

Russian hemp

Hemp was once a reason for war, as it was needed to make ropes, nets and sails, all of which were important in war. In 1740, Russia produced 80% of the hemp needed in Europe. England was 90% dependent on production in Russia. In 1807, Napoleon and Tsar Alexander signed a peace agreement in Tilsit, which also stated that Russia was no longer allowed to sell hemp to the British. Today this is called a sanction. Napoleon wanted to weaken the British fleet in this way; in 1811, the Russians again supplied hemp to England, and on June 24, 1812, Napoleon gathered almost 700,000 soldiers and moved towards Moscow to bring hemp cultivation under French control, among other things.

I read this remarkable and little-known fact on the virtual pages of Hashmuseum.com (Amsterdam) because I was looking for "Russian hemp" after I wanted to add an Austrian postal stationery from Bludenz (1881) to Strasbourg in Alsace to my collection and found mention of this plant in the text on the back. Bludenz - the town where this 2 Kreuzer postcard (postal stationery) was canceled in 1881 (Fig. 1) - is



Fig. 1: Postcard from Bludzen to Strassbourg

located in the Austrian province of Vorarlberg. The single-circle thimble postmark (19 mm) in grotesque and the year was used for the postmark, which is known for the years 1873 - 1881, but was still used internally until 1909. Thus a late use of this stamp. The card is addressed to Simon Hammel in Strassburg in Alsace.

The sender of the card lived in Brunnenfeld. This is the eastern district of the five-valley town of Bludenz and lies at the entrance to the Klostersal and the Montafon. Brunnenfeld was first mentioned in documents in the 13th century [Lords of Brunnenfeld]. This district was notorious as the Bludenz entertainment district [the town council complained in the 18th century that there was no church, but five inns with a total of only 10 houses]. In 1881, Mr. Burtscher, a ropemaker, lived there. He used this card to order 200 kilograms of Russian hemp from Simon Hammel in Strassburg (Fig. 2).

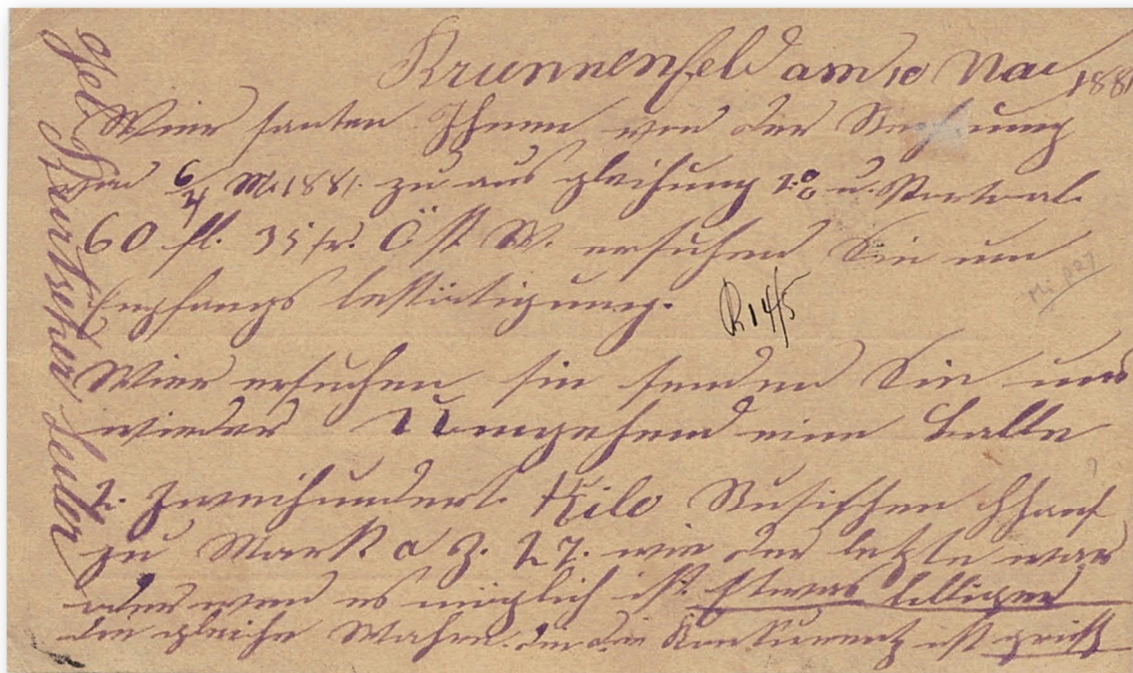


Fig. 2: Back of the postcard from Fig. 1



Fig. 3: Invoice head of the company of Simon Hammel

Simon Hammel processed and traded in various plant fibers, including tampico fibers for brushes - made from agaves and named after the Mexican port city, as can be seen from an "invoice header" (Fig. 3). He also mentions couch grass [chiendent - *Elymus* sp.], which he imports from Mexico and Italy. Finally, he refers to his trade in silk hemp (special hemp, e.g. for sealing pipes) and horsehair.



Fig. 4: Vignette

The economic importance of hemp fibers has been on the rise again in Germany since 1985. Today, industrial hemp is cultivated for the production of hemp oil; however, hemp is still used historically for the production of ropes and twine (Fig. 4). Some insulating materials contain hemp fibers and the automotive industry (Fig. 5) has also discovered hemp as a component of composite materials. Such



Fig. 5: Poland 1952



Fig. 6: Sender's postmark 1974

kopeck stamp of the Wenden district in Latvia was printed on special hemp paper. This was slightly transparent, which is why the printed motif on the reverse showed through (Fig. 7). The stamp was issued in 1893; its predecessor with the same design was printed on thick linen paper in 1884. The version issued in 1894 was also no longer printed on hemp paper, but on normal white paper. I am not aware of any other stamps printed on hemp paper.

Two stamps I know of have a "hemp motif" in the sense of hemp extraction in its capacity as a plant fiber, not as a drug.

In its 1950 series "The new Italy at work", the Italian postal service dedicated a stamp with a high face value to a female hemp worker (La Canapa) (Fig. 8). The stamp shows the farmer/worker with a shouldered fork behind sheaves of hemp in front of the Abbey of Pomposa in Emilia Romagna.

This was a tribute to the importance of hemp cultivation as a key industry in this region at the time. The fact that hemp was an important crop all over the world because of which - as seen above - wars were



Fig. 7: Russia, Wenden 1893



Fig. 8: Italy 1950, the hemp farmer from Emilia Romana worth 65 lire, from the series "The new Italy at work"

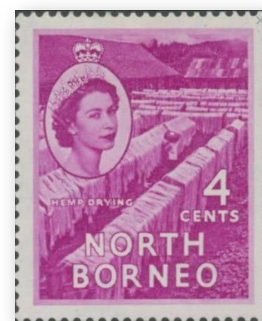


Fig. 9: North Borneo 1955; hemp fibers drying

also fought is also shown by the issue of a stamp from North Borneo from 1955 (Fig. 9), on which the drying of hemp fibers can be seen.

Much more could be written about hemp, especially about why its importance declined so quickly. Economically, but also politically.

Quellen: <https://hashmuseum.com/de> - [Wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org), [Michel-Katalog](https://www.michel-katalog.com), [colnect.com](https://www.colnect.com), [delcampe.com](https://www.delcampe.com)