

#1 – Survey of Holy Land Postal History 1850-1950

By Dr. Albert Friedberg

A philatelic survey is intended to cover a period of time without going into great detail in any particular phase of the philatelic history of a country. This lecture is designed to acquaint the collectors of the modern Israel stamps with the fact that almost 100 years of very interesting Holy Land postal history preceded the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948.

Postal history of the Holy Land can be divided into 4 periods:

1. Forerunner Period 1852-1917
2. British Period December 1917 – May 5, 1948
3. Interim Period March 1948 – June 1948
4. Israel Period May 16, 1948 to date

There is some overlapping of these four periods.

First consider the events leading up the Forerunner Period.

Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. Prior to 1852, most mail in Palestine was carried by couriers on foot, by mounted messenger, and by coach. In the 1840-s and early 1850's, there was a fairly regular-scheduled mail coach service between the major cities in the Holy Land and Beirut. However, this was not adequate as an internal postal system, since the mail deliveries were on a weekly basis.

Turkey had a very poor merchant marine, and thus mail deliveries to Europe were very irregular. We must remember at this time most inhabitants of Palestine were illiterate, and the greater part of the mail of this period came from religious orders, officials, traders and foreign visitors on pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Since there was no real Turkish postal system at this time, the Turkish government actually encouraged various private arrangements for mail transport. In 1774-1775, Turkey had signed “The Capitulation Treaties” which gave certain extra-territorial rights to some European powers. Thus, five European nations created their own postal systems in Palestine. The dates of the foreign post office openings in Palestine were:

1. Austria about 1852
2. France about 1852
3. Russia 1856
4. Germany 1898
5. Italy 1908

The Turkish postal system began in 1863, and Egypt operated a post office in Jaffa from 1870-1872. Originally, the European postal systems were supposed to limit themselves to the handling of mail between Palestine and foreign countries, but eventually they handled much of the local mail. This inland mail service operated in direct competition with the Turkish postal system from 1863-1914, and competition between all of the postal systems was keen.

After Turkey joined the Universal Postal Union in 1875, there was no real need for any of the foreign post offices to exist in Palestine. However, it had become a matter of national prestige for the European powers to have their own post offices in the Holy Land, and Turkey was too weak to enforce her demands that they close down.

With the outbreak of World War I, all foreign post offices in Palestine were closed down by Turkey on October 1, 1914 and the Turkish post office remained the only post office for civilians until the end of 1917. When we get to the slide portion of this program, you will see examples of each of these postal systems.

However, please realize that the Society of Israel Philatelists has a much more detailed lecture on each of these postal systems, with as many as 50-60 slides on each postal service. In a philatelic survey of this type as presented here, we show just a few of these slides so as to give a general picture of each of these postal systems.

The Egyptian Expeditionary Forces, made up of units of British, Australian, Indian and New Zealand troops, plus a small brigade of French and Italian troops, launched a full-scale operation against Palestine in early 1917. Gaza was taken on Nov. 7, 1917; Jaffa on Nov. 16, 1917; and Jerusalem was occupied on Dec. 9, 1917.

After Jerusalem was occupied by General Allenby's army, the British Army post office SZ44 was opened in late December 1917. Postage stamps were introduced on Feb. 10, 1918 and from then on civilian mail was handled.

Later in 1918, the Army post office was succeeded by a regular civilian Post Office of the Military Administration. Postmarks carried the letters "O.E.T.A.-E.E.F." in the upper part, with the name of the city in lower part. OETA-EEF is the abbreviation for "Occupied Enemy Territory Administration – Egyptian Expeditionary Forces".

Because of an uncertain political status, Palestine remained under military rule until July 1, 1920. The British Mandate over Palestine was framed at the San Remo Conference of April 25, 1920 and this was officially ratified by the League of Nations on Sept. 29, 1923.

When the civilian administration took over from the military administration on July 1, 1920, the same cancellations were kept in service, but the letters “OETA-EEF” were removed. Under the British system, outgoing mail was date-stamped with a double-circle postmark, while incoming mail was stamped with a single-circle postmark. In 1921, the first double-circle postmark with 2 bars and the Maltese Cross in its lower half was introduced.

From 1921-1948, many different postmarks were used by the British Mandate postal system. There were oval registered postmarks of different sizes, different wavy-line postmarks, circular registered postmarks, triangular postmarks, double-circle and single circle postmarks, and special-event postmarks. The British Mandate stamps are interesting, and some of them are the great rarities of Holy Land philately. The stamps and the postmarks of the British Mandate period are discussed in much greater detail in other Society of Israel Philatelists slide lectures.

In November 1947, the United Nations organization voted to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish zones. The British Mandate was scheduled to end on May 15, 1948, but long before that date the tension between Arabs and Jews had reached a climax.

The British Mandate Postal System began to break down in some areas of Palestine as early as March, 1948. Many post offices were closed by the British authorities in Mid-April, and the British Postal System was officially terminated in Palestine on May 16, 1948.

As the British closed the various post offices, Jewish postal clerks (as ordered by the Jewish Agency for Palestine) re-opened the post offices and remained on the job until the Israel Postal Service was inaugurated on May 16, 1948. This period between the end of the British Mandate Postal System and the beginning of the Israel Postal Service is known as “The Interim Period.”

Jewish National Fund labels were overprinted “DOAR (post)” in Hebrew, and were used as stamps in the Jewish-held part of Palestine. An emergency seal mail service was inaugurated between Nahariya and Haifa in March, 1948 when the road between the cities was occupied by Arab Forces. An armored car mail service carried the mail from Rishon Le Zion to Tel Aviv from April 5 – May 5, 1948. An emergency local stamp was issued in Safad on May 4, 1948 and was in use for 2-1/2 weeks.

British Mandate stamps were overprinted “EMERGENCY” in Hebrew and used in Affulah, Nahalal, and Tiberias. Jerusalem local stamps were issued on May 9, 1948 and, because of the siege, were used until early July 1948. The Interim Period is a fascinating period for philatelists and we have an 80 slide lecture on this particular period.

The State of Israel's independence was announced on May 14, 1948, and the first stamps of Israel were put on sale on May 16, 1948. The first stamps of the new state bear the inscription "Doar Ivri (Hebrew Post)" since they were printed in secrecy before the country was named.

The first Festival Stamps issued later in 1948 were the first stamps to bear the name of the new state "Israel." The technical progress of Israel's stamps is most apparent when we consider the relatively simple designs of the "Flying Scroll" Festival stamps of 1948 and then the beautiful complex "Creation Series" of 1965. Israel's stamps depict the Bible, archeology, the customs, the land, the products and the people of Israel. The design of Israel's stamps shows a creativeness that is hardly to be rivaled by most countries in this modern day.

NOW – ON TO THE SLIDES!

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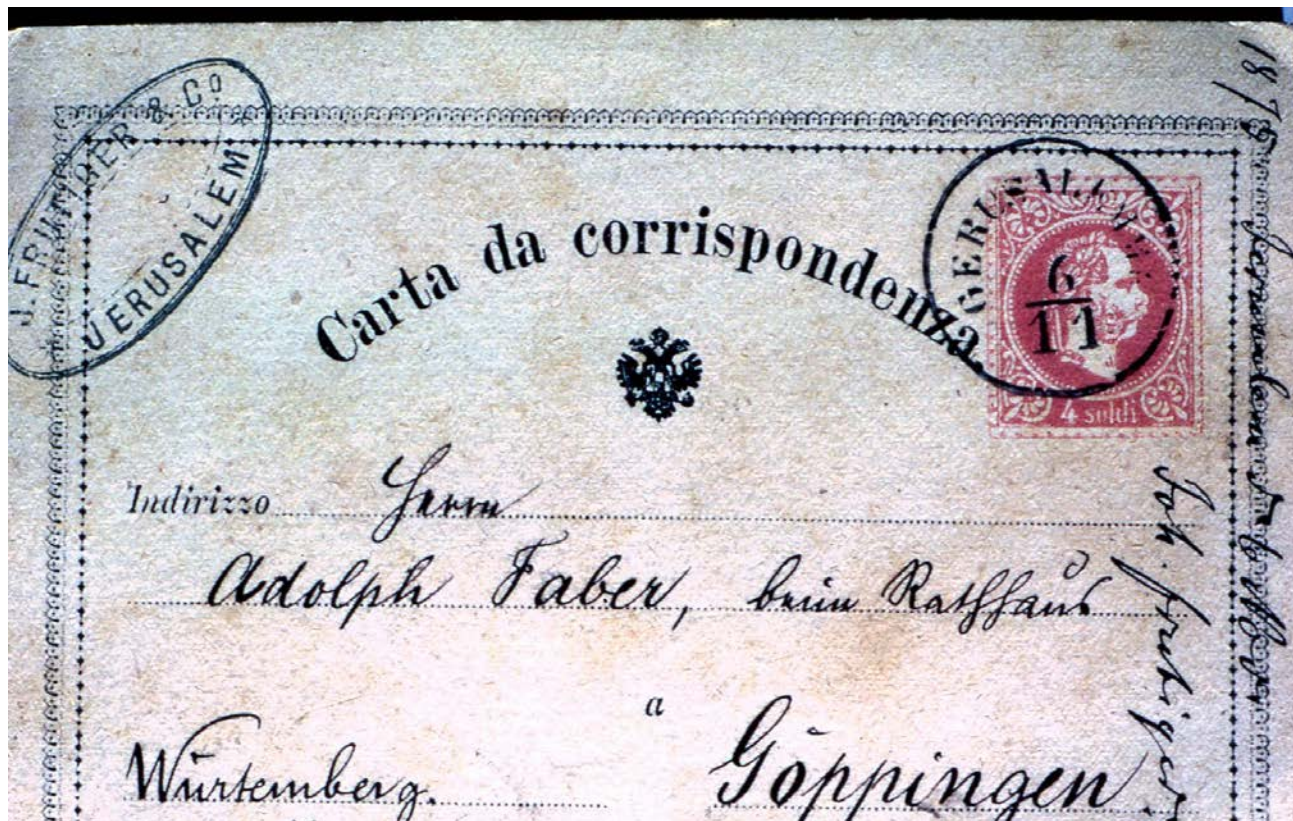


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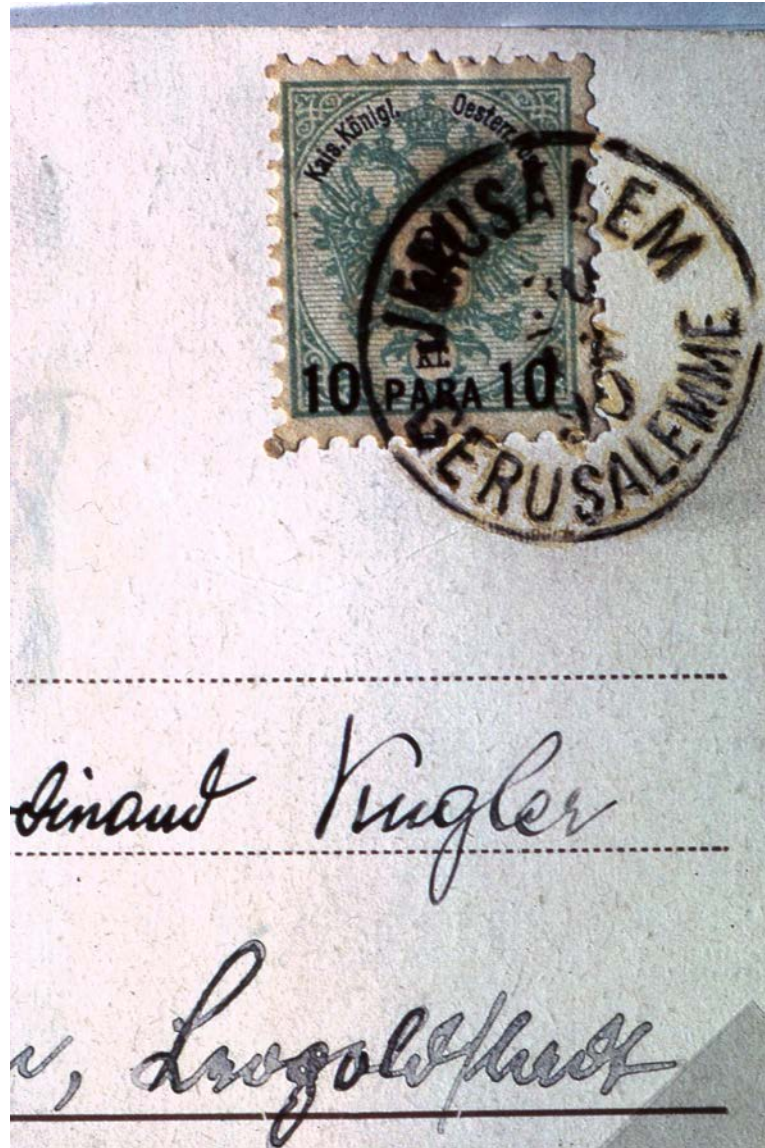


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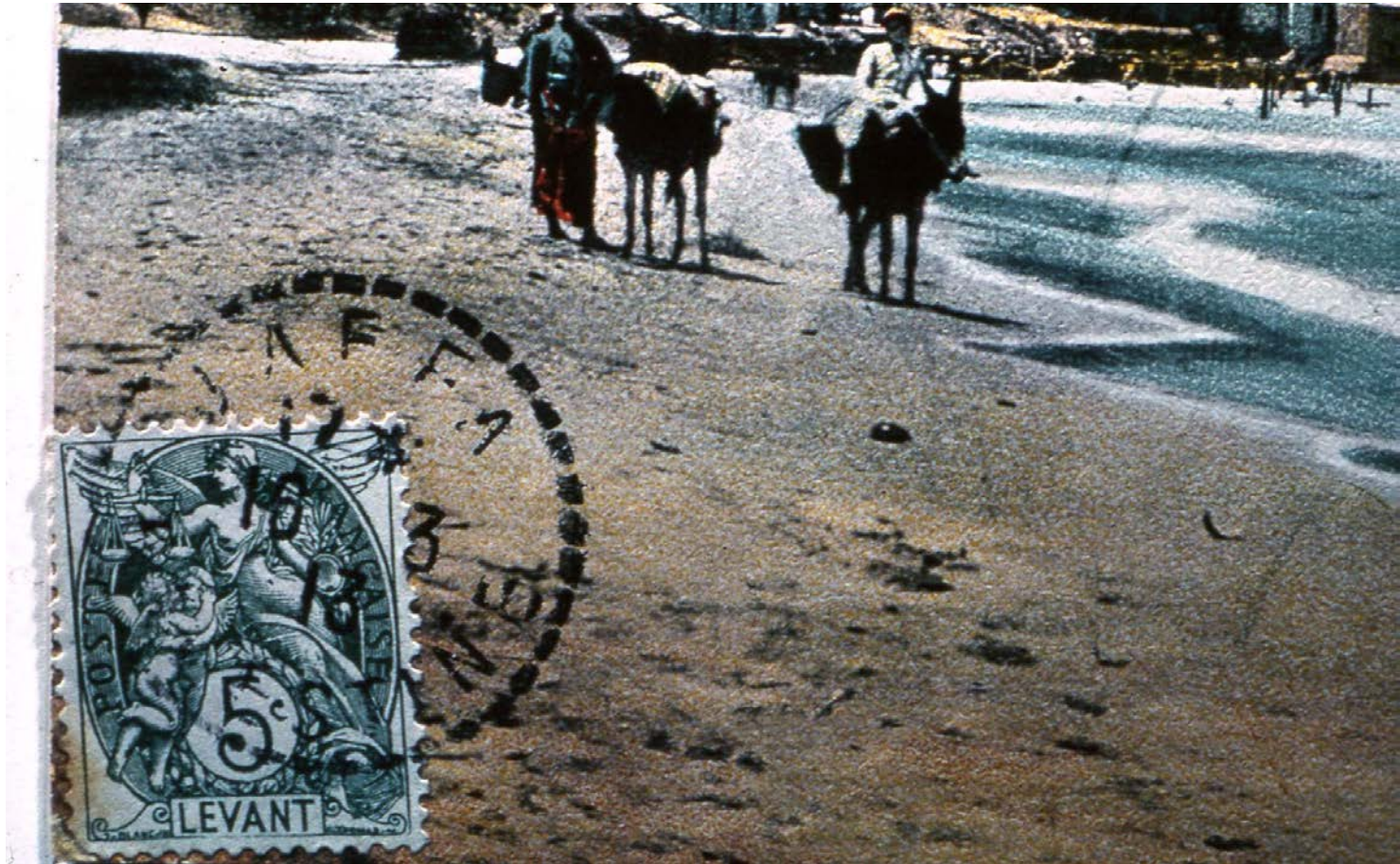








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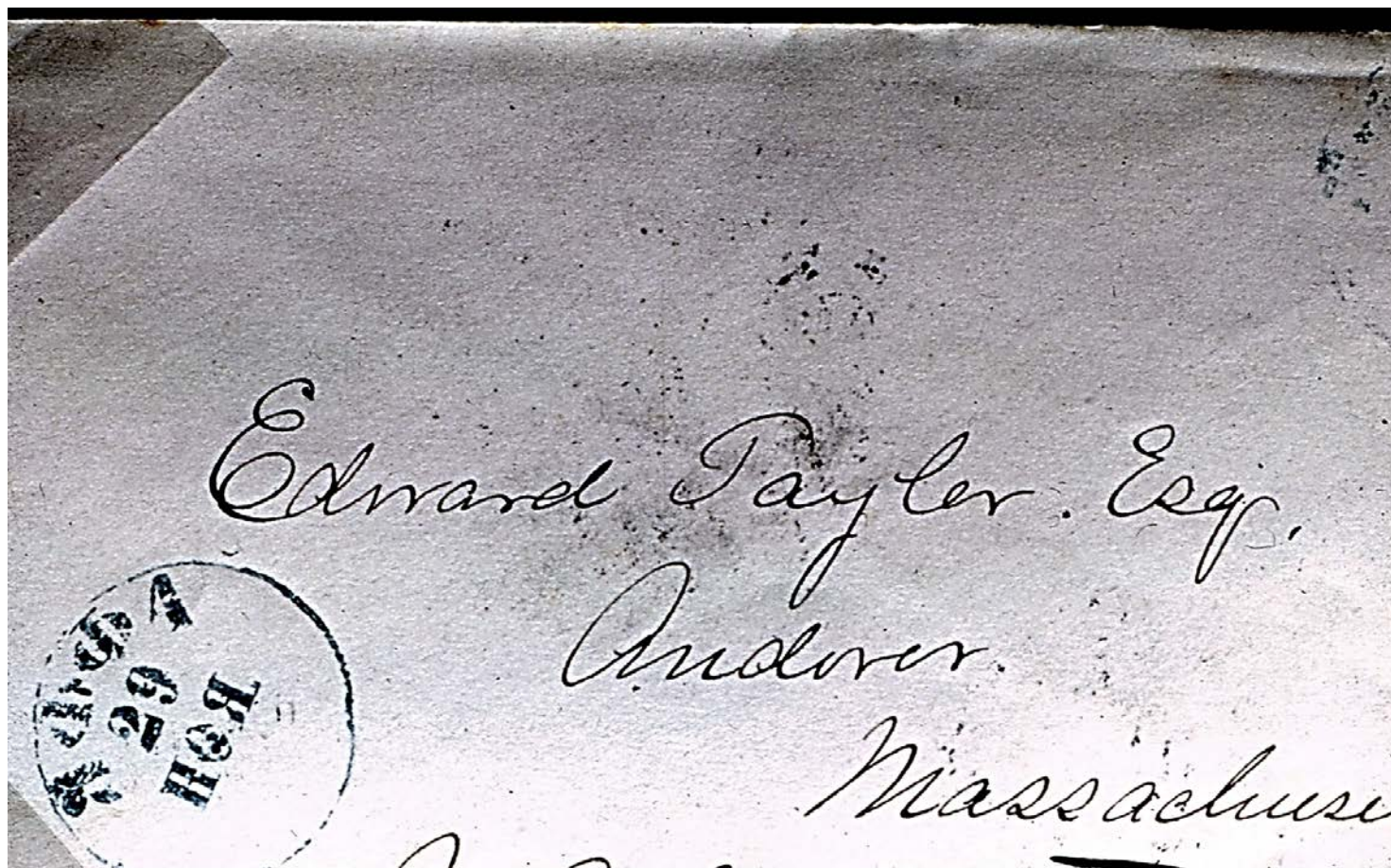


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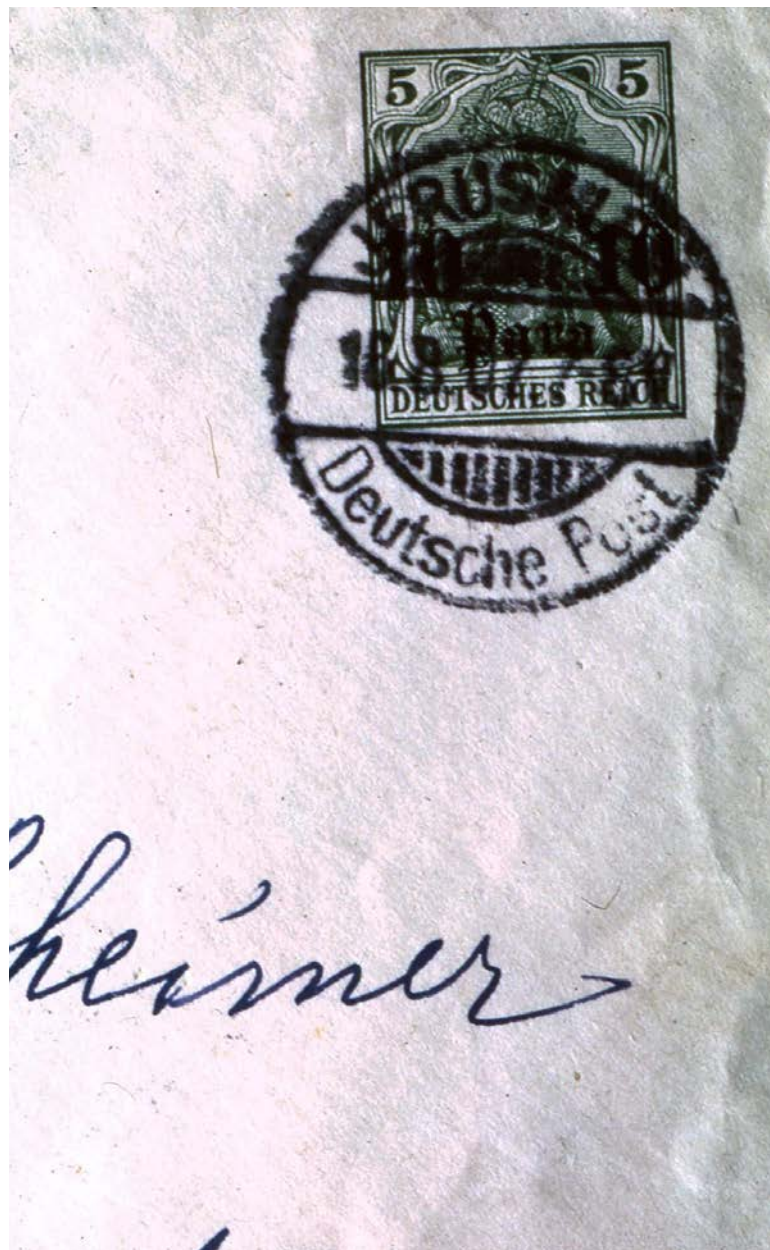


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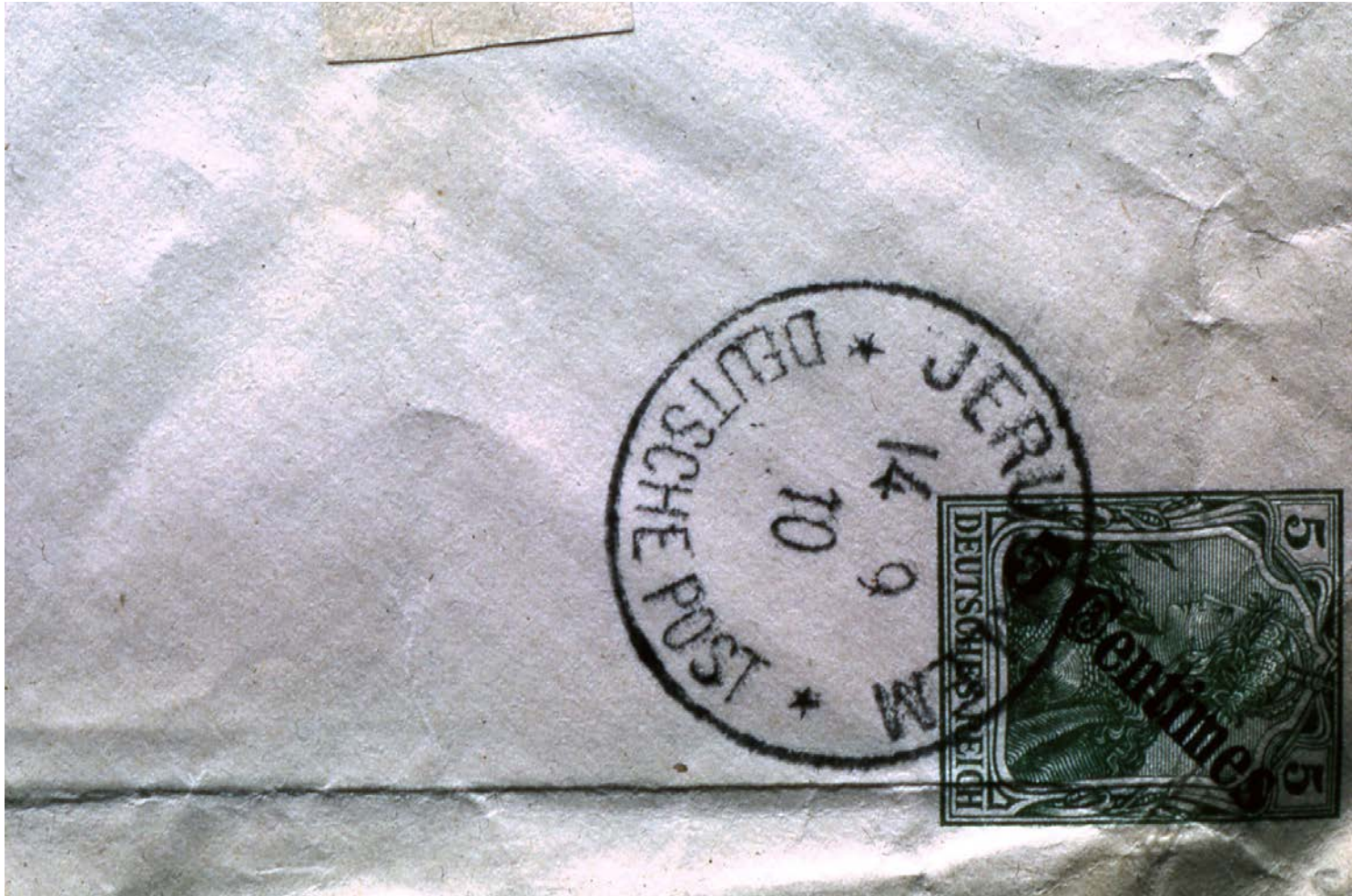


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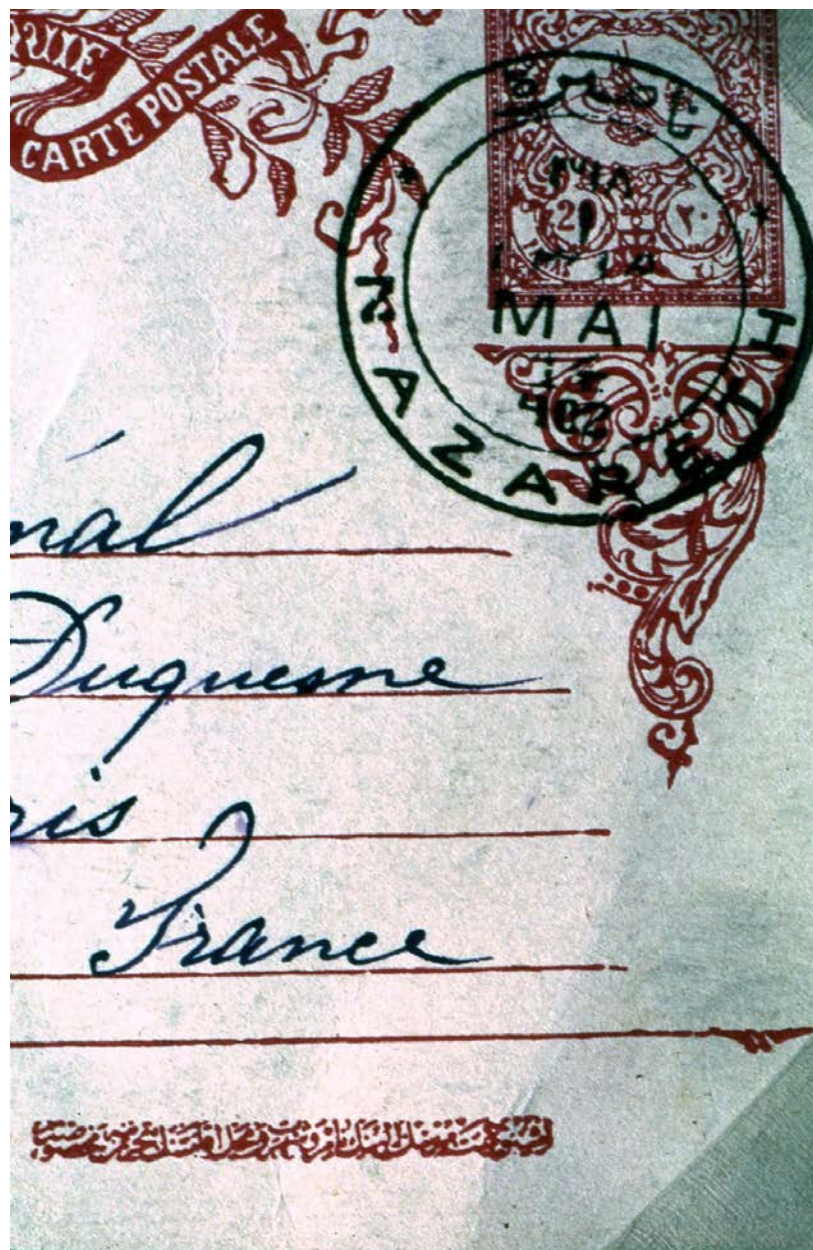




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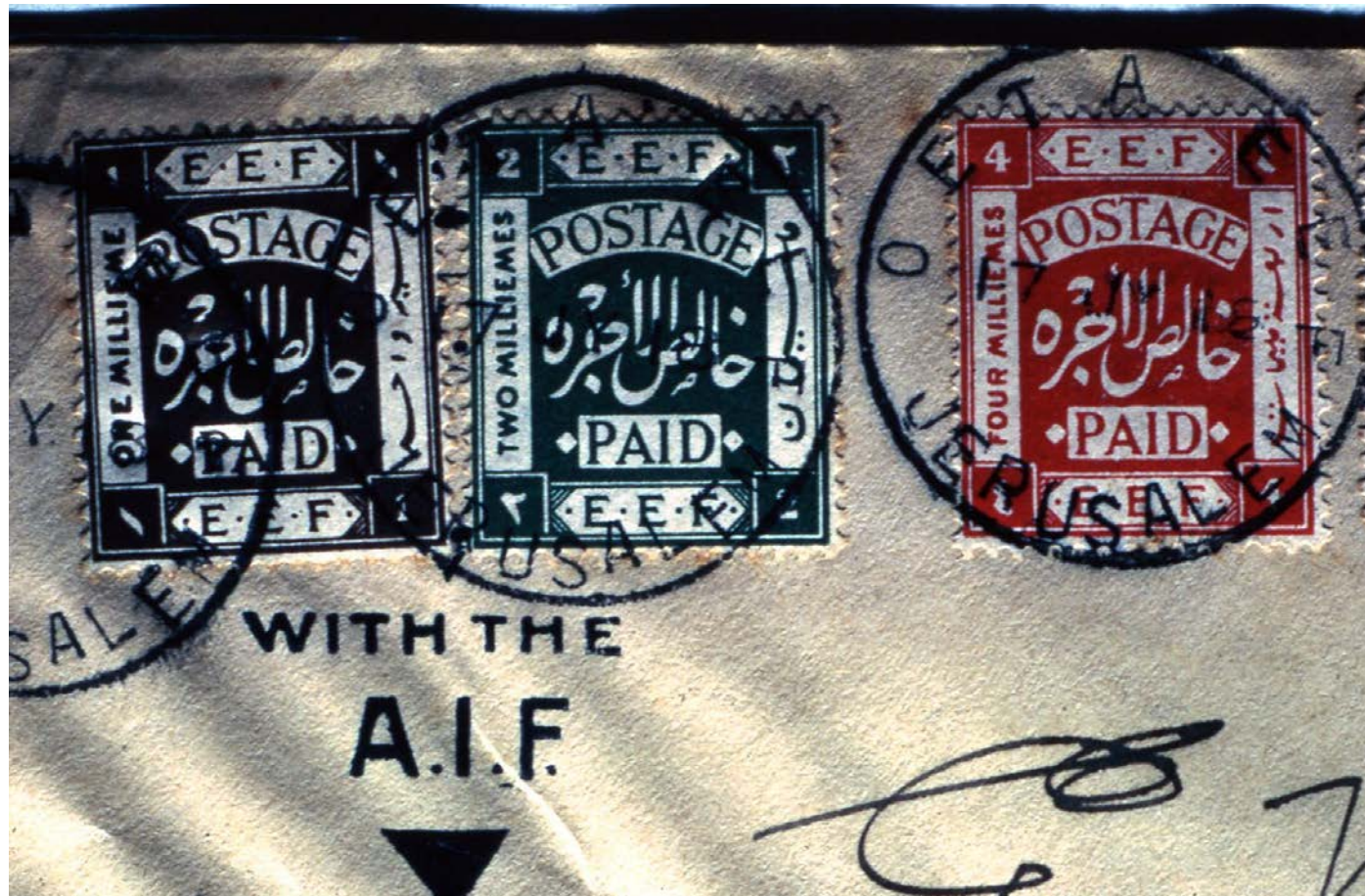




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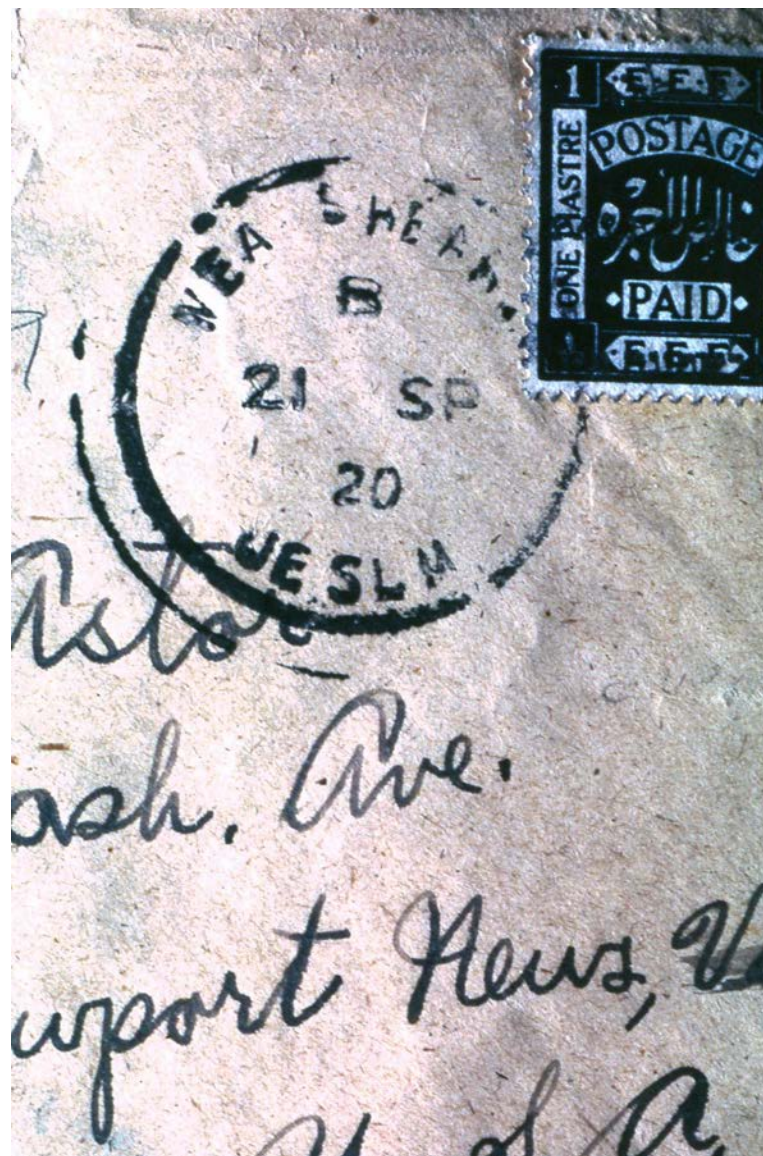




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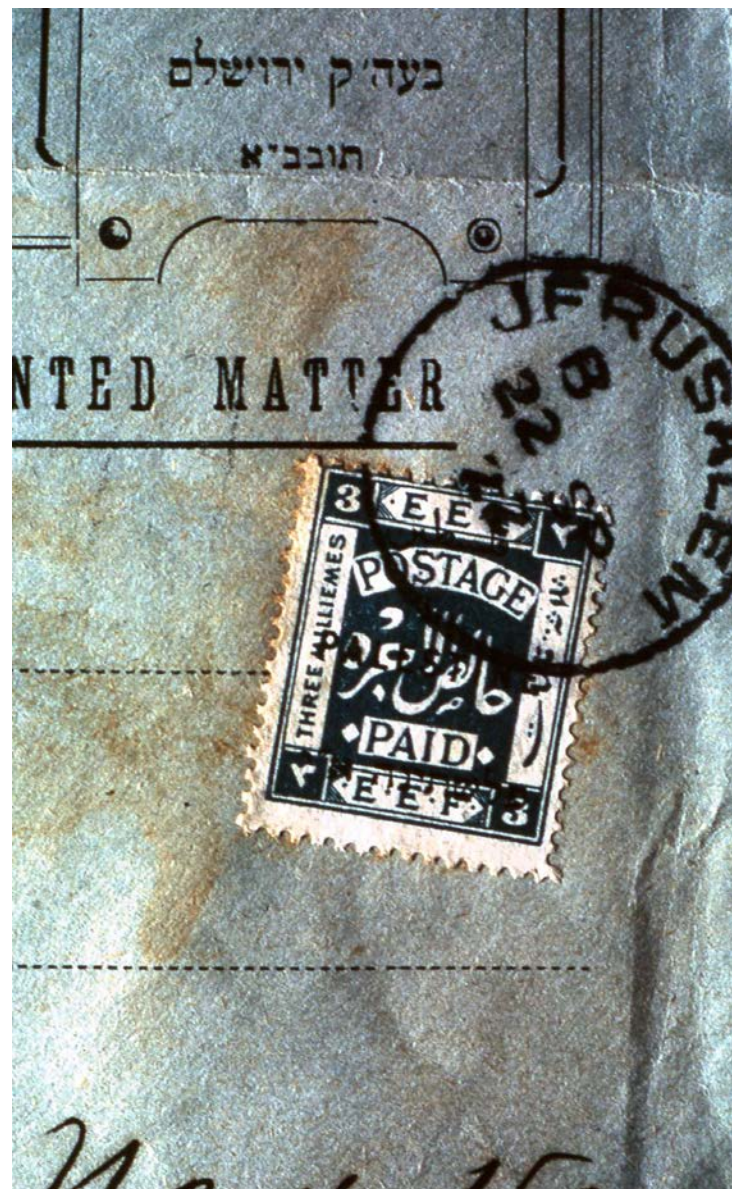


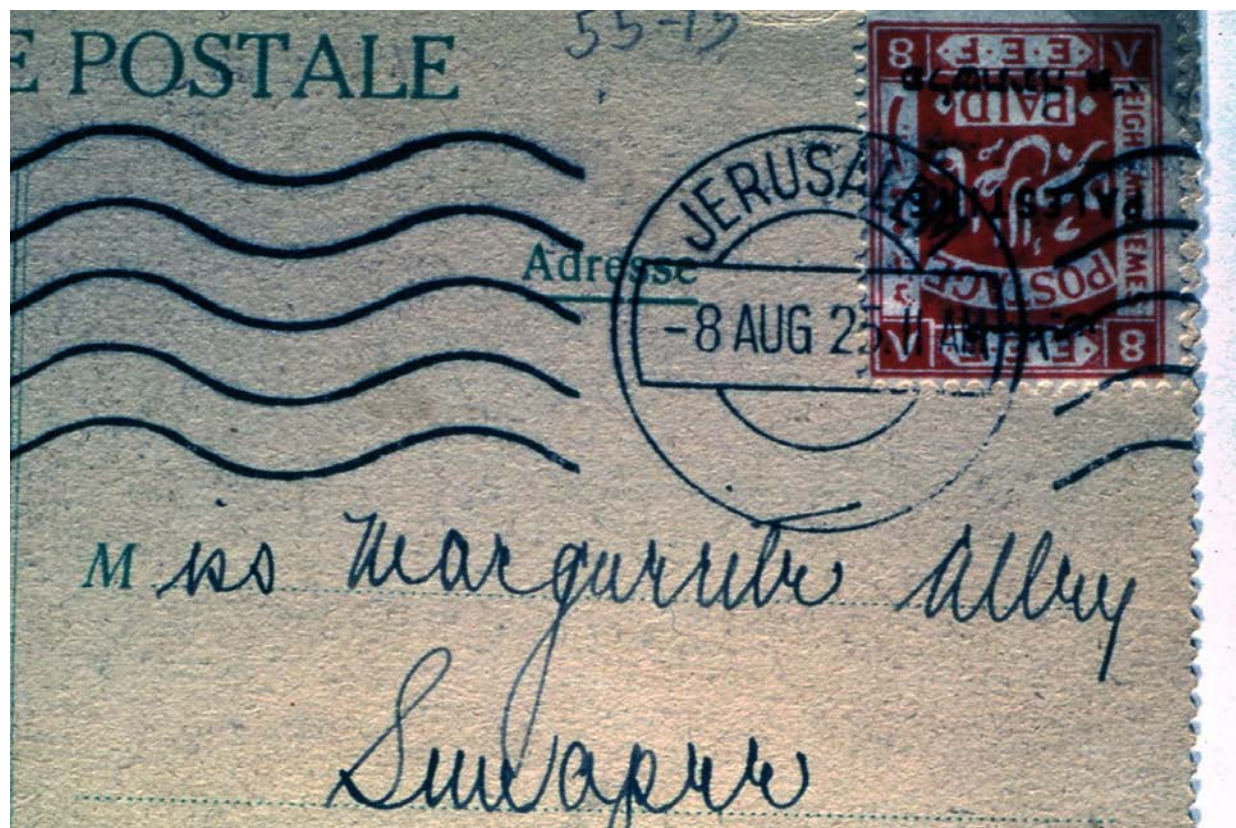


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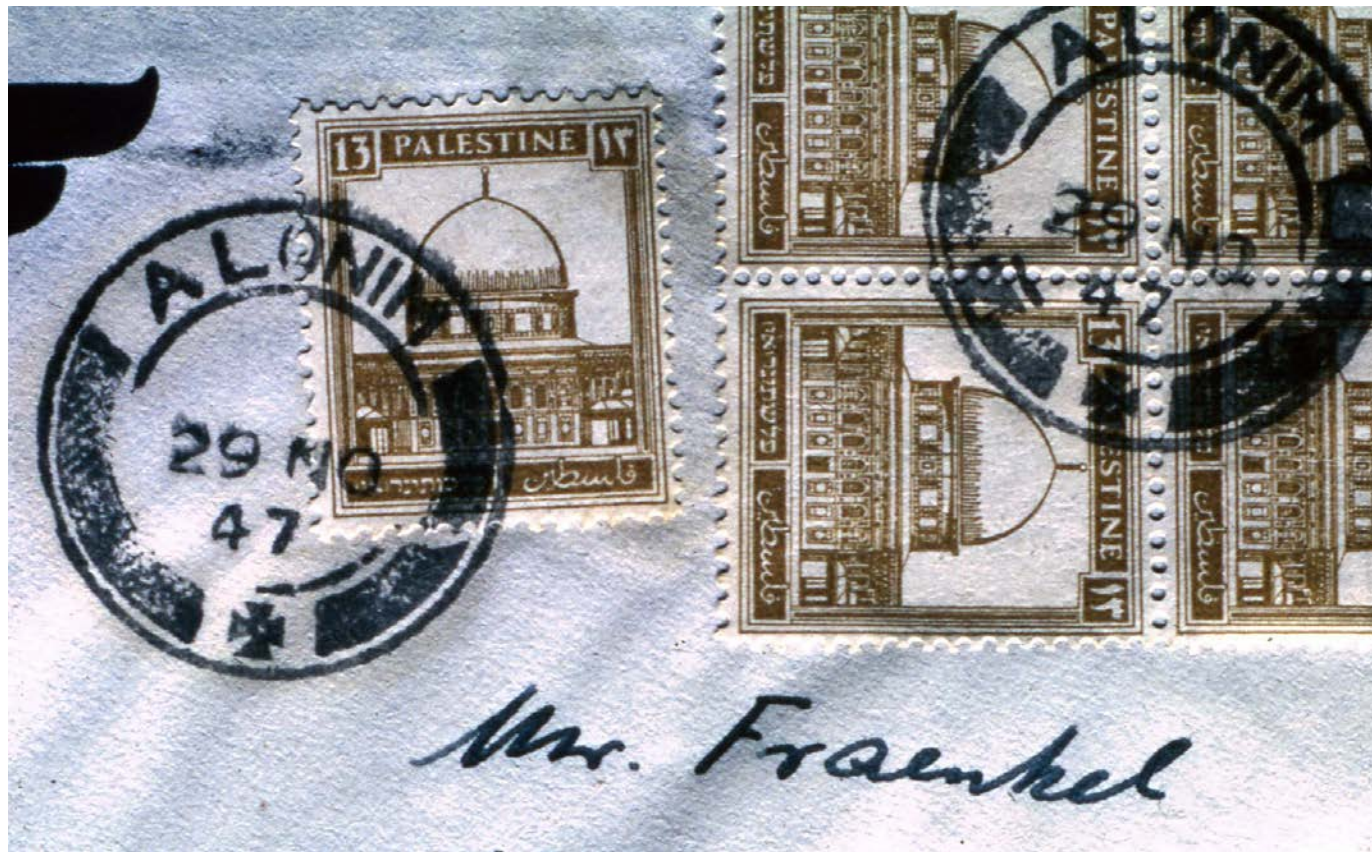
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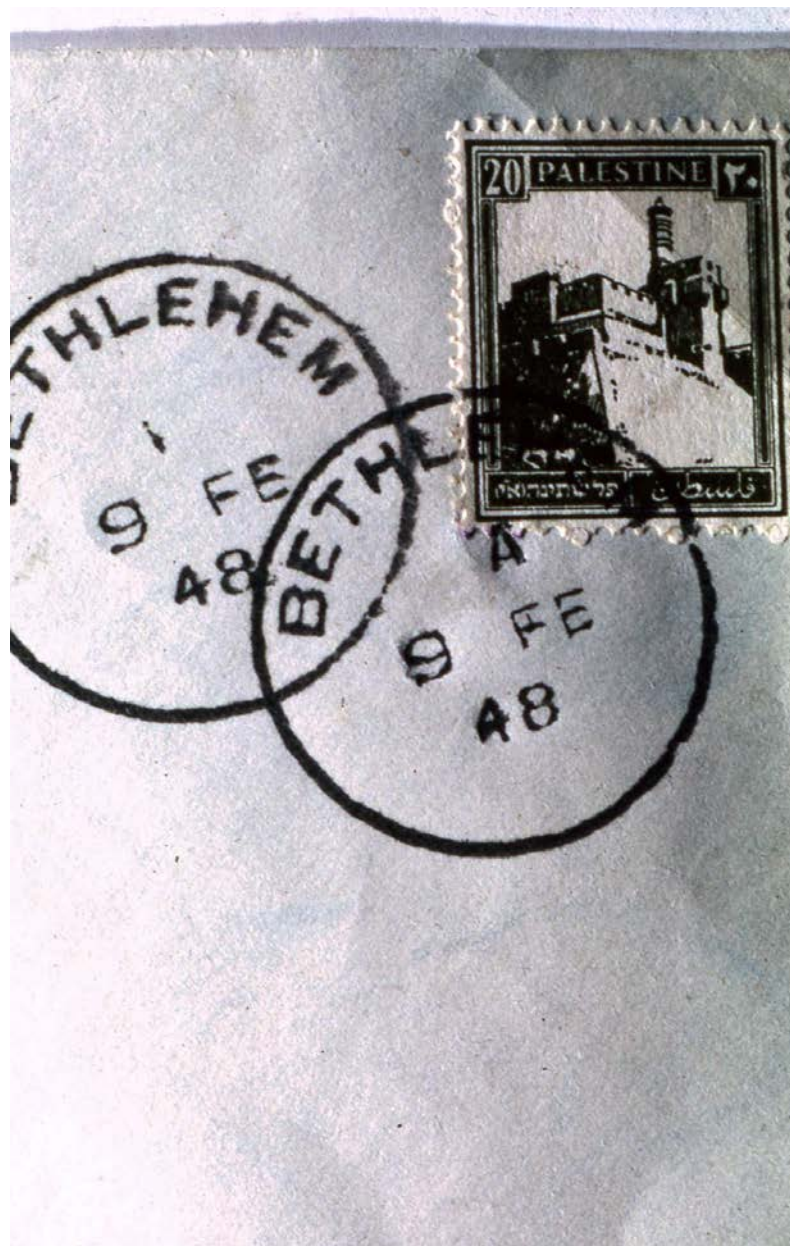
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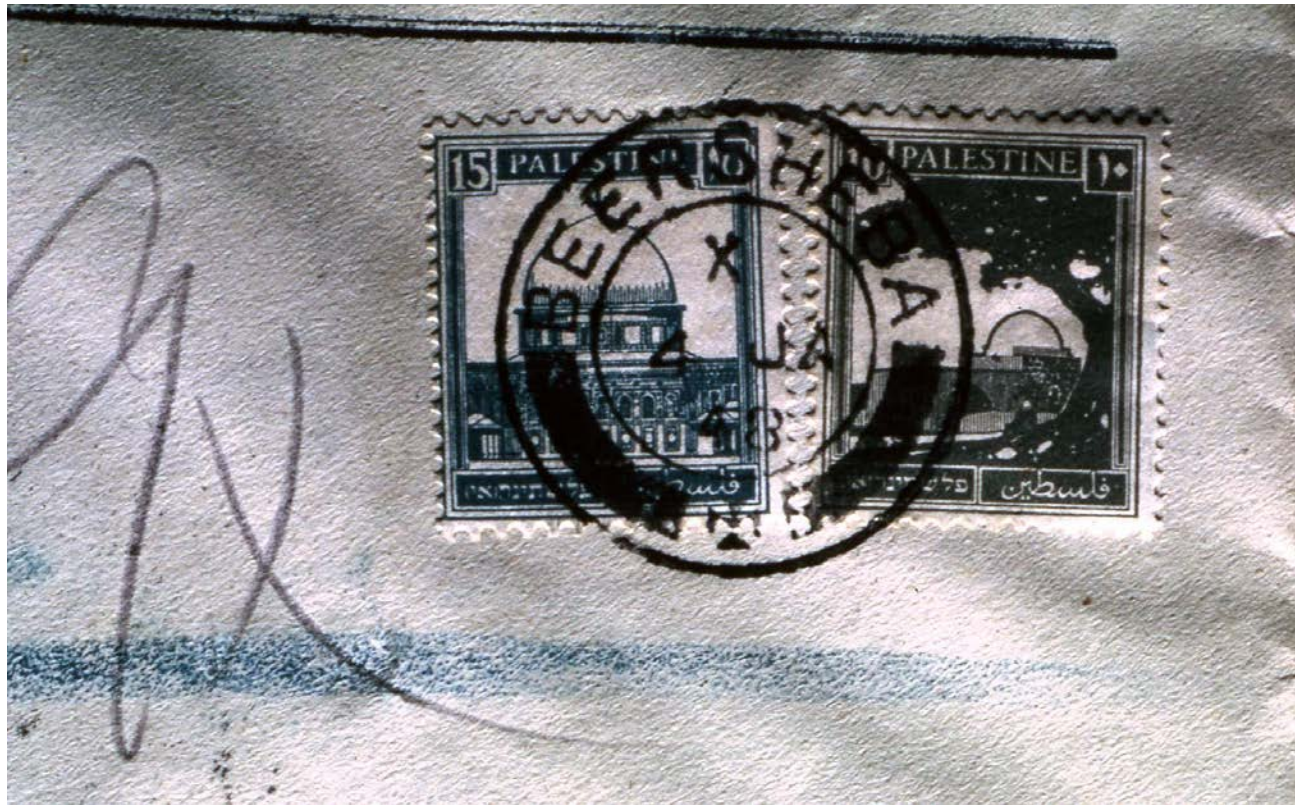


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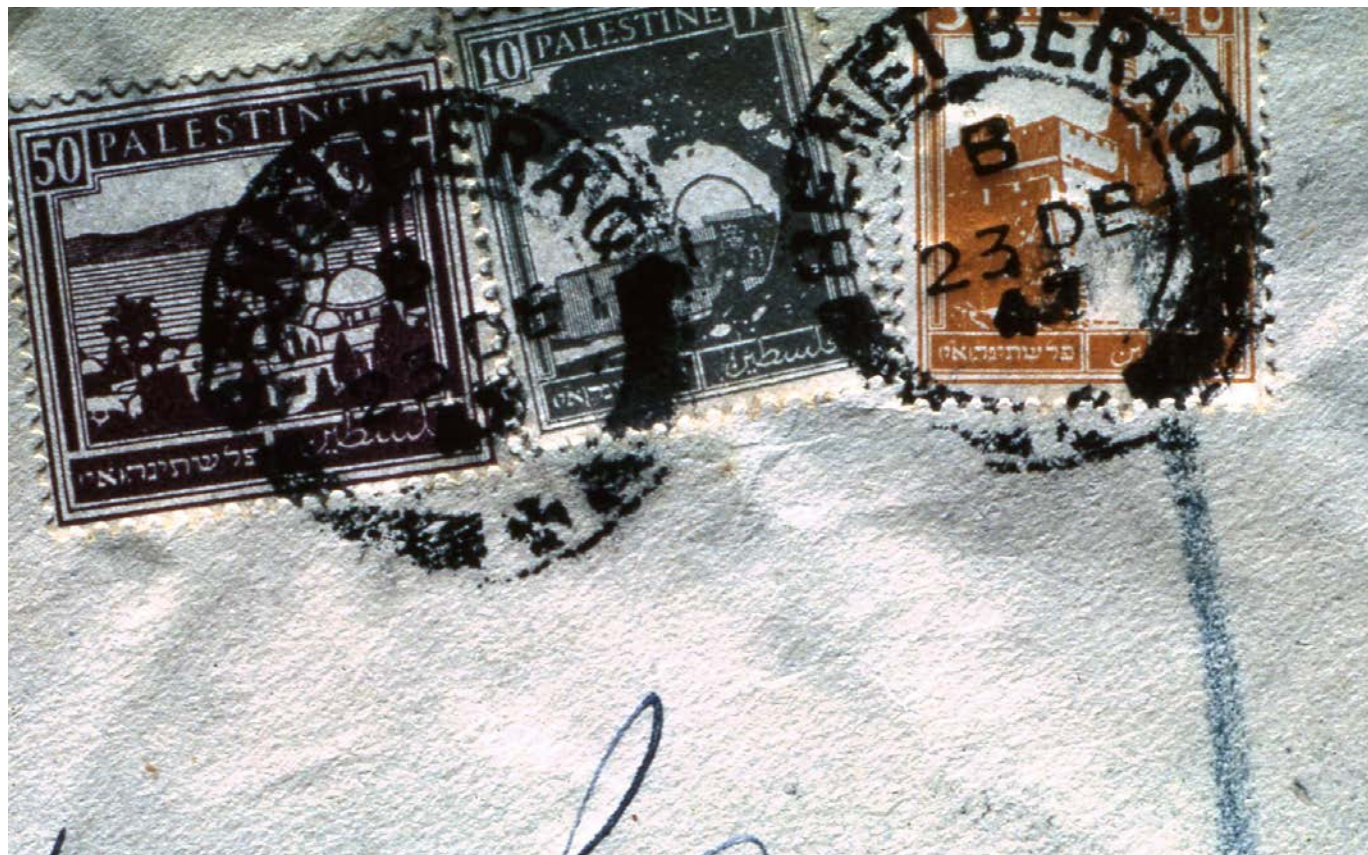




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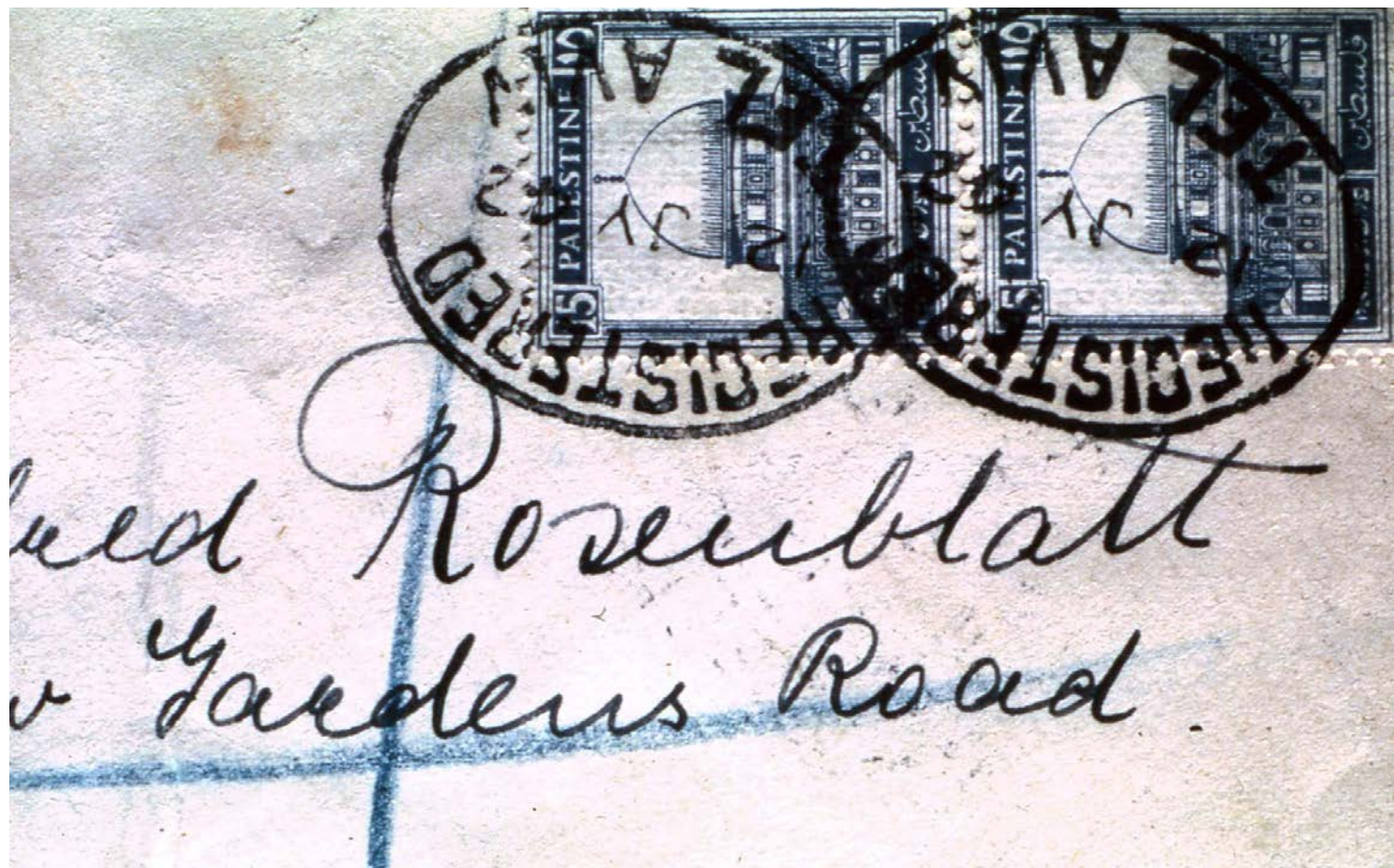




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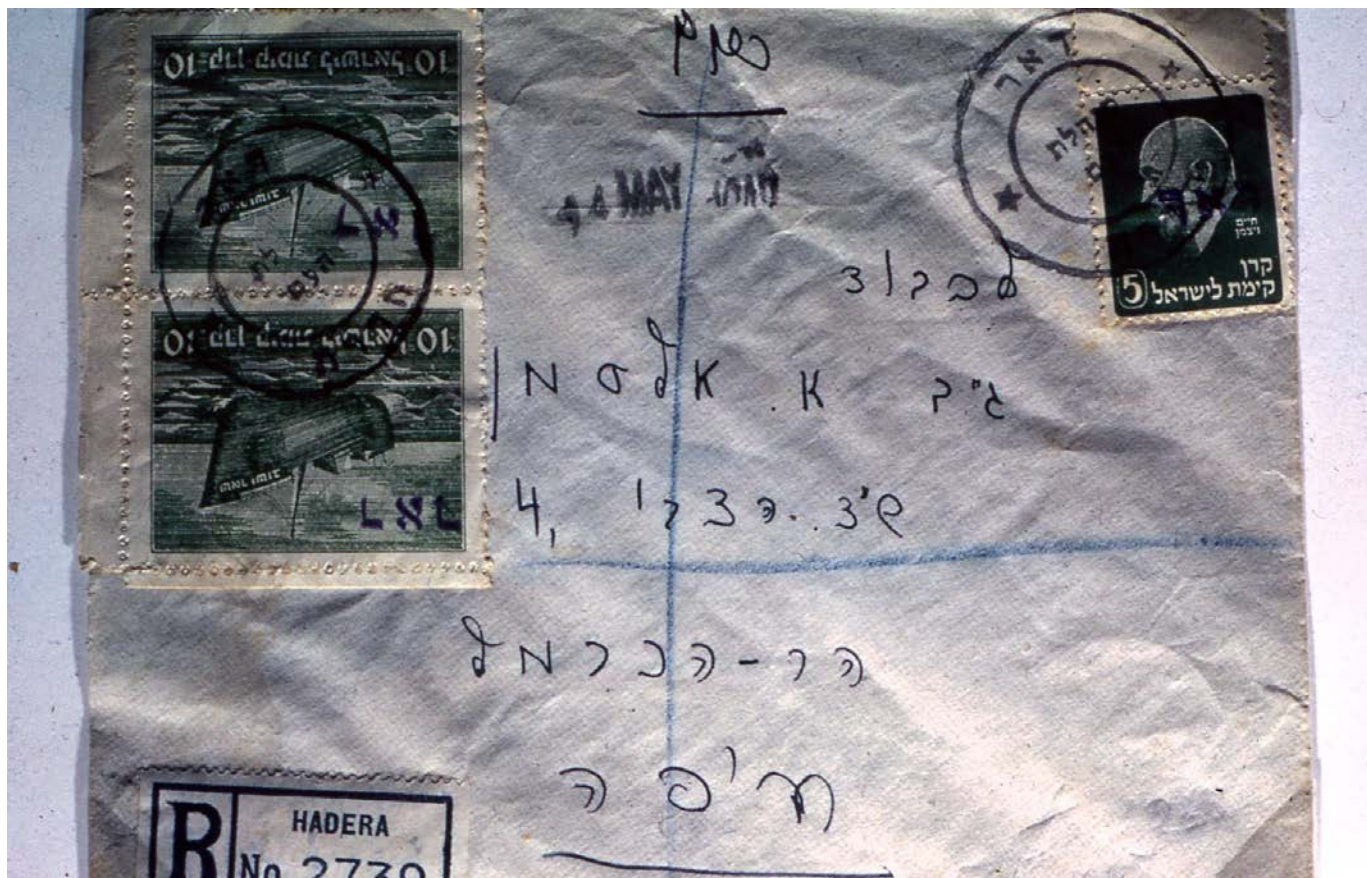
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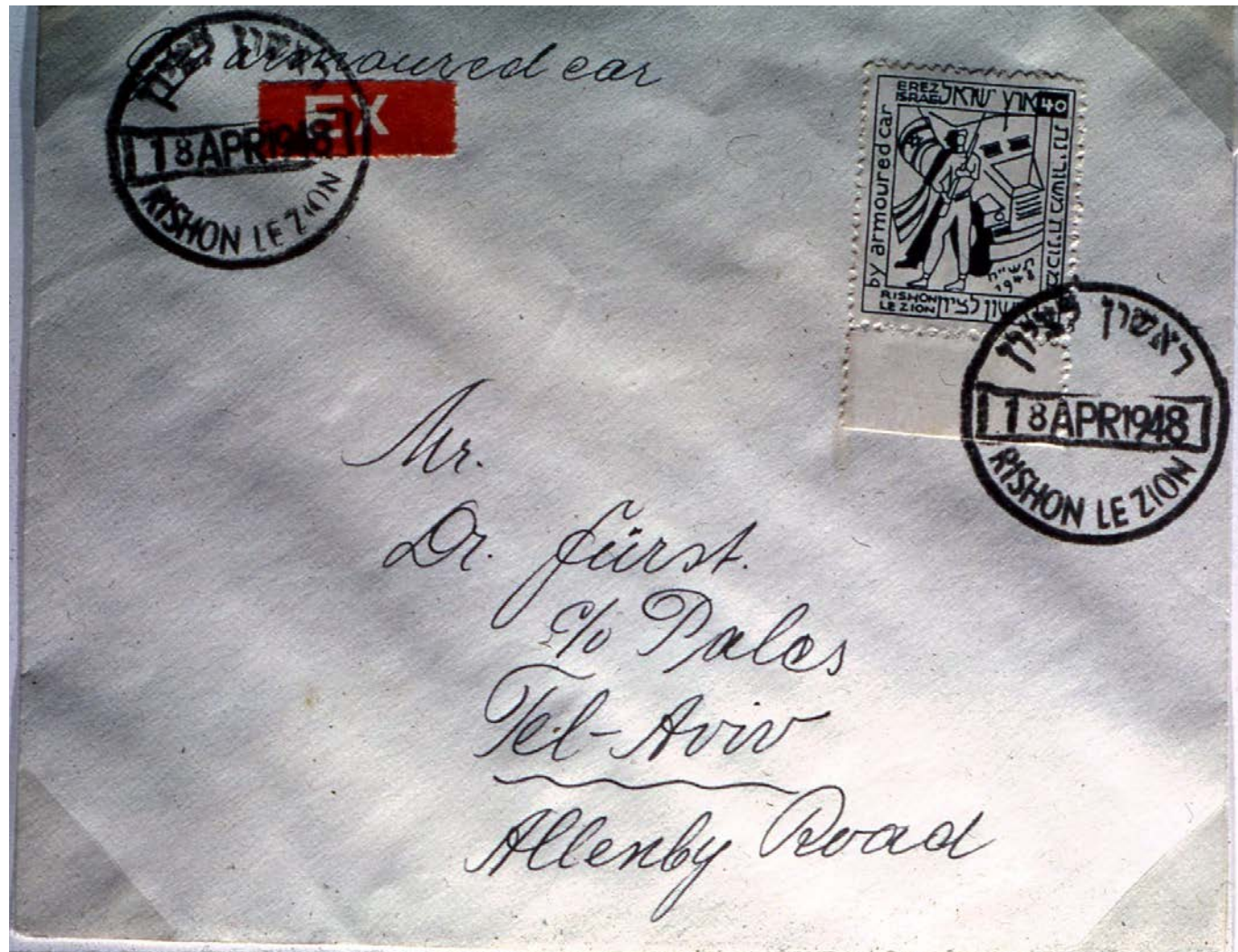
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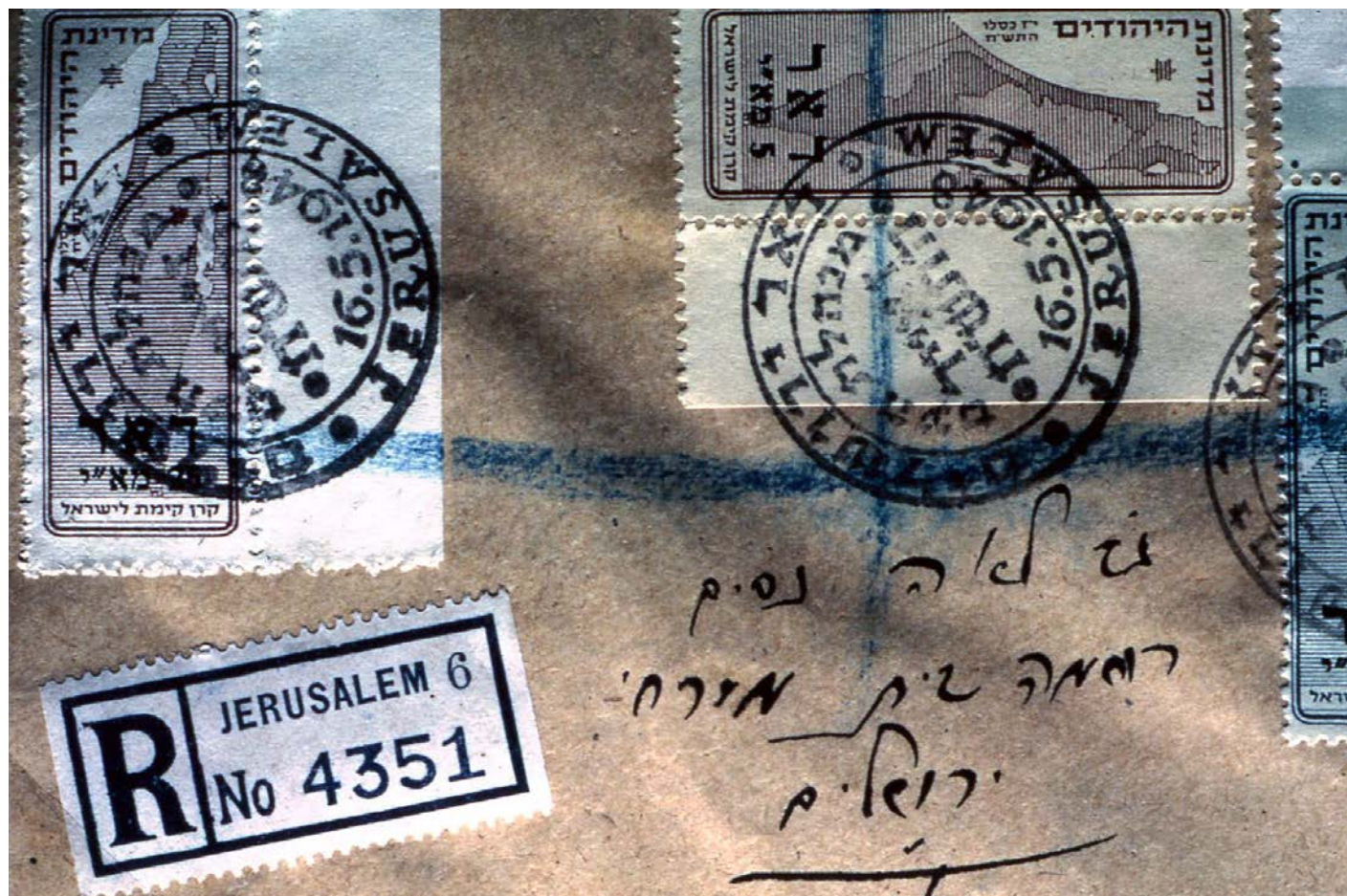




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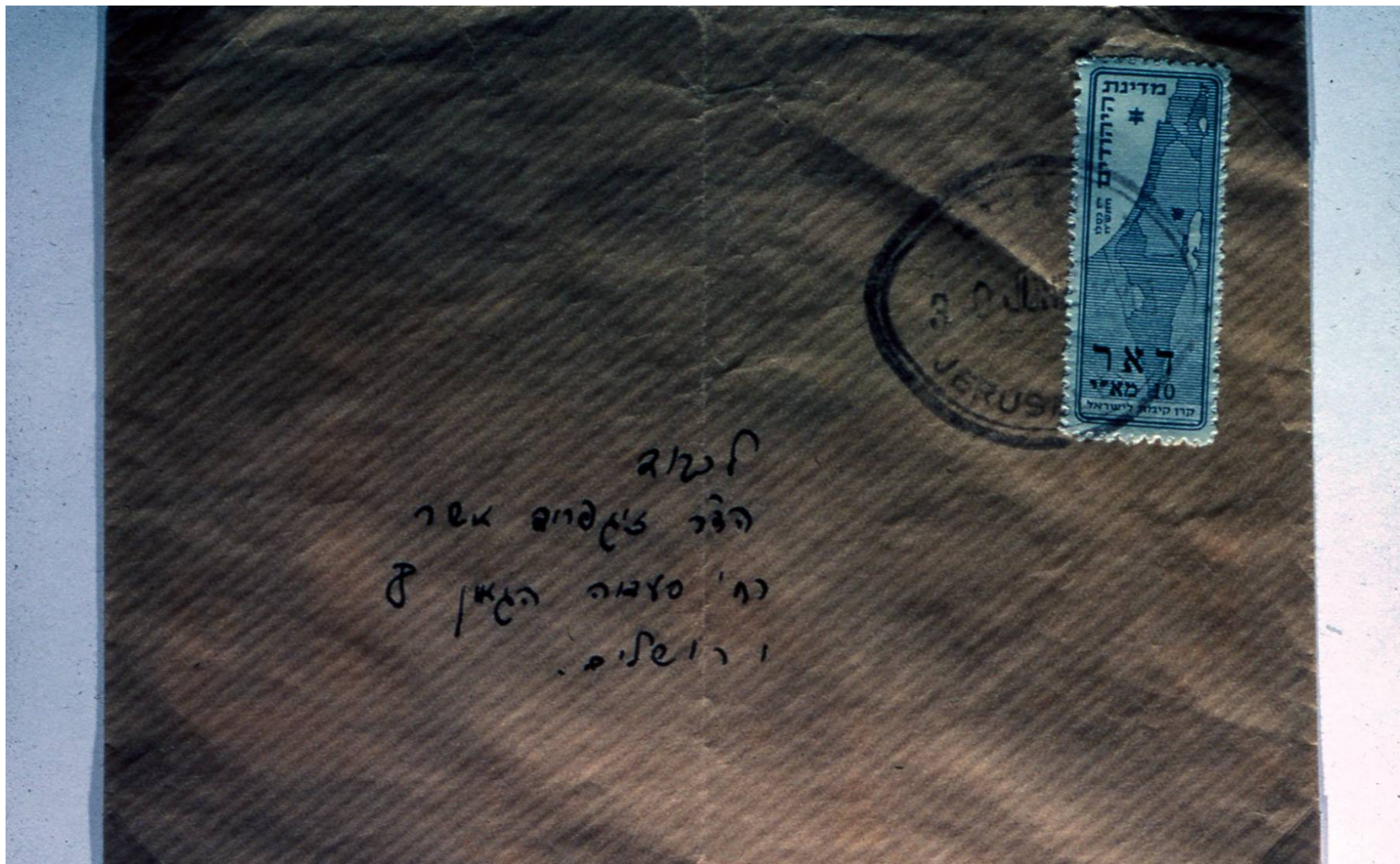
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The Jewish State will strive to be
worthy of the confidence which has
been placed in it by the nations of
the world.

Abba H. Eliezer

announcing the proclamation of Israel's
independence before the United Nations
on May 14th, 1948.

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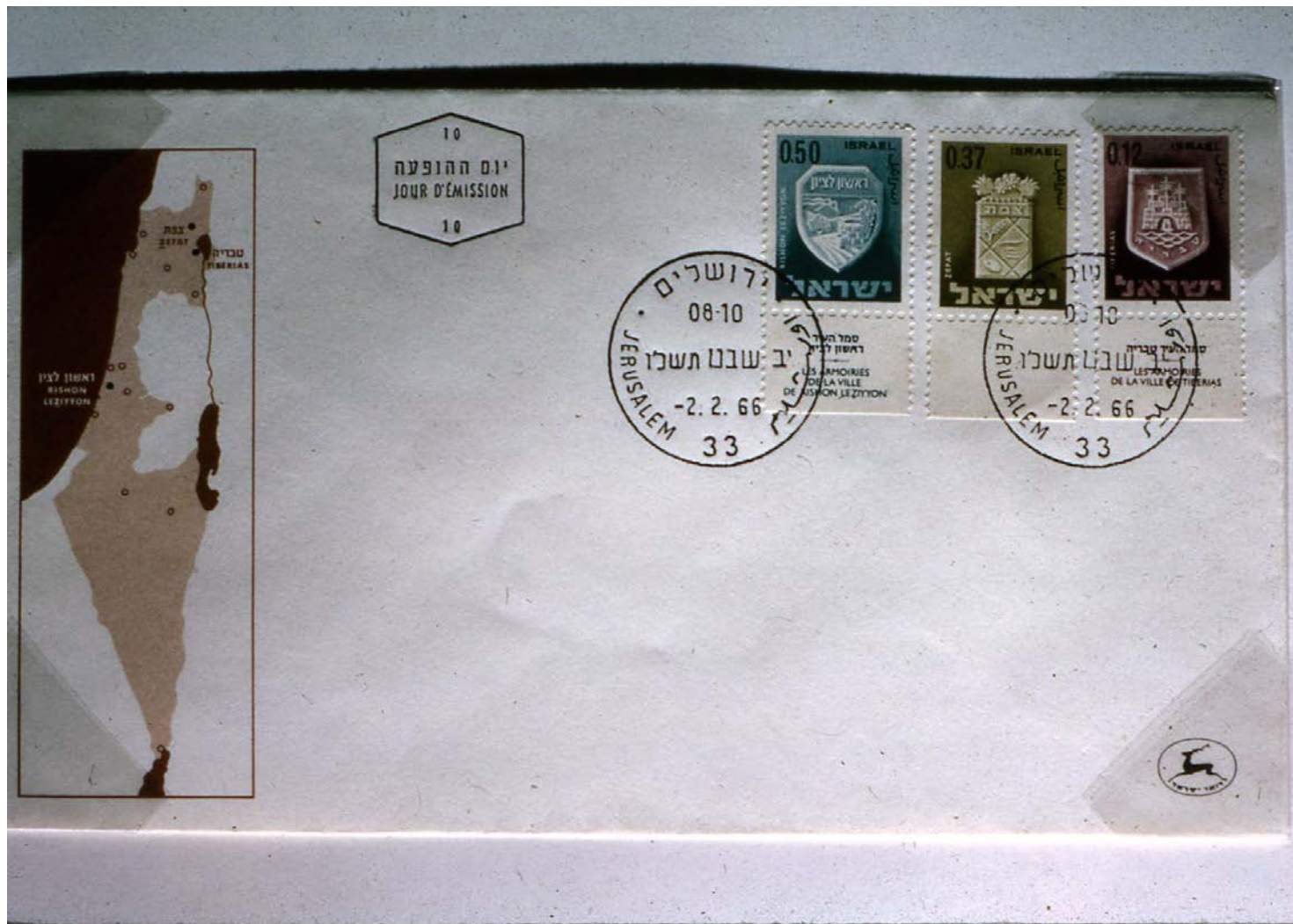


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I realize this slide lecture is too long, and I hope that you are still awake. However, it was a difficult task (though enjoyable) to limit myself to the 90 slides you see here, because there are so many things that I had to leave out of this lecture because of the time limit. However, this will serve as an introduction to the wonderful field of Holy Land Forerunners, British Mandate, Interim Period, and Modern Israel.

Dr. Albert Friedberg, Cleveland, Ohio