

# SMYRNA

## ONE OF THE MAJOR PORTS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Smyrna, renamed Izmir in 1923, is situated at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and became the most important port to serve the development of trade between the Ottoman Empire and the rest of Europe.



**MICHAEL FULFORD RPSL**

## INTRODUCTION

Smyrna, renamed Izmir in 1923, is situated at the Eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It developed as a port during the sixteenth century in order that goods produced in Western Anatolia could be shipped to Constantinople avoiding the long and tortuous land route. Smuggling and illicit trade developed between local traders and foreign ships. Gradually this increased and the Ottoman government accepted that trade with other countries was necessary to economic development.

Trade required communications and it was clear that the Ottoman postal authorities were completely unable to provide more than a basic internal service. Therefore certain major powers decided to provide a postal service for themselves. Because of their great influence they were able, whenever a Treaty of Commerce was concluded with the Ottoman Empire, to insist on a foreign national post office being opened.

The first foreign post office to be opened was the Austrian. There is considerable doubt as to the date of opening, varying from Armstrong, who thinks it was in 1748 to Mueller, who thinks it was between 1784 and 1817. The French office was opened in 1835 after the war between Turkey and the Allies over the independence of Greece. The Greek government opened a postal agency operating from their consulate in 1834 and the post office was set up in its own right in 1857 until 1881 when it was closed by the Turkish authorities. The Russian office opened in 1857 in a big effort to re-establish their merchant fleet after the Crimean War. It was run by The Russian Company for Shipping, Navigation and Trade (R.O.P.I.T.). The Egyptian office was established in 1865 and was run by the Khedivial Mail Line from the building of the Turkish post office. In 1881 it was merged into the British office which opened in 1872. Although it was reported that a postal agency operated from the Italian consulate in 1873, no material has ever come to light and there must be doubt as to whether this was the case. If so, the Italian post office only opened in 1908. And the German post office in Smyrna opened in 1900.

The Great War saw the closure of all the offices, although there was a German Military Mission post office during the war and an Italian military post office was set up after the war under the terms of the Treaty of Mudros, it closed in 1923. The Greeks invaded Smyrna in 1919 and also established a military post office which was open until their withdrawal in 1922. The British Post office was re-opened after the war, but was closed in 1922 with the onset of the National Government in Turkey led by Kemal Ataturk.

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## EARLY LETTERS

Up to the early part of the sixteenth century the Ottoman theory of government was that the Sultan's principal duty was to guarantee the well-being of his subjects, which resulted in the creation of a relatively closed economic system. The foremost consideration of the state was to ensure adequate supplies of food and other goods for the needs of the subjects and the perquisites of the government and the army. The government discouraged commercial development that might divert goods outside the empire. As goods that arrived down the silk road from China traditionally were traded through Alexandria and Aleppo, this meant that Smyrna, as a port, was developed to supply to supply goods to the capital Constantinople. Gradually however, foreign ships started to visit Smyrna and inevitably trade started to develop with the outside world. There were no postal services, as such, and letters were entrusted to the care of ships' captains to take them to foreign ports.



1695 Entire to Livorno, Italy. Endorsed 'con nave Carlo' ('by the ship Carlo').  
Disinfected by scorching on arrival at Livorno.

Overland foreign mail from the Ottoman Empire into Europe went mainly by a courier service between Constantinople and Vienna, developed by the Austrians which operated when required from the fifteenth century. The first legal basis for a courier service was written into the Peace Treaty with Vienna in 1616. This had interruptions because of wars. As from 1748 the Chamber of Commerce in Smyrna organised a private courier service to Constantinople to join up with this service.



1807 Entire to Francomont. Sent by the Austrian courier service to Vienna.  
Then forwarded by Arnstein & Eskeles in Vienna.



## THE BRITISH POST OFFICE

The initial British public postal service in The Ottoman Empire opened in Constantinople in 1857. It was a successor to the Army post office opened there to serve the British troops in the Crimean War between 1854 and 1856. The post office in Smyrna was not opened until 1872. It was opened in the house of the British consul situated in the Rue Franque. It also had an entrance onto Fassulah Street, which led, in the direction of the harbour, to the Quai Anglais.

According to the GPO notice 32/72 the letter rates were fixed at:-

Letters via Austria to England 5d per ½oz

Letters via France to England 8d per ½oz.



1874 Cover to London via Marseilles, France.

When Great Britain joined the General Postal Union in 1875 the rates were amended to :- Letters per ½oz - 2½d or 40 paras, Postcards – 1d or 20 paras, Samples per 2oz - ½d or 10 paras. Registration was 2½d or 40 paras.

The killer postmark allocated to Smyrna was 'F87' and this was used in conjunction with a small single ring postmark inscribed with 'SMYRNA' and the date in two lines. This system was changed in 1885 to a single ring postmark inscribed '**BRITISH POST-OFFICE SMYRNA**'.

In the early 1880's the Turkish currency depreciated by nearly 25%. This presented an opportunity to speculators and in 1885 the 2½d single rate letter stamp and the 5d double rate letter stamp were overprinted 40 paras and 80 paras respectively, together with the 2/6d stamp overprinted 12 piastres. Later, in 1896, another value was added, the 10d overprinted 4 piastres.



1900 Registered envelope to Tübingen, Germany.

2½(40 paras) letter rate, 2d for registration plus a further 1/8d (8 piastres) for insurance.

In 1905 the other values from ½d to 1/- were overprinted with the single word 'LEVANT'. Also at that time the 'PARAS' was changed to the equivalent in 'PIASTRES'. There was no change in the overprinting with the succession of King George V. The Downey heads were both overprinted 'LEVANT' together with the subsequent standard issue.

After the outbreak of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, in which Turkey was not initially involved the Porte rescinded the rights of the foreign countries (The Capitulations) and the British post office was closed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1914.

## BRITISH STEAMSHIP COMPANIES

The Asia Minor Screw Steamship Company was formed in 1868 at Smyrna. The company's steamers, sailing under the British flag, plied between Smyrna and Adalia and calling at the ports of Chios, Chesme, Samos, Calymnos, Cos, Symi and Rhodes. Postal agencies were established and mail was taken between the ports. Any letters for destinations beyond Smyrna were disembarked there and transferred to other post offices for onward transmission.

## THE FRENCH POST OFFICE

The French had an extraordinarily good relationship with the Ottoman Empire going right back to 1535 when she succeeded in concluding a trading agreement with the Ottomans under Sultan Suleiman II. This also gave French Christians who lived in Turkey exemption from the jurisdiction of the Turkish courts. The trading relations suffered at times, particularly as a consequence of the various Turkish campaigns in the Balkans. However after The Peace of Passarowitz in 1719 between Austria and Turkey relations became normal again. A postal transmission office was attached to the French consulate in Smyrna from 1712. A consular post office is believed to have existed from about 1820 and this received the status of a regular post office from about 1835. The hand stamp used at the French office was a double ring inscribed 'SMYRNE (TURQUIE)' and the date in three lines. The first known date is in 1837.



1842 Entire to Marseille. Disinfected by slitting at Malta. Rated 9 decimes on arrival.  
Manuscript – Par Vap'r de la Méditerranée.

Although stamps were introduced in France in 1849, there was, up to at least 1879, no requirement that the Levant post be prepaid. However stamps were available from about 1860. Prior to that the postage was either paid in Smyrna when the letter was handed in and the prepayment was confirmed with a 'PD' handstamp, or at the destination.

In 1852 The French offices were allocated hand stamps with small numbers within a diamond of dots. The number allocated to Smyrna was 3709. The numbers were reallocated in 1862. Smyrna was allocated 5098 and the numbers were larger on the hand stamp. Both were used with the small circular town hand stamp.

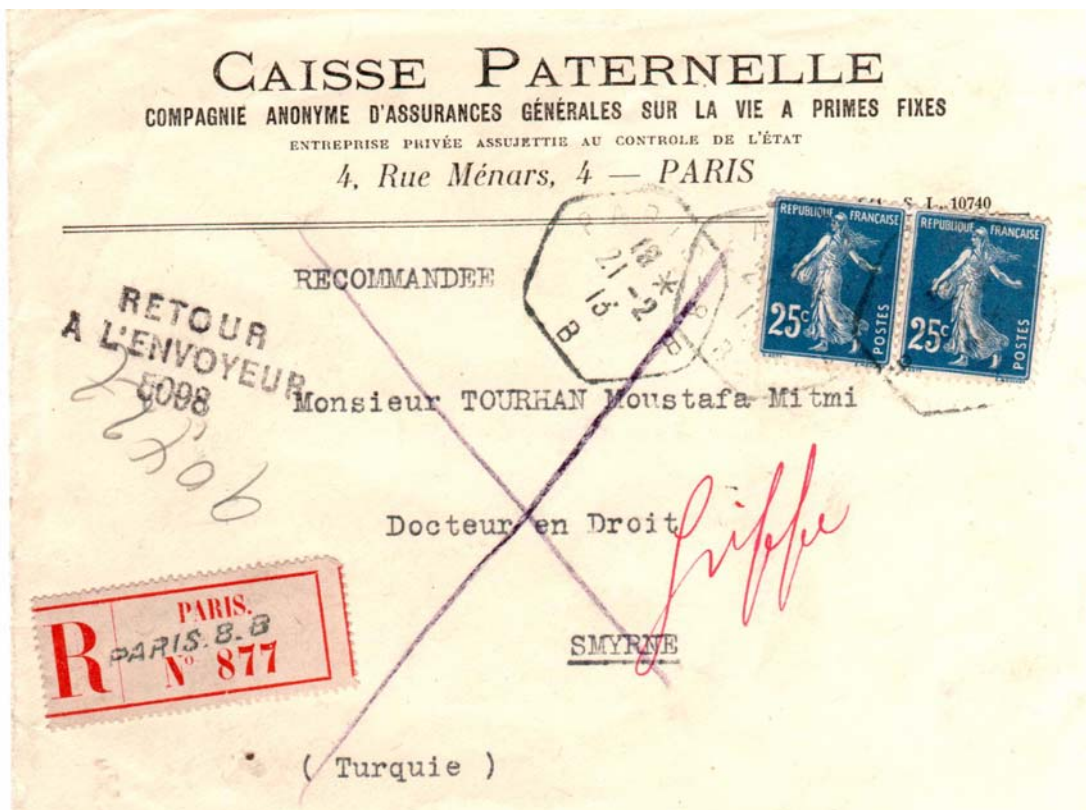
Letters could be posted on board the Messageries Maritime steamers plying the Mediterranean. The letters would be cleared from the box at the next port of call hand stamped with a B.M. (Boite mobile) and taken to the post office, hand stamped and returned with the rest of the mail to the ship for the onward journey.





1874 Entire to Lyon, France. Rated 3fr 20c 4<sup>th</sup> weight step of 30-40 gms.  
 Posted in the mobile box en route from Constantinople and cleared into the Smyrna post office.

The use of the numeral hand stamps was discontinued around the mid 1870's. In 1885, together with other foreign post offices, the stamps from 25c and above were overprinted with Turkish currency. The regular French stamps of the 1900 issue were modified in 1902 by inscribing them 'POSTES FRANCAISE LEVANT' and only the higher values were overprinted with Turkish currency. Letters unclaimed in Smyrna were returned to the sender stamped with the hand stamp 'RETOUR A L'ENVOYEUR 5098'



1913 Envelope to Smyrna returned to France.

The post office was closed on the outbreak of the First World War.



## THE EGYPTIAN POST OFFICE

The formal integration of Egypt as an Ottoman province was discontinued in 1867 when Sultan Abdülaziz recognised the descendents of Mohammed-Ali the Great as the hereditary rulers of Egypt, although it remained nominally under the suzerainty of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The grandson of Mohammed Ali, Ismail Pasha, the Viceroy of Egypt, was determined to develop Egypt as a naval and mercantile power in the eastern Mediterranean. He took advantage of the services of the national steamship company, Azireh Misri, which became the Khedivial Mail Line to carry Egyptian mails between Alexandria, Smyrna and Constantinople. Post office counters were opened at the Egyptian Consulates in the two Ottoman cities.

The Smyrna office was opened on November 14<sup>th</sup> 1865. Egypt first issued stamps on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1866, so it is conceivable that there should be in existence some pre-stamp covers, although none have been recorded from Smyrna. Indeed covers with the first issue of Egyptian stamps are exceedingly rare.



March 1867



December 1866



September 1866

Egypt's second issue of stamps was introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1867 and changed to a pictorial design depicting the pyramids and the sphinx.



1870 Envelope to Constantinople 3 piastres rate (third step 21-30grams).

If a letter was not prepaid the charge was double the 1 piastre standard letter charge when it reached its destination office. With the formation of the General Postal Union

the standard letter charge was increased to 1 piastre 20 paras, and reduced to 1 piastre 10 paras on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1878.

The first postmark was a single ring with the inscription 'POSTE VICE-REALI EGIZIANE SMIRNE'. This was superseded about 1871 by a smaller single ring postmark inscribed 'V.R. POSTE EGIZIANE SMIRNE'. Around 1880, unique amongst the Egyptian consular offices, the postmaster took it upon himself to change the description on the postmark by removing the letters "V.R." to reflect the changed status of the ruler from Viceroy to Khedive,

The charge for registration initially was 2 piastres but was reduced to 1 piastre when Egypt joined the G.P.U.



1879 Registered envelope to Constantinople.  
2 piastres double rate foreign letter plus 1 piastre for registration.

By 1881 Egypt found that its Consular offices had lost much of their profitability and the decision was made to close them. This also had the effect of strengthening Egypt's position with regard to having the post offices of other countries removed from its own territory.

The Egyptian post office in Smyrna was closed on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1881 and the service merged into the British post office.

## THE ITALIAN POST OFFICE

It is reported that a postal agency was available at the Italian Consulate in Smyrna between 1873 and 1883. However no examples of such a post have yet come to light. In March 1908, at the request of the large Italian trading community in Smyrna, the Italian government defied the, by now, weak Ottoman administration and opened a post office in Smyrna. From the outset Italian stamps of the 1909 issue depicting the head of King Emmanuel III were used overprinted with Turkish currency.

Three postmarks were in use from the opening. The double ring postmark with bars is the one usually found franking mail. A squared circle and a single ring postmark are much scarcer. My theory is that the squared circle was normally used for cancelling bulky parcels and as the single ring postmark has been seen used as an arrival postmark in Constantinople, this was its primary purpose.



1909 Envelope to Paris. 40 paras letter rate doubled for registration.  
Double ring postmark with hatching.

The rate for a standard letter was 40 paras(1piastre) plus another 40 paras for registration. The printed paper and postcard rate was 20 paras. From 1909 the town name "SMIRNE" was added to the overprint.



Italy had for a long time had its eye on Libya, the last remaining country under Ottoman control on the Southern Mediterranean coast and in October 1911, judging that The Ottoman Empire would be too weak to resist, they invaded and thereby precipitated the Turco-Italian War. This meant that the Italian post office in Smyrna was closed. The Turks accepted the Italian rule in Libya by the Treaty of Ouchy in August 1912 and the post office in Smyrna opened again for business in December of that year using a new postmark, still a double ring but without the hatching within the segments. As with the other foreign post offices, the Italian post office was closed on the outbreak of World War One in 1914.



1913 Letter to Paris. 1 piastre letter rate doubled for registration.  
Double ring postmark without hatching.

## THE GREEK POST OFFICE

A postal agency was established at Smyrna during 1834 operating from the Greek Consulate, in order to serve the large number of Greek nationals living there. It was temporarily closed during the Crimean War, but re-opened in December 1855. In 1857 it was detached from the Consulate and set up in its own premises. The Greek post office did not play a significant role in the trading metropolis of Smyrna. Almost exclusively it handled mail to Greece. International mail from Greek firms was usually sent via the Austrian or French post offices.

Postal rates from Smyrna to Greece were in two parts. The maritime transportation from Smyrna to the Greek entry port, usually Piraeus or Syros at 30 lepta for the first 7½gms, plus the Greek inland postal charges from the port of entry to destination. Where the addressee was at the port of entry the charge was a 10 lepta “in town” fee.



July 1861 Entire to Athens.  
40 lepta charge. 30 lepta for transportation from Smyrna to Piraeus (the port for Athens)  
plus 10 lepta for the “in town” charge.

Greece commenced using stamps on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1861. The initial printing was done in Paris, subsequent printings were done in Athens. With the introduction of stamps the maritime section remained at 30 lepta but the maximum weight for a standard letter was increased to 15gms. At the same time the inland postal charge was consolidated to 20 lepta for 15gms.

Letters could be paid for in advance or sent unpaid. If sent unpaid the rate was marked on the letter and stamps affixed and cancelled in the receiving post office. Each office had a circular town hand stamp and also a killer hand stamp of a diamond of dots with a number in the centre. Athens had No.1 and Smyrna No.96.



1867 Entire to Syros 50 lepta letter rate up to 15gms (30 lepta maritime plus 20 lepta inland) cancelled with Smyrna town hand stamp and killer hand stamp of a diamond of dots with "96" in the centre.  
Instructional marking - ΠΕΛ - Paid to Destination

In 1875 when Greece joined the General Postal Union the rates were much simplified. The maritime rate and inland rates were consolidated and the rate was fixed at 30 lepta per 15gms.

The Berlin Congress of 1878 was convened in the wake of the Russo-Turkish war and its aim was to re-organize the counties of the Balkans. Greece was granted a part of Epirus and the Province of Thessaly previously held by the Ottoman Empire. Greece then compulsorily closed the Turkish post offices in those areas. In retaliation the Ottoman government sent an ultimatum in 1881, stating that if the Greek government did not re-open the Turkish post offices, the Greek post offices in the Ottoman Empire would be closed. The ultimatum date passed and the Ottoman government ordered the Smyrna post office to be closed on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1881.

### **GREEK SHIPPING COMPANY MAIL**

The Hellenic Steam Navigation Company was established in 1856 at the port of Hermoupolis on the island of Syros and carried mail between its ports of call in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its existence was short lived because of the opening of the Corinth canal and the subsequent rise in importance of the port of Pireaus. The company ceased trading in the late 1880's.



## THE GERMAN POST OFFICE

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 1869 the North German Federation's Representative in the Ottoman Empire informed the Turkish Foreign Ministry of the North German Federation's intention to open a post office in Constantinople. In a note handed over on this occasion he referred to the fact that the North German Federation, as a major European power, claimed the same rights as the other major powers which were already represented with post offices in Constantinople. The Turkish Foreign Minister gave assurances that, in view of the otherwise good, conflict free, German-Turkish relations, a post office would be passively tolerated.

Since a number of German firms had established branches in Smyrna the Imperial Post Administration in Berlin decided to open a post office at the port on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1900. The resident Turkish Governor-General tried to hinder this action by having the incoming mail bags of the German post confiscated in the harbour. However he soon submitted through the immediate intervention of the German Consul and the threat of an application of pressure by the German Empire.

The first stamps used in Smyrna were the 1889 issue introduced after Wilhelm II was crowned Emperor in 1888. Officially the only stamps to be used had overprints in the Turkish currency of 'paras' and 'piasters'. After only eight months new stamps were issued in Germany. The 'Germania' issue inscribed 'REICHPOST'.



1901 Registered envelope to Leeds., England. 1piastre letter rate plus 1 piastre for registration.

The postmark was a single ring hand stamp inscribed 'SMYRNA DEUTSCHE POST' with the date in two lines and stars either side of the date. The postage rates in 1900 were, letters - 1 piastre per 15gms, postcards - 20 paras, printed matter and samples - 10 paras per 50 gms and 1 piastre for registration. ( 1 piastre = 40 paras)

The inscription on the Germania issue was changed from 'REICHSPPOST' to 'DEUTSCHES REICH' in 1902 and at the same time the overprint was changed to Gothic Script.

**Abchnitt.**  
**Coupon.**  
 Kann vom Empfänger abgetrennt werden.  
 Peut être détaché par le destinataire.

Postmachstempel.  
 Timbre du bureau d'origine.

**SMYRNA**  
 10/10  
 03  
 DEUTSCHE POST

Name und Wohnung  
 (Wohnort, Straße und Hausnummer) des Absenders:  
 Nom et domicile de l'expéditeur:

*a m. Halepian*  
*& Co*  
*Smyrna*  
*420*

**385.** **386.** **387.**

**Smyrna**  
 (Deutsches Postamt)

Anbei *3 Colon* H. H. H.  
 Ci-joint

Wertangabe  
 Valeur assurée

Nachnahme  
 Remboursement

An  
 À *Mons. Vitale Besso.*  
*Trieste*  
*Österreich*

(Bestimmungsort) in  
 (Lieu de destination) à

Wohnung  
 (Straße und Hausnummer)

*10 Via Madonna del Mare*

Postgewicht *15* kg ..... g  
 Poids .....

**Mp.**

Vámcsomag állítandó  
 Zölgut zu stellen  
 hol  
 in *Trieste*

\*) Von der Grenz-Eingangspostanstalt des Bestimmungslandes auszufüllen.  
 (\*) Cadre à remplir par le bureau d'échange d'entrée du pays de destination.

A. 20.

1903 Parcel receipt for 3 parcels weighing 15 kgs sent to Trieste at a cost of 21 piastres.

Owing to the vagaries of exchange rate differences a better rate could be achieved using the French franc and so it was decided to accept payment for stamps in centimes and in consequence in 1908 the German stamps were supplied overprinted with the French currency. This enabled the German post office to gain a larger share of the lucrative sample market for raisins and dried fruit.

German consulates and post offices throughout the Empire were issued with labels bearing the name of the consulate or post office to seal official mail. Such mail was sent free of charge.

With the termination of the privileges for foreigners in the Ottoman Empire at the outbreak of the First World War The German post office was closed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1914



## THE AUSTRIAN POST OFFICE

It is not possible to state categorically when the Austrian post office was opened in Smyrna. The first postal markings appear in 1841, but it would have been opened before that. It could even have been opened at the same time as the post office in Constantinople. According to Alexander Eberan von Eberhorst, who was, up to 1913, the General Post Director of the Austrian post in the Levant, the post office in Smyrna was opened before 1813.

The first postal marking was a straight line 'SMIRNA'

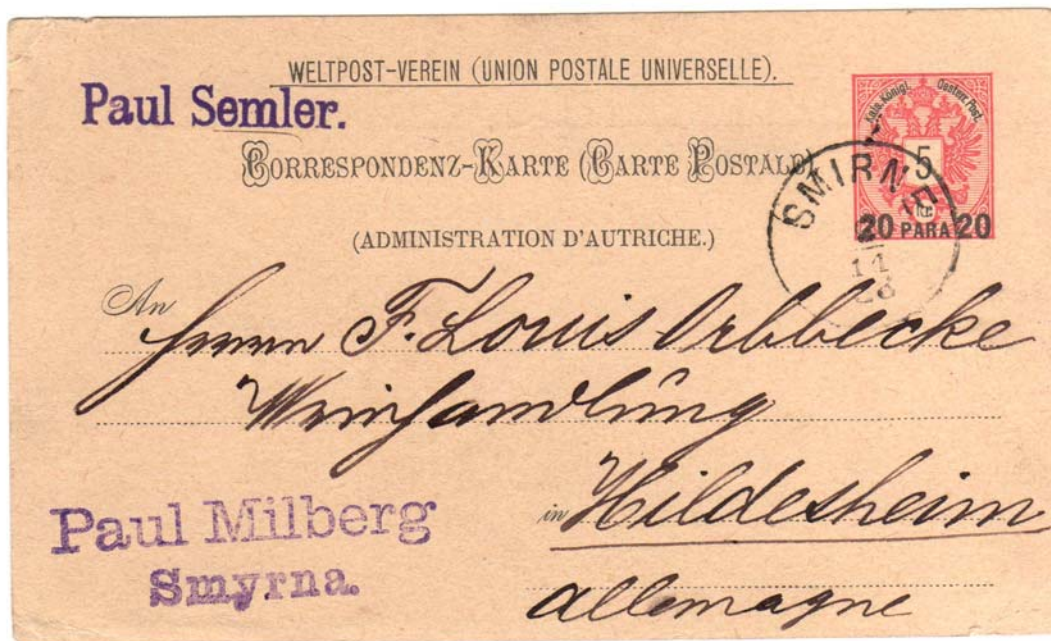


1843 Entire to London via Vienna and Forbach to London. Rated 1/6 on arrival.

In 1848 a new hand stamp was introduced, a two line stamp with the date under the town name. This lasted until 1854 when it was changed to a single ring circular hand stamp with 'SMIRNE' around the edge and the day and month in two lines across the centre. Stamps were introduced in 1864. These were the stamps issued for use in Austrian Italy with the values in soldi. (100 soldi = 1 florin). This measure was necessary because the Turkish currency had lost much of its value and the soldi currency based on silver made a better conversion possible. From 1867 the current Austrian stamps with Franz Joseph's head were used, but still with the soldi currency. From 1868 the hand stamp was replaced with a small circular hand stamp inscribed 'SMIRNE' and now the year date was added. A larger version was used from 1875. In 1883 another new issue featuring the Arms of Austria, still with the values in soldi. In 1888 the soldi currency was abandoned and regular Austrian stamps inscribed kreuzer and gulden were used, but overprinted in the Turkish currency of paras and piastres. The Austrian post office became the last of the foreign post offices to counter the effects of the depreciating Turkish currency.

A new hand stamp was in use at the beginning of the 1890's, still single ring but with 'OSTERREICHTSCHE POST' added around the bottom half, this was changed around 1893 to a double ring, although the single ring hand stamp was not withdrawn until at least 1896. Austria changed its currency on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1899. The new currency was 100 heller equal to 1 krone. The new stamps still overprinted with Turkish currency were not issued to the Levant offices until 1900.





1888 Printed postcard to Hildesheim, Germany. 20 paras postcard rate.

Because of the differences of exchange rates postage in French currency was cheaper than in Turkish currency, so stamps overprinted in centimes for use in the Crete office were sold in the Smyrna office in order to encourage the use of the Austrian post, particularly for the sending of samples boxes of raisins and dried fruit. The post office used a special hand stamp called a 'Rosinen stempel' for cancelling these packets. Incorporated into it was the letter 'Z' standing for 'Zoll' (Customs).

On 15<sup>th</sup> July 1908 there was a special issue was to commemorate 60 years of Emperor Franz Josef's reign and a special printing was made for the Levant post offices with the values in Turkish currency.

The post office was closed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1914 when the Turkish authorities terminated all the privileges of foreign governments, known as the Capitulations, on the outbreak of the Great War.

## THE AUSTRIAN STEAMSHIP COMPANY MAIL

The Austrian Lloyd Company was retained by the Austrian Government to act as postal agents in the Levant ports on their shipping routes. All postal charges collected accrued to the government, less an agreed amount for operating the service. The company was, however, allowed to run for its own account a 'Levant port to Levant port' service. This meant that in large ports like Smyrna there were two Austrian post offices.

The Lloyd agencies were issued with their own postmarks, the first of which was an oval with 'AGENZIA DEL LLOYD AUSTRIACO' and the town name 'SMIRNE'.



1838 Entire to Syra with 'ΥΠΕΡΘΑΛΑΣΣΙΑ' (overseas) cachet and disinfection slits.

The oval postmarks were changed in 1862 to a single ring inscribed 'LLOYD AGENZIE SMIRNE' with the date and the month but no year. Postage stamps were introduced in 1864, but it was still possible to send letters unpaid and for postage to be collected on receipt.

There were two more changes of postmark. Firstly to a large single ring inscribed 'SPED. POST.PRESSO. LLOYD' with the town name across the centre and finally around the turn of the century the initials 'I.R.' standing for Imperiale Royale were added.



1882 Mourning envelope to Metelino.  
10 soldi 'port to port' rate.



1901 Printed postcard to Bremen, Germany.  
20 para postcard rate.



## THE RUSSIAN POST OFFICE

Immediately after the Crimean War ended in 1856 the Russian merchant fleet was expanded at great rate to carry the flag and to help re-establish Russian prestige throughout The Levant. The Russian Company for Steam Navigation and Trade, more usually referred to by the initials **R.O.P.i.T.** was established in 1856 by Nikolai Arcas and Nikolai Novelski. The company soon established a wide range of routes connecting Odessa with other Russian and Foreign ports in the Levant. Agencies were set up in all their ports of call and they accepted correspondence for forwarding. They applied their own postal markings to letters entrusted to their care. This was an oblong mark with “COMPAGNIE RUSSE” at the top and the agency, in this case “SMYRNE” at the bottom.



1860 Entire to Beirut

In 1863 the Russian government signed a postal agreement with **R.O.P.i.T.**, who paid a fee for operating the service. But they still had the responsibility for the running it. The Russian post office produced a large 6 kopecs blue stamp, which was the regular Russian postal rate for printed matter conveyed by sea. In 1865 **R.O.P.i.T.** produced its own stamps. Two values only, 2 kopecs for printed matter and 20 kopecs for letters. There was a second printing in 1865 of the same two values.

On 18<sup>th</sup> May 1868 the postal contract was renegotiated and the responsibility for running the postal service was transferred to the Russian government and **R.O.P.i.T.** was contracted to run it. The government issued a new set of stamps with a large ornamental unit of value enclosed in an oval frame bearing the Russian inscription **ВОСТОЧНАЯ КОРРЕСПОНДЕНЦИЯ** (Eastern Correspondence). Four values were issued 1,3,5 and 10 kopecs. In 1875 Russia joined the General Postal Union, this led to a reduction in the letter rate from 10 kopecs down to 8 kopecs and the 10 kopecs stamp was overprinted with an 8.

During the war between Russia and Turkey the agency in Smyrna was closed between 24<sup>th</sup> April 1877 until 13<sup>th</sup> July 1878. After it was re-opened the letter postage rate was reduced to 7 kopecs and the 10 kopecs value was overprinted with a 7 until a new printing of the stamps in 1879.



1880 Envelope to Malden, United States of America

In 1900 the numeral issue was replaced with the then contemporary stamps of the Russian Empire. They were overprinted with values in Turkish currency. The reason for this was the continual decline in the value of the Turkish currency and this measure had already been taken by the Austrian, British, French and German post offices. The lowest value 4 paras on 1 kopec was in fact an error. It should have been 5 paras. The 4 paras stamps were sold at the Russian post office for 5 paras until the stock was exhausted.

To commemorate the Jubilee of the Russian Levant post offices a series of special stamps was prepared for issue in 1907. The design was similar to the current Russian postage stamps, but with a vignette of a steamship and the dates 1857-1907 in place of the Imperial Arms. The political situation in 1907, however, rendered the moment inauspicious for the issue of commemorative stamps and the issue was delayed until 1909. After six months it was decided to add the name of the post office to the currency overprint.

In 1911 the new issue of Russian stamps appeared, this time with the overprint applied diagonally added to in 1912 with 5 new values, but this time with the overprint horizontally at the top of the stamp. These definitive stamps were replaced in 1913 by the new pictorial issue of Russia commemorating the Tercentenary of the Romanov Dynasty also surcharged with the Turkish currency.

The Russian post office in Smyrna was closed in 1914 on the outbreak of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War.

## THE TURKISH POST OFFICE

The well-established “Tatar” postal system carried the correspondence during the first half of the nineteenth century until in 1839 Abdul Meshid, the son of Mahmud II, took over the government and set into motion the establishment of a number of public institutions, included a State post. A Ministry of Posts was established under Ssami Effendi and operations commenced on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1840. In the early years the new postal system had the usual teething problems and in 1856 after the Crimean War, the Ottoman government appointed Mr J.Smith, who had been the postmaster at the British Army post office serving the Crimean War, to be an advisor to the Turkish post office. He made proposals that led to certain restrictions in the postal services and to a much needed simplification of the postal fees.

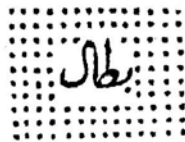
Up to 1861 there was a chart of distances prepared by the government in route-hours. This was the distance a postman was expected to ride in an hour and varied according to the terrain. The charge for a letter up to 3 dirhems in weight was charged 1 para per route-hour. In 1861 this system was simplified to a band system. Up to 50 route-hours was charged 1 piastre, over 50 and up to 100 route-hours 3 piastres and each further 100 route-hours 2 piastres. This was again changed in 1868 when the whole territory of the Ottoman Empire was divided into three distance zones. These were drawn, as circles on a map. In the centre lay Constantinople. The 1st zone covered all places which could be reached, on the postal routes in 100 route-hours (about 500 km.) and 60 paras (1½ piastres) was charged for a standard letter up to 3 dirhems. The second zone covered 200 route-hours and the charge was 3 piastres and the third zone anywhere outside the second zone at a charge of 6 piastres.

Before the introduction of stamps in 1863 circular negative seals were used to indicate that letters were in the postal system and where they had come from.



Negative seals used in Smyrna. Text reads “Post from Smyrna”

Turkey started to use stamps in 1863. The stamps had as their design the seal (Tughra) of the Sultan Abdülaziz Khan. There were 3 printings and 4 different values – 20 paras, 1 kurus, 2 kurus and 5 kurus. The second printing was actually issued first and only when the supply of stamps ran out were the 1<sup>st</sup> printing of 2 kurus and 5 kurus and the 3<sup>rd</sup> printing of 20 paras and 1 kurus issued. These stamps were franked with a “battal” cancellation.

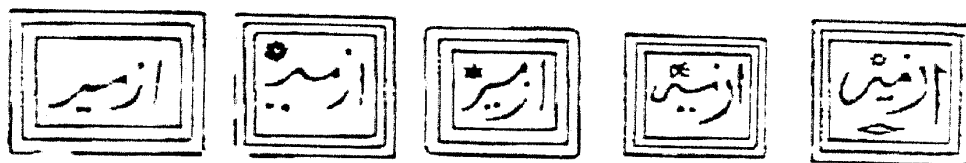


Battal cancellation

A new issue of stamps was introduced in 1865, the “Duloz” type. A star and crescent design with an Arabic inscription around the centre of the stamp reading “Post of the Government of Turkey” This design lasted until 1876, by which time Turkey had joined the General Postal Union and a new issue was introduced and inscriptions other than arabic were included.



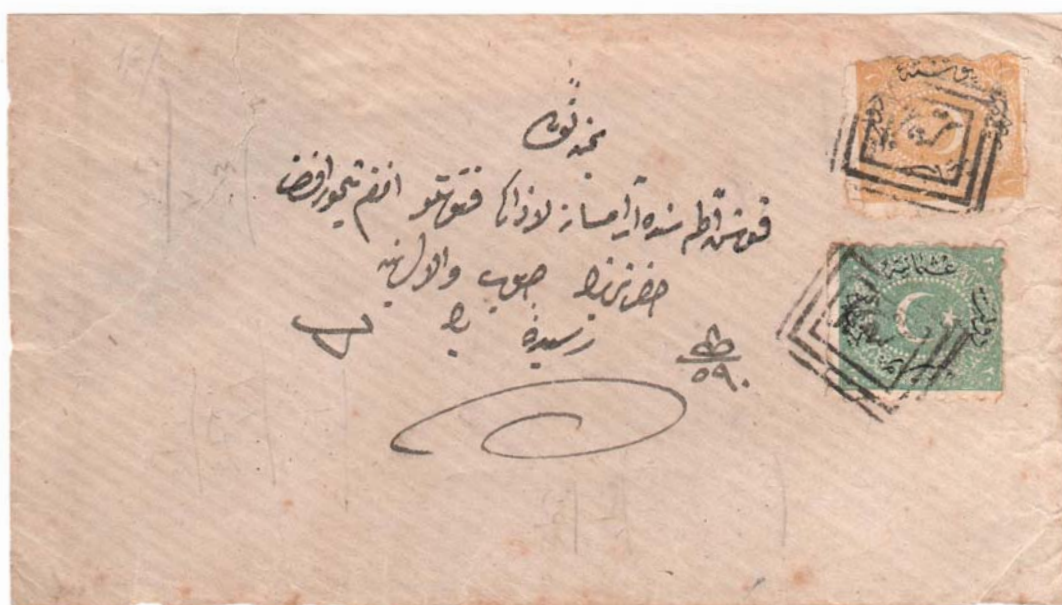
The postmarks used on these two issues were a variety of triple boxed postmarks.



A selection of triple boxed cancellations used in Smyrna.



1864 Entire to Karahisar (Afyon – Turkey)  
 Franked with a pair of 20 paras (third printing) and a single 2 kuru (second printing)  
 Distance is between 50 and 100 route hours therefore charged 3 kuru.



1871 Envelope  
 Franked with a 1 gurus and a 20 paras stamp from the 1871 “Duloz” issue  
 for a distance of up to 100 route hours

Joining the General Postal Union meant that Turkey had to standardise its foreign letter rate to 1 kuruş 10 paras, reduced in 1880 to 1 kuruş. Although, as businessmen in Smyrna tended to post their mail at the foreign Levant post offices, it was a while before a substantial amount of foreign mail went through the Turkish office. Also in the mid 1870's, because of the founding of the G.P.U., Turkey abandoned its multi-tiered rating system for internal mail and replaces it with a single rate of 1 kuruş and for letters to the coast (the littoral rate) 20 paras. But then it turned out that there was such a small amount of mail sent in the interior that it did not cover the costs. So the rate was increased in 1882 to 2 kuruş and did not reduce back to 1 kuruş until 1888.



1885 Envelope  
20 paras littoral (coast) letter rate.

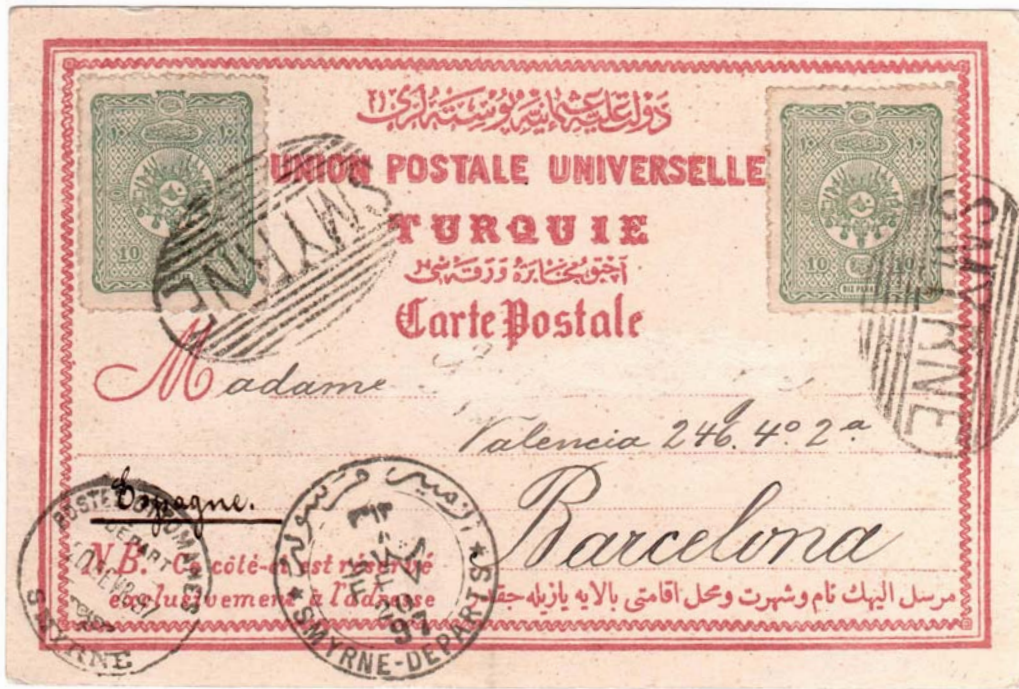
Double ring postmarks were in use by 1867. They had the both the town name and the date in Arabic and French. In the international section of the post office they used double circle postmarks with the legend only in French, sometimes with “depart” in a straight line underneath.

Towards the end of the century killer hand stamps were introduced with Smyrna either in French or Arabic. These were in conjunction with the town postmark.

Various attempts by the Ottoman government to get rid of the foreign post offices, or to reduce their influence, had little effect. The foreign powers took no notice of the demands for them to close. In 1901 the Ottoman government overprinted the current issue for interior use. The un-overprinted stamps were for foreign use and gave the sender the right to request a confirmation of the mailing as a guarantee for its prompt despatch. Both overprinted and un-overprinted stamps could be used for exterior and interior use.

In 1906 the un-overprinted stamps for foreign use were overprinted with the Arabic letter ب standing for ‘behie’ (discount). These stamps were sold for foreign mail at a discount of 20% off their nominal value. This measure did achieve a considerable increase in revenue, since business houses with extensive correspondence were prepared to grasp every financial advantage, even with the small differences in postage rates.





1897 Postcard to Barcelona postmarked with killer hand stamp and town postmark.  
20 paras foreign postcard rate.



1914 Registered envelope with "beyie" discount stamps.



## THE POST IN WARTIME

On November 1914, Turkey entered the war on the German side and all the foreign post offices were closed. Censorship of mail was introduced. Internal mail was censored in Smyrna, but all foreign mail had to be sent to Constantinople for censorship. After censorship, the envelopes were sealed with a circular red label.



The new pictorial issue introduced on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1914 was printed by Bradbury Wilkinson in England. With the outbreak of World War 1, it was therefore impossible to get extra supplies, so when the first printing ran out the government rounded up all the remainders of issues since 1892 and overprinted them with a six pointed star and a crescent with the Arabic date ١٣٣١ (1331) in the Muslim calendar to which 584 has to be added to convert to the Gregorian calendar making it 1915, the year of issue. There was considerable criticism of the six pointed star as it was deemed to be a Jewish and Christian symbol. Also the star in the Turkish State coat of arms was a five pointed star, and so that was used in the second printing.

On 30<sup>th</sup> September 1915 an obligatory surcharge of ten paras was introduced for the benefit of war orphans and a special surcharge was issued. In the fullness of time normal stamps and war orphan stamps were used indiscriminately.. The foreign traders complained to the UPU that this surcharge should not be applied to foreign mail. The UPU agreed and it was abolished for foreign mail. However on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 the government increased the foreign postage rate by 10 paras to 1 piastre 10 paras.

At last in 1916 the Ottomans managed to get a new pictorial issue printed in Vienna, although one can find the overprinted stamps in use well after this date until they were used up.

On 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918 Turkey signed the cease-fire on the British warship "Agamemnon" in Mudros Bay at the island of Lemnos.



1916 Envelope to Dardenelles via Constantinople.  
Showing both first printing six pointed star and second printing five pointed star.  
Also the stamp on the right is overprinted for War Orphans.

## GERMAN MILITARY MISSION

Turkey was an ally of Germany during the Great War and there was a German Military Mission based in Smyrna from 19<sup>th</sup> August 1916 to 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918. Mail was sent without charge for postage. They are cancelled with the Feldpost handstamp issued to Smyrna.

## POST WAR POSTS

### TURKISH

On 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918 Turkey signed the cease-fire on the British warship "Agamemnon" in Mudros Bay at the island of Lemnos. The Vilayet of Smyrna was ceded to Greece for five years. The Greeks occupied Smyrna on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1919. The Turkish post office remained open for a short while, but in June the Turkish officials were told to leave as there was a concern that they were involved in espionage. They were replaced by Greek officials. The post office remained open as a civilian post office and the new Turkish issues were available. There was, inevitably, inflation and by 1921 the internal letter rate had risen from 1 piastre at the end of the war to 5 piastres.

The situation remained the same until 13<sup>th</sup> September 1922 when the Turkish National army troops under Mustapha Kemal retook the city and all the Greek residents were ejected. Many thousands were massacred and the town was burned down. On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1923 after the abdication of Sultan Mehmet VI the once almighty Ottoman Empire came to an end and the Republic of Turkey was proclaimed with Mustapha Kemal as President. New republican stamps were issued and the city's name was changed from Smyrna to Izmir.

### BRITISH

The British post was the only foreign post office to re-open after the War as a purely civilian post office. It opened on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1919. At first existing stocks of surcharged or overprinted stamps were utilised until they were exhausted in mid-1920. These stamps were supplemented and finally replaced in mid-1920 by ordinary stamps of Great Britain. The standard letter rate of 2½d remained the same until the post office was closed in 1922. From 1920 a large proportion of the letters were registered (at a cost of 2d). In view of the troubled times in Smyrna with the Greek occupation, this gave a greater degree of security to the post. The post office was finally closed in September 1922 just prior to the retaking of the city by the Turkish troops.



1921 Registered envelope to U.S.A.

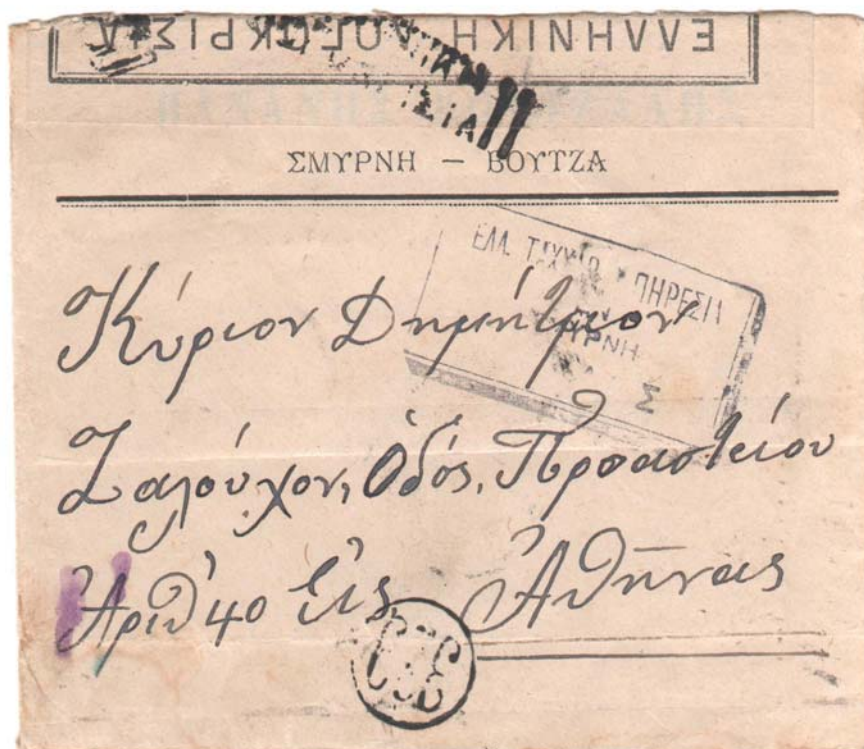


## FRENCH MILITARY POST

The French army maintained a military establishment in Smyrna at the end of War. The 'Trésor et Postes' military post office allocated was 528. Some mail was censored. If so, it received an oblong hand stamp inscribed 'CENSURE MILITAIRE FRANCAIS SMYRNE' The standard letter rate initially was 25c rising to 50c from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1921. The office was closed in August 1923.

## GREEK MILITARY POST

In February 1919 Greece claimed the city and vilayet of Smyrna and on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1919, she invaded and occupied Smyrna with 10,000 troops, supported by British, French and American warships. This act was eventually ratified by the Treaty of Sèvres on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1920, when Greece was assigned the responsibility of that area for 5 years. The Greek field post office was opened on the day of the invasion. The Greek civilian post office did not open until 20<sup>th</sup> May 1919 and for five days the Greek civilians were able to send letters home via the military post free of charge. The envelopes received a Greek freepost hand stamp.



21<sup>st</sup> May 1919 Censored envelope to Athens with Greek free postmark.

During 1921 the Greek forces, which had been involved in ongoing battles against the Turkish revolutionary army of Kemal Pasha, advanced inland through Western Anatolia as far as the Sakyra River. However they were defeated there and during the next year they gradually withdrew. During this period the post for the Greek army was free, but all mail had to bear the unit stamp and be signed by the censoring officer.

## ITALIAN MILITARY POST

At the end of the Great War, the Italians sought to put into effect what had been agreed in the Treaty of Mudhros (October 30<sup>th</sup> 1918) i.e. that they should have a right to political and economical expansion in Asia minor. They started landing troops at various points on the Anatolian coast. One detachment landed at Smyrna and set up a military mission with a post office attached, which opened on March 1<sup>st</sup> 1919. It used a hand stamp inscribed 'POSTA MILITARE' and was issued with the number '171'.



1919 Envelope to London.

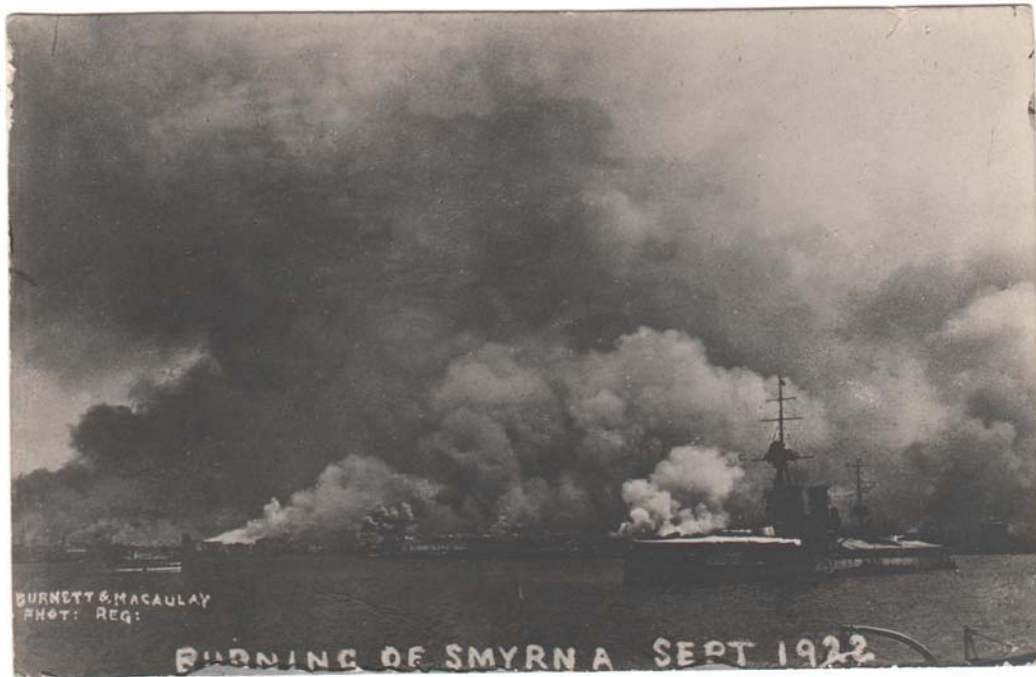
The initial standard letter rate was 25 centesimi. On 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. 1921 it was raised to 60 centesimi. On 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. 1922 it was raised again to 80 centesimi and finally on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan. 1923 to 1 lira.

The fire of 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1922 destroyed the Italian post office. However it was re-opened by 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. using a temporary hand stamp. By the beginning of 1923 it was operating normally with a new hand stamp inscribed 'POSTA MILITARI No. 171 SMIRNE'.

The office was closed on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1923, when the Italian army unit withdrew. Finally the Ottoman Empire was free of foreign post offices.

## THE AFTERMATH OF WAR

The Greek army had invaded the Anatolian area of Turkey in September 1919. Their campaign ended in September 1922 when they withdrew. On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1922 fires broke out in the Greek and Armenian districts which rapidly engulfed most of the city. Refugees from the city were desperately trying to leave before the Greek troops arrived. Allied shipping moored in the harbour were instructed not to help. It is estimated at least 100,000 Greek citizens perished.



HMS Iron Duke is the battleship in the right foreground



The quayside one month after the fire.