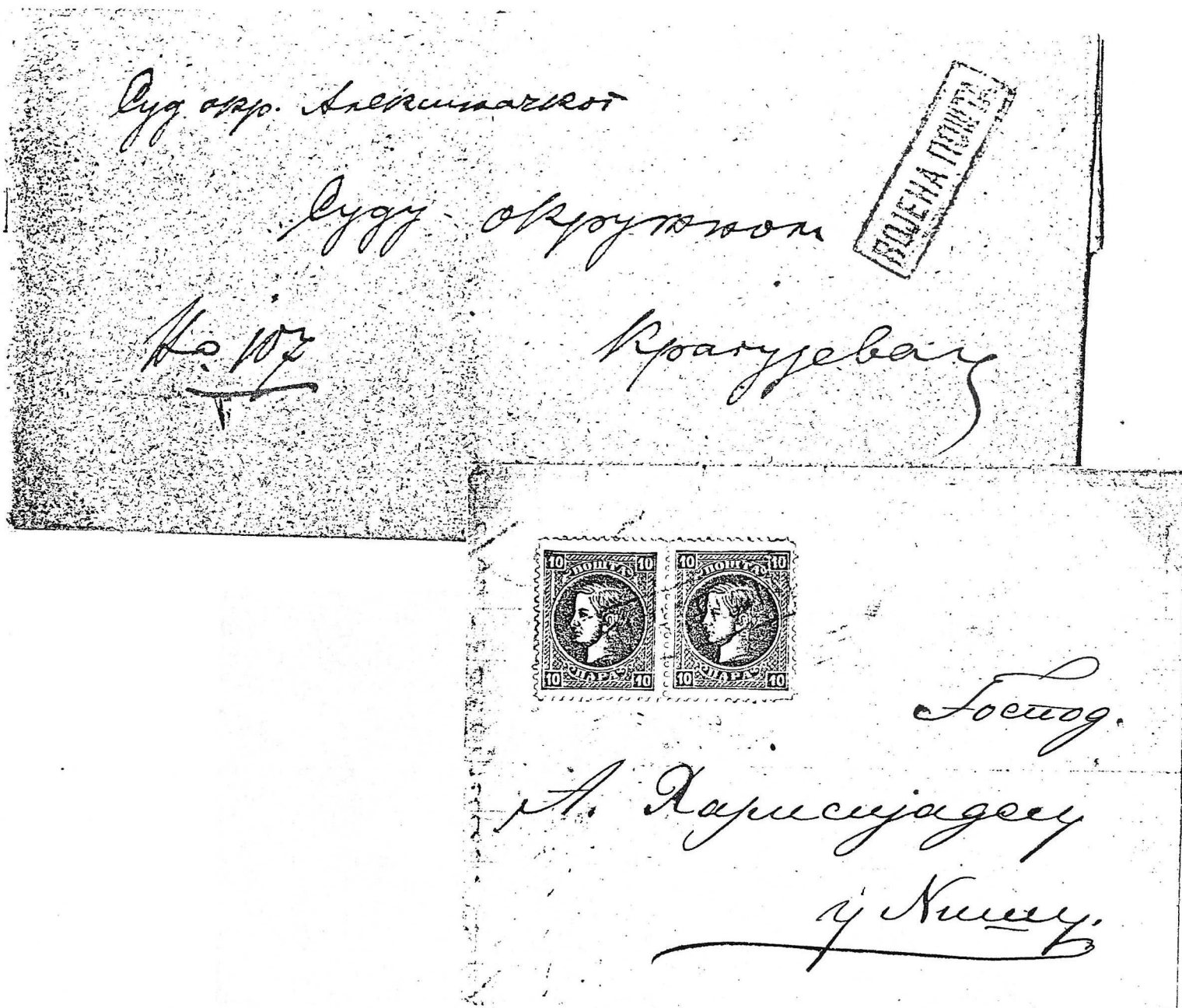
Inspekcija Vojnih Posta
24 February 1878



The special military stationery above provided 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 inscribed "Inspectorate of Military Posts," introduced in early 1878; sent from Nish, backstamped at Belgrade on 26 February.

SERBIA

Vojena Posta
18 February 1878
22 June 1878



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

Examples shown are folded letters; the upper item sent from Aleksinac to Kragujevac was unfranked due to military origin. Lower item to Nish was franked with 20 paras in Prince Milan stamps and is written in Greek. It is a commercial letter from the firm of Th. G. Christodulo & Son and was subject to censorship, having manuscript "Vidio" (Seen) and signature on reverse, thus providing a most unusual combination.

SERBIA
Russo-Turkish War

Petlavatz
17 September 1877

"Italian Legion" Volunteer

*La mia direzione - volontario
nell'armata della Brzina - Belgrade
Legione Italiana
Parisf. A. Achille -*

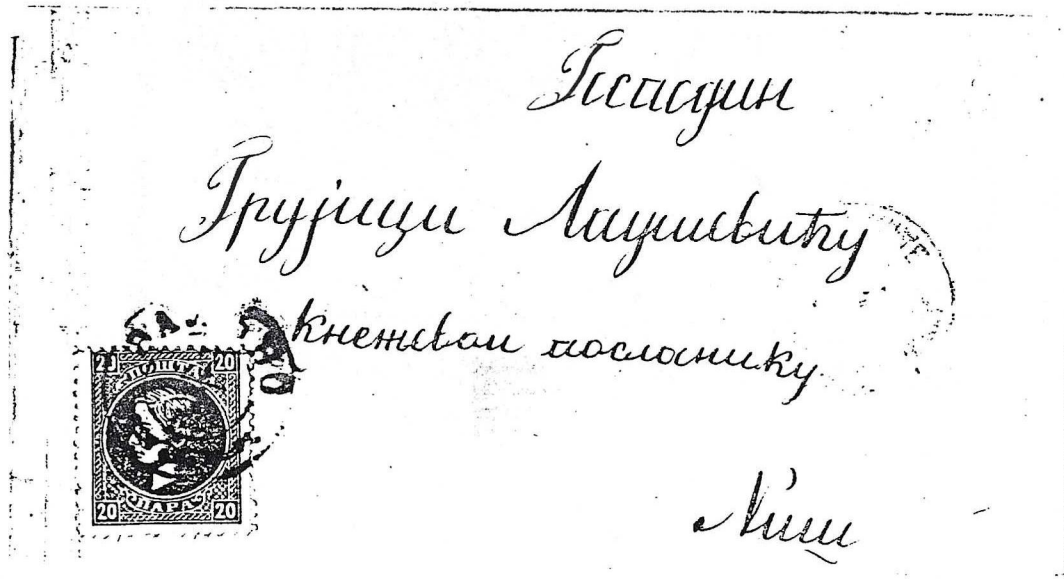
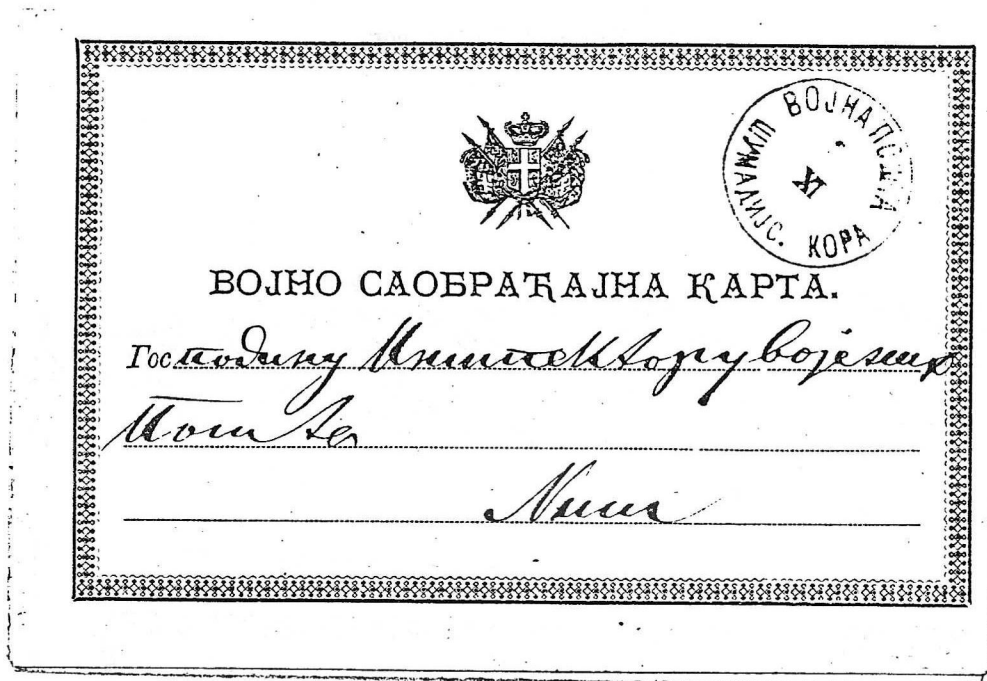


Serbian postal card with added 10 para franking for foreign destination. Boxed marking reads "Military Mail." The return address indicates extraordinary usage by Italian volunteer with the "Army of the Brzina, Italian Legion, Belgrade" who was undoubtedly motivated by sympathy for the Christian Serbs against the Moslem Turks. The message describes some of the 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.

SERBIA
Russo-Turkish War

Vojna Posta/Shumadija Division
10 September 1878

Vojna Posta/Vrh. Komande
12 January 1879

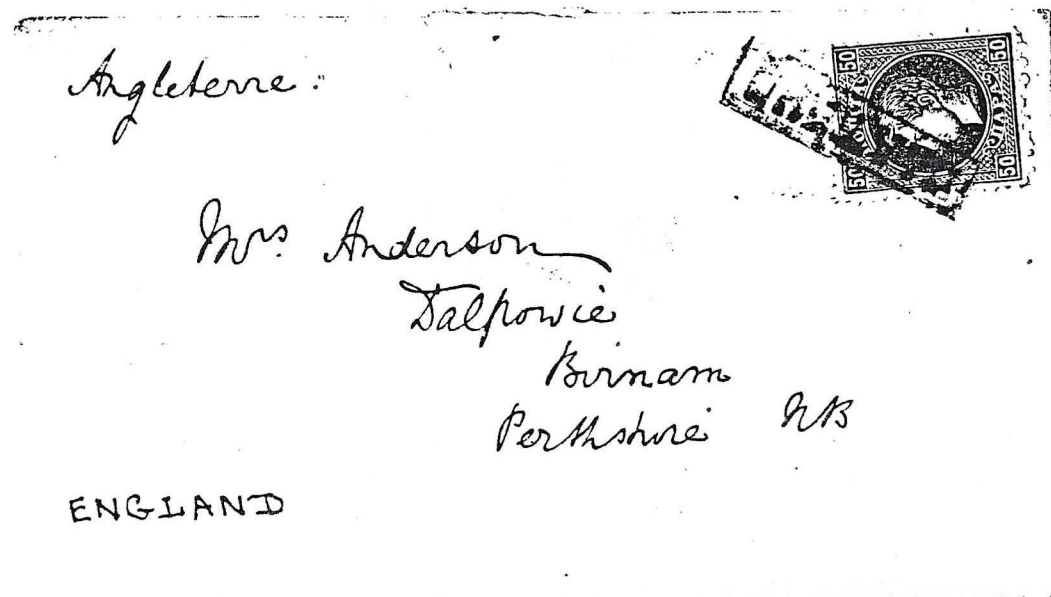
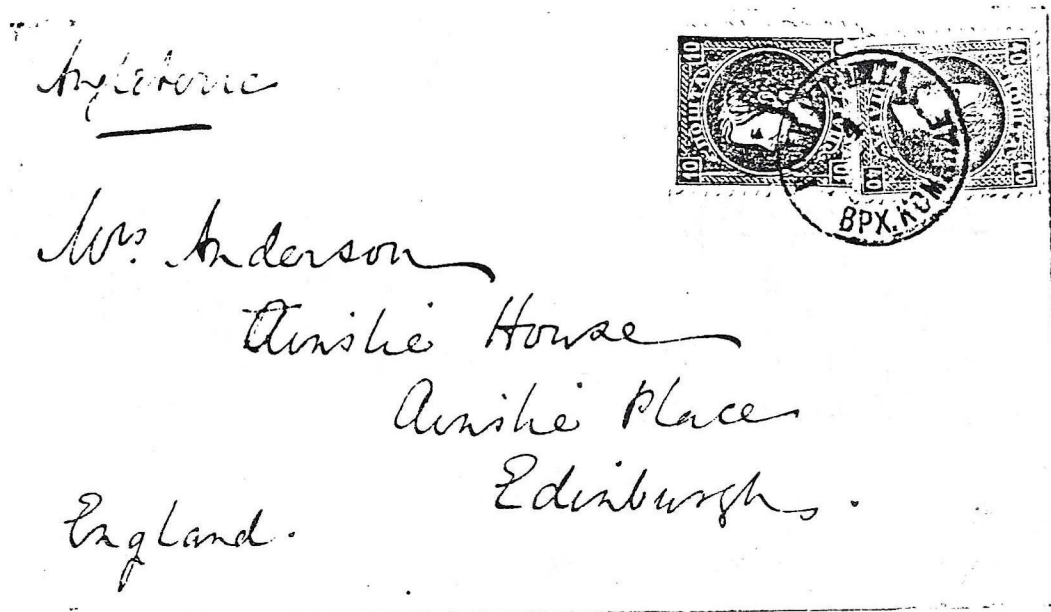


As a result of the successful intervention by Russia in the fighting against the Turks, Serbia was able to occupy former Ottoman districts inhabited by ethnic Slavs. Under the territorial provisions of the Congress of Berlin, the Serbs were allotted only the districts of Nish and Pirot. Above items are examples of mail to Nish, the principal town in the liberated territory; the franked cover was sent from Valjevo and backstamped for receipt at Serbian military headquarters. (Nish did not receive a civil postmark until 1880.)

SERBIA
British Military Advisor

Vojna Posta /Vrh. Komando
May 1879

July 1879



The outcome of the Congress of Berlin following the Russo-Turkish War was very unsatisfactory from Serbia's point of view. Therefore, Prince Milan felt that additional fighting in the Balkans was likely. (Indeed, the Serbs attacked Bulgaria in 1885.) Thus, a program was undertaken to strengthen the army.

Above covers mailed by a British military advisor to his wife in Scotland. The upper item is postmarked with a "Military Post/Headquarters" cds and the lower has a boxed "NAPLACENO" (Paid) marking believed to have originated at Pirot. The latter has a Belgrade transit marking of 16 July 1879 on the reverse.

BULGARIAN UPRISING

Russo-Turkish War

Field Post Office 15
23 December 1877



A second aspect of the Russo-Turkish War related to the liberation of Bulgaria. Following an unsuccessful revolt by the Bulgarians in 1876, Russia supported its Slavic brethren and declared war on Turkey in April 1877. After a successful campaign, the Treaty of San Stefano confirmed Bulgaria as an independent principality.

Cover addressed to an English nursing sister at the Red Cross hospital in Sistov, Bulgaria. Mailed from London on 29 December 1877 and backstamped in transit at Bucharest on 3 January 1878. There is also a transit marking of the Russian field post office #15 dated on 23 December 1877; however, Russia was still using the Julian calendar at this time and the equivalent date on the Gregorian calendar used in the West was 4 January 1878. (This is presumably the Russian FPO located at Zimnitsa, a small town on the Romanian side of the Danube, which Tchilinghirian cites as a forwarding center for handling mail between Russia and the occupied areas of northern Bulgaria. It is stated that "No postal material from this Office appears to have been recorded.")

BULGARIA
Principality

Lom Palanka
13 March 1881



At the Congress of Berlin, Bulgaria was confirmed as an independent principality. However, its borders were sharply reduced from those which had been proposed by the Russians, thus sowing the seeds for future conflict. In fact, the Bulgarians ended up with territory limited to the north of the Rhodope Mountains, although many of their ethnic brethren lived further south. This decision by the great powers sowed the seeds for future conflict.

On 1 May 1879, Bulgaria issued its first stamps as an independent entity. This "lion" series consisted of 100,000 sets and was denominated in French currency of centimes and francs. Exceptional usage of the 1 franc high value which (with a 50 centime stamp on the reverse) paid quadruple weight UPU rate for a registered letter to Bavaria. A new series of stamps denominated in stotinki and leva was introduced in April 1881.



For political purposes, the great powers decided not to require Turkey to give up title to the territory occupied predominantly by Christians lying to the south of the Rhodope Mountains. However, this area was given a degree of autonomy as the Villayet of Eastern Roumelia.

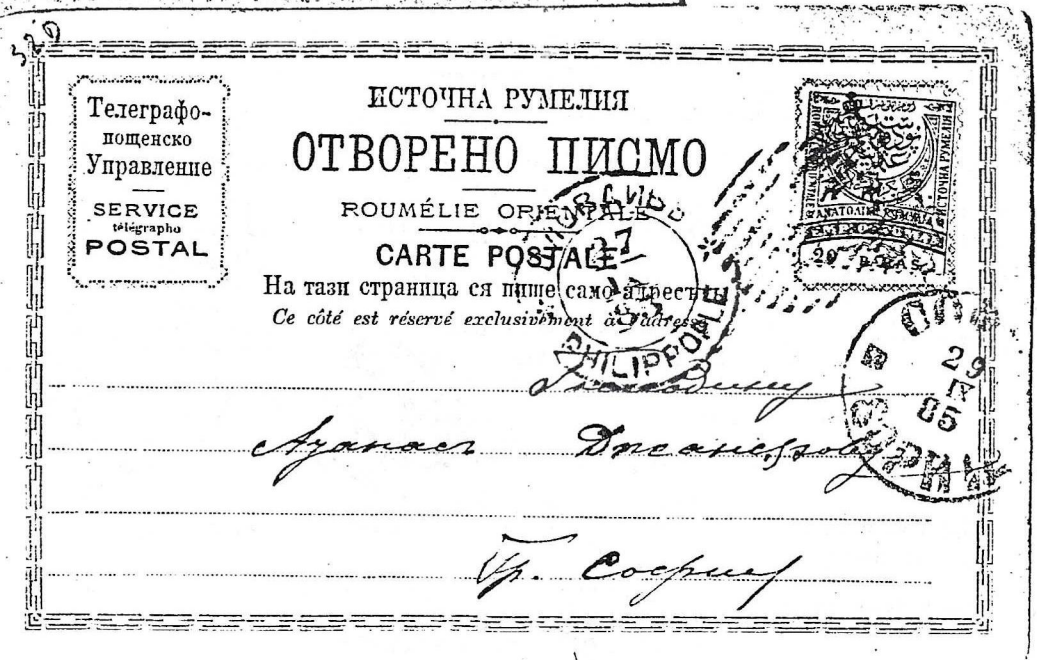
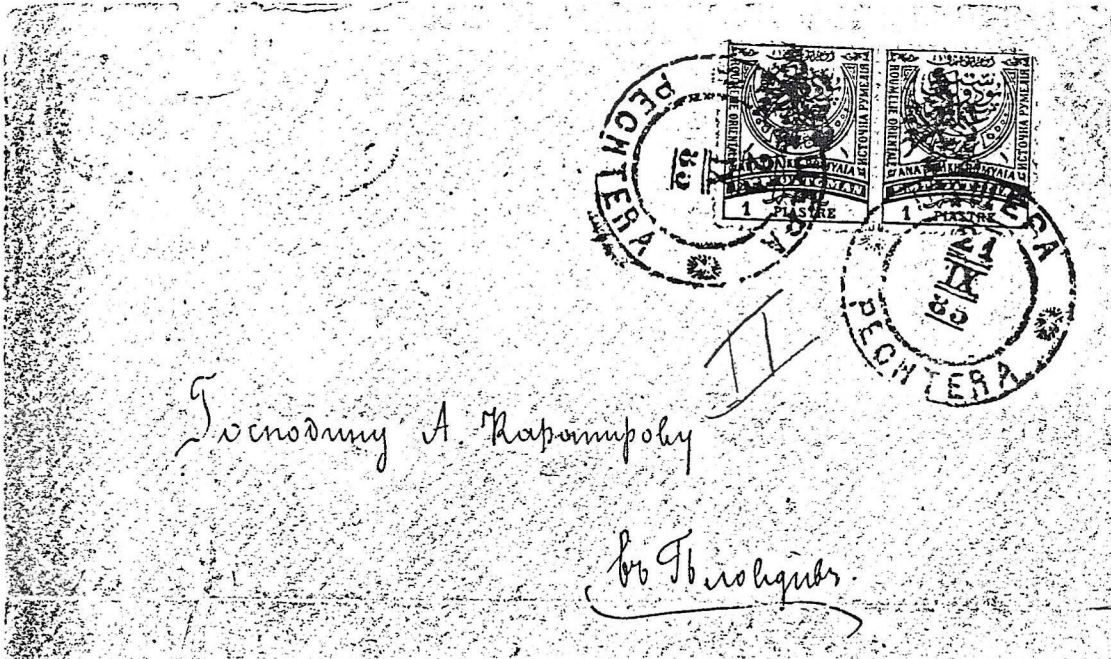
In 1881, the first stamps were issued for Eastern Roumelia. These stamps are customarily found used on special formula post cards as shown above. However, the upper example showing TPO cancel is exceptional.

SOUTH BULGARIAN UPRISING

BULGARIA

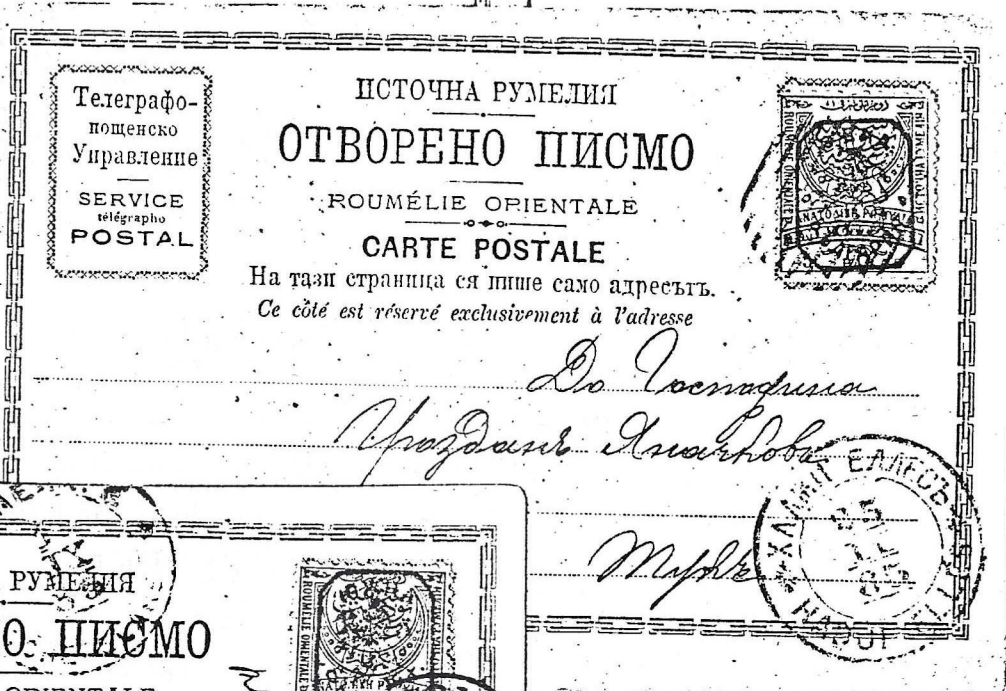
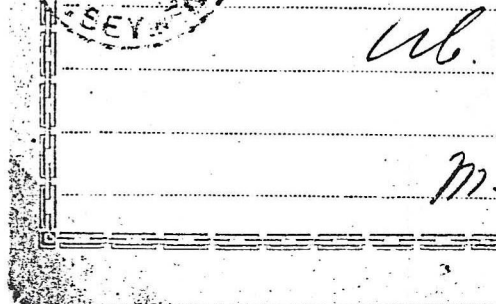
Pechtera
21 September 1885

Philippople
27 September 1885



Following a successful revolt by its Slavic inhabitants, the Turkish province of Eastern Roumelia was annexed by Bulgaria on 1 September 1885. A week later the first stamps were issued for the new "South Bulgaria" with the Eastern Roumelia issue being overprinted by a Bulgarian lion. This provisional issue was in use for less than a month, being replaced by regular unoverprinted Bulgarian stamps as of 1 October 1885.

Aitos
16 September 1885



On 11 September 1885, a new set of overprints was issued, this time with the Bulgarian lion inside a frame and the wording "South Bulgaria,." more clearly designating the change in administration of the territory. This second provisional issue was in use for barely three weeks. Most of these stamps were used on the Eastern Roumelia formula postal cards; use of (top portion of) a reply card, especially registered, is extraordinary.

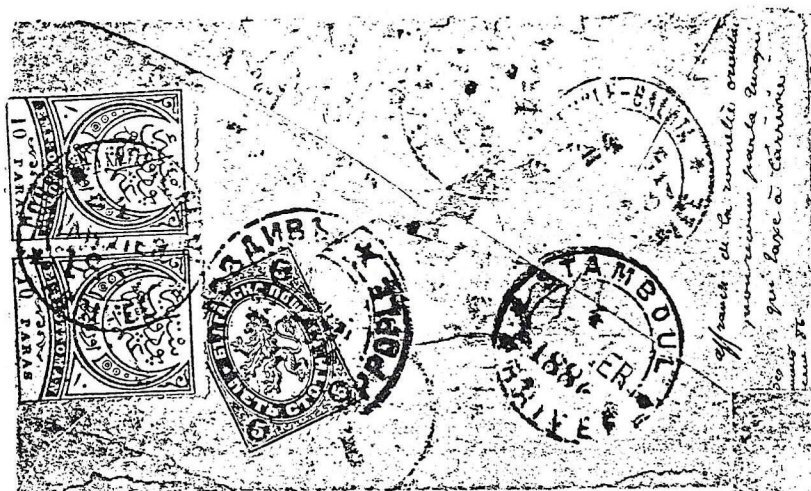
BULGARIA
South Bulgaria

Philippople
17 October 1885
19 July 1886

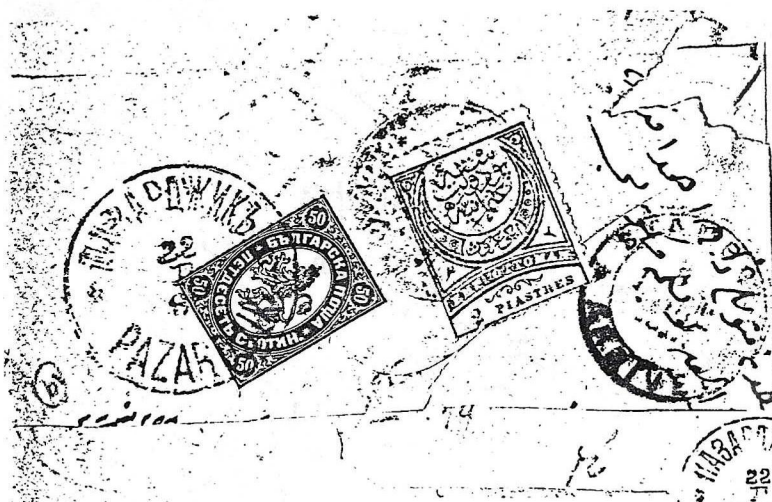


On 1 October 1885, normal Bulgarian stamps were required for payment of postage in the former South Bulgaria. Above are examples of international registered mail (50 stotinki rate) to Austria and Germany, respectively.

Pazardjik
22 February 1888



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 در مجلس در علمیه در اسلامیه
 جوداکی فیوض بقای دین شریعت
 اخلاص جانب علمیه رسید
 Hacı Eker
 No 236
 Constantinople

 RECOMMENDED
 1929

The Turkish authorities refused to recognize the Bulgarian annexation of Eastern Roumelia. As a result, when mail franked with Bulgarian stamps arrived in Turkey from this area, it was assessed postage due at double the normal postal rate. The underpayment was indicated by the "T" marking in circle shown on the above covers, with Turkish stamps added to reflect the amounts collected from the addressees. Such usage is very unusual.