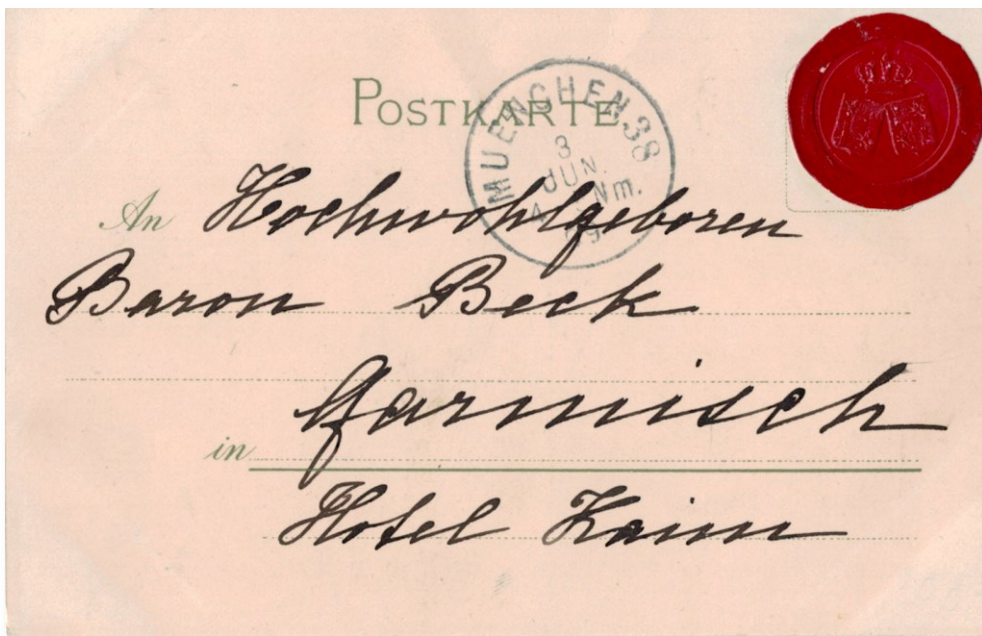


A postcard without postage stamp

It is often what is missing that provides the greatest insight in philately. In the present postcard from 1909, it is the absence of a postage stamp that sharpens our view. Although no franking is present, the card was properly cancelled in Garmisch on 3 June 1909, conveyed, and delivered. There is no postage due, no indication of objection, and no reference to any postal irregularity. The item was accepted by the Reichspost—and it is precisely this fact that gives it its postal-historical significance.



Under the regulations in force during the period of the German Empire, postcards were generally subject to postage. Unfranked cards were normally either assessed with postage due or returned. That this did not occur in the present case points to a recognized exception. This was not accidental, but is to be sought within the framework of postage-free privileges, as they were applied around 1900 in narrowly defined cases.

Postage-free privilege was not a general right of status. It applied neither to the nobility as a whole nor solely on the basis of social standing. The Reichspost clearly distinguished between official postage-free



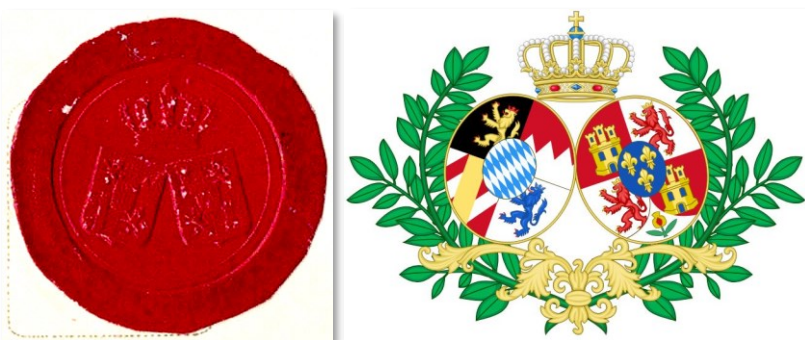
Postage-free field post postcard dated 25 August 1916¹; a seasonally incongruous yet appealing winter motif. Clearly struck field post cancellation in good condition. High-quality printing by Meissner & Buch.

privileges for government authorities, special military regulations—such as field post—and a third category that was handled with particular strictness: personal postage-free privilege. This

was strictly tied to specific individuals and could be used exclusively for clearly private, personally written correspondence. Chanceries, secretariats, or court administrations were expressly excluded. For this reason, every unfranked item of this type requires careful individual examination.

The card in question withstands this scrutiny—not because of any single feature, but through its overall appearance. The choice of medium alone is revealing. Around 1909, the postcard was the preferred means for personal, situational messages. Official or office correspondence, by contrast, made almost exclusive use of envelopes, often supplemented by pre-printed letterheads or service annotations. The open postcard points to a private occasion. The handwritten text is free of formulaic or official language and maintains a personal tone. The address, too, is deliberately private: “Hochwohlgeboren Baron Beck,” without any functional or official title.

The decisive accent is set by the wax seal on the reverse. On a postcard it serves no sealing function; its significance lies solely in identifying the sender. It is a princely alliance seal—a personal seal that, on the occasion of a marriage, combines the coat of arms of one’s own house with that of the house into which one has married. Such alliance seals were not used for official authentication, but for dynastic and personal identification.



Left: Princely alliance seal of María de la Paz of Bourbon, Infanta of Spain and Princess of Bavaria, as applied to the postcard. **Right:** The coat of arms of María de la Paz in detail—Bavarian arms on the right, Spanish arms on the left².

In the practice of the Reichspost, a seal of this kind—when combined with a handwritten text and a private form of address—could function as an external identifying feature of an item posted personally by the sender, and thus substitute for the missing postage stamp. In this case, the seal is therefore less a heraldic decorative element than a component of postal legitimation.

¹ © Field post postcard, Germany, 1917 – original in the public domain – source: eBay reproduction photograph

² © Graphics: Heraldry, Sodacan, CC BY-SA 4.0, Wikimedia Commons



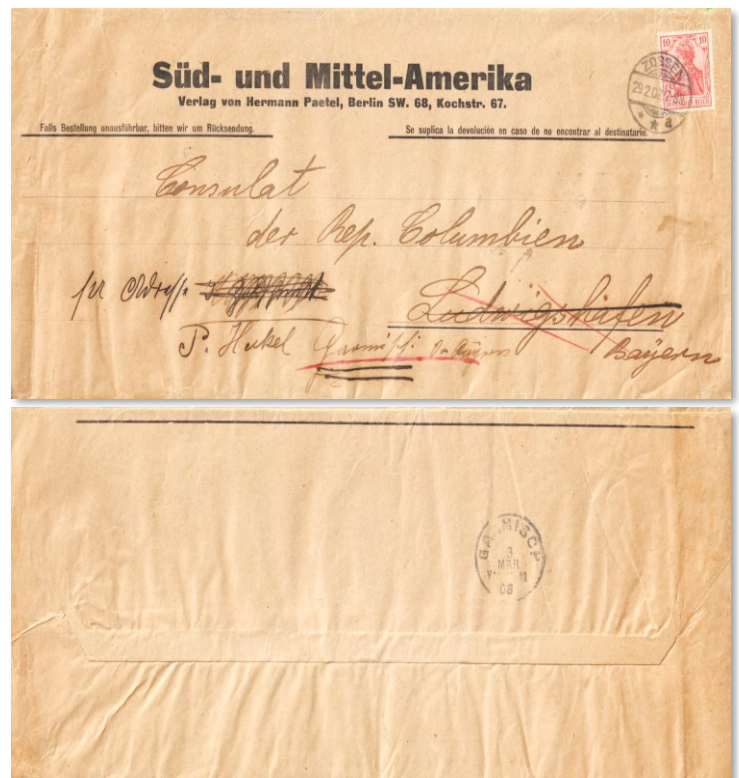
Infanta María de la Paz de Borbón, Franz von Lenbach (1894) – © public domain

Through this seal, the sender can be unequivocally identified as María de la Paz of Bourbon, Infanta of Spain and—through her marriage to Prince Ludwig Ferdinand—Princess of Bavaria³. As the daughter of a Spanish queen, she belonged to that small circle of individuals whose personal status was recognized beyond the borders of their country of origin. From a philatelic perspective, however, it is not the title that is decisive, but the role. María de la Paz was not a reigning princess supported by a chancery apparatus, but a high-ranking aristocratic private individual. Contemporary correspondence shows that she frequently wrote personally, preferred brief forms of communication, and not infrequently used postcards. Such handwritten, private items fulfilled the conditions under which personal postage-free privilege was granted in practice.

The place of posting, Garmisch, fits coherently into this picture. Around 1909, the town was a major summer and spa resort frequented by the high nobility. Temporary stays of this kind gave rise to lively, informal correspondence: brief messages, invitations, or replies. The postcard was the obvious medium for such communication. That an unfranked card was accepted in this environment without the assessment of postage due accords with the pragmatic, less formalistic practice of the Reichspost.

The recipient is correctly and appropriately addressed as “Hochwohlgeboren Baron Beck.” This form of address was clearly defined in postal usage and indicates baronial rank. The most likely addressee is Beck von Peccoz, a representative of the Bavarian nobility without a prominent official function. Here, too, the private character of the item is confirmed: it is not official or business mail, but personal correspondence within a clearly defined social circle.

The material basis of the card is a floral postcard with a violet motif from the so-called “12 Flower Postcards, Series 1026”, produced by the Leipzig publisher Meissner & Buch, as noted on the card itself. Around 1900, violets were among the most popular floral motifs in postcard production and appeared in numerous variants at Meissner & Buch, issued under a wide range of different series numbers. Series 1026 apparently comprised at least two violet motifs (see the second



The postal forwarding of the newspaper wrapper from 1908 to Garmisch indicates the temporary presence of the addressee and thus the use of the location as a place of residence and holiday stay.

³ Über das Leben der Maria de la Paz von Bourbon können Sie mehr erfahren unter <https://wirbellose.at/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Maria-de-la-Paz-von-Bourbon.pdf>



Source: Delcampe-reproduction photograph



Source: Delcampe-reproduction photograph

Color illustrated postcard published by Meissner & Buch, Dresden. Part of the floral greeting card series No. 1026. Posted as a domestic postcard within the German Empire on 21 October 1900 in Harburg (Elbe), franked with 2 Pfennig in accordance with the valid postcard rate. The 1026 series evidently remained in production over an extended period, independent of the introduction of the divided back. The reverse is still undivided and reserved exclusively for the address (postal regulations prior to 1905): the message text was therefore written on the illustrated side. © Original in the public domain

“violet” card). The cards are characterized by high-quality color lithography and a deliberately non-specific, occasion-neutral design. For postal handling, the quality of the card was not a minor aspect: especially in the case of unfranked items, a formally correct, standards-compliant postcard was a prerequisite for smooth acceptance. In the violet motif of María de la Paz’s card, a small monogram can be found, which is regarded as the illustrator’s signature and was a common marker of individual authorship in applied graphics around 1900. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to identify the illustrator by name.

The violets on the front of the card have no postal function in themselves. They are part of the period’s



Source: Delcampe-Reproduction photograph



Source: Delcampe-Reproduction photograph

Appropriate to the season: color lithographed embossed postcard with a wreath of violets, a four-leaf clover, and a floral depiction of the year “1908.” Produced by a German embossed postcard publisher (publisher’s mark: monogram AE with crown), series designation M.S.i.B. 13779, circa 1907/08. The card was postally used in the German Empire in 1907 as a New Year’s greeting for 1908. Around 1900, violets were a frequently used motif for New Year and congratulatory cards. © Original in the public domain.

typical visual language—serving as a simple greeting, for name days and birthdays, or for the New Year—and form the aesthetic surface of the message. Many such violet postcards circulated around the turn of the century. At the same time, they offer an instructive glimpse into the personal tone of the correspondence. The text of the card shows that the sender is in fact expressing thanks for lilies of the valley—for a floral greeting received earlier. The violet motif thus does not illustrate the specific occasion, but rather frames the gesture of thanks within a generally understood, courtly visual language.

Accordingly, in the case of María de la Paz’s card, it is less the motif that is significant than the absence of the postage stamp—a postal-historical testimony to the lived practice of postage-free privilege around 1909.

