

# Parcel Post & Parcel Card Usage in the Holy Land 1882 – 1954

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## INTRODUCTION

This article deals with a topic not yet covered extensively in literature pertaining to Holy Land postal history. It generally describes parcel post services and specifically focuses on parcel card usage. Given the breadth of this topic, the article will run in a number of parts. Each part will illustrate examples of parcel cards used to process the payment and instructions for the delivery of parcels to and from domestic and/or foreign destinations.

The term “parcel post” refers to postal service for mail that is too heavy for normal letter post. It is usually slower than letter post. The development of the parcel post is closely connected with the development of the railway network which enabled parcels to be carried in bulk, to a regular schedule and at economical prices.

Part I of the article generally describes the origins of parcel post services after the 1874 creation of the Universal Postal Union (UPU). To acquaint the reader with the nature of the topic, Part I shows examples of parcel cards sent to and from the Holy Land between 1882 and 1954. Subsequent parts of the article will discuss parcel rates and will show further examples of parcel cards relating to parcel post service.

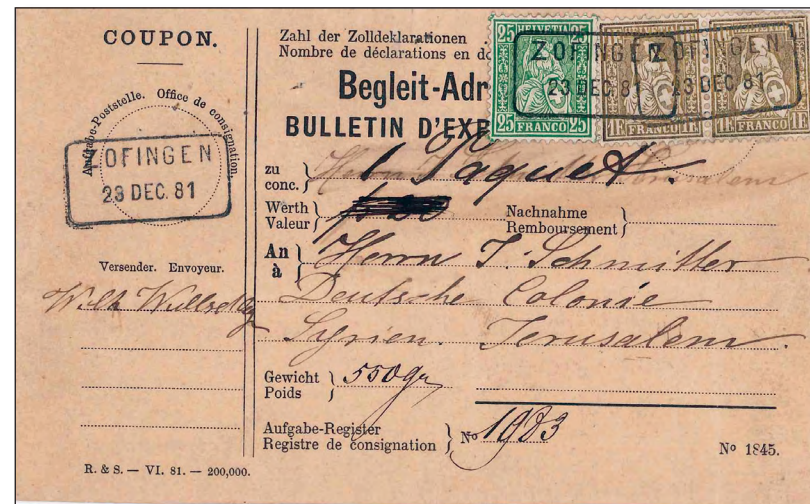


Figure 1  
Switzerland Parcel card sent to the Jerusalem in 1881 just after the conclusion of the UPU convention.

The domestic parcel post was established throughout Germany in 1874.

It was of course possible to send a parcel before 1883 and there were several large courier companies operating nationwide parcel services using stage coaches. By 1850, the railway companies had monopolized the market, making them a powerful opponent to any Post Office

## DOMESTIC PARCEL POST

The practice of forwarding parcels with the mail was not new to some countries. For example, parcel post had been in use within Austria since the seventeenth century and, in some German states, since possibly the fifteenth century.

enterprise. The Post Office had previously tried at length to negotiate with the railway companies during the late 1860s, but to no avail.

In 1883, the British Parliament approved a bill implementing domestic, colonial and foreign parcel post services. Other countries quickly followed suit. The United States Post Office Department agreed in 1887 to deliver parcels sent into the United States but refused to institute a domestic service until 1913.

The establishment of domestic parcel post services within a particular country required many changes. The introduction of the Parcel Post meant rebuilding or adapting post offices, as well as arranging for collection and distribution in postal districts. It also meant an immediate change to the workload of the former letter carriers – soon to be known as postmen.

Wicker baskets and handcarts were required for sorting and transporting parcels. Each post office counter required scales and were issued specifically designed cork handstamps to cancel the stamps on parcels. Every letter carrier's walk had to be altered so that each postman did not have too heavy a load and allowances were made for the use of a horse and cart, tricycle or pony to aid parcel delivery.

## THE UPU AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL PARCEL POST SYSTEM – 1878 TO 1881

The creation of a domestic parcel post system had its challenges but so did an international system. There were many issues to sort out.

In late 1880, 23 members of the UPU met in Paris for 3 weeks to discuss the establishment of an international parcel post system. The topic had been raised by Germany at the UPU Congress in 1878 but most members were unprepared to discuss the topic then in detail. Different draft agreements were circulated prior to the Paris meeting in 1880.

The Convention of November 3, 1880 concerned the

exchange of postal parcels without declaration of value (Figure 1). The international parcel service, which allowed the orderly shipment of mailed packages and parcels from one country to another according to predetermined rates, was established by the UPU on October 1, 1881 (Great Britain, India, The Netherlands and Persia, April 1, 1882), following the agreement of 1880 in Paris during a three week conference on the subject referred to above.

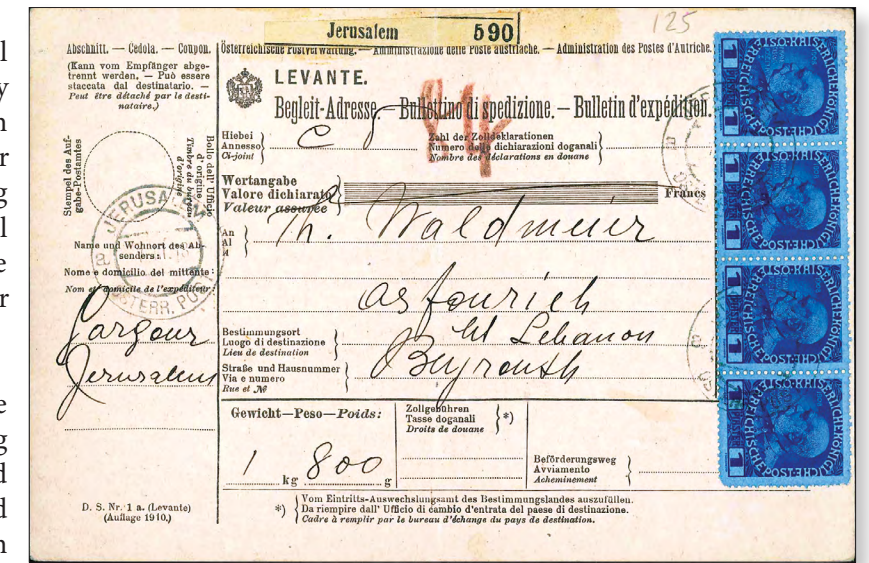


Figure 2  
Austrian parcel card from the Holy Land circa 1913

The international service was difficult to introduce because, in several countries, the carriage of parcels was a monopoly of the railway companies, Egypt, Great Britain, India, Canada and Italy all initially claimed that there was no domestic parcel service in their country.

By 1882 twenty delegates had reached agreement on a Convention and related Regulations to be implemented. Some of the details were as follows;

1. The weight limit for parcels was three kilograms;
2. Parcel post had to be prepaid;
3. There were requirements for customs declarations and transit documentation to accompany a parcel;
4. The postal administration of a dispatching country had to pay land transit and/or maritime transport fees to each country's postal administration to the extent that delivery of the parcel required that it traverse a particular country or that the parcel be transported by sea;
5. Lost or stolen parcels would be the subject of a specific indemnity; and