

1934 Airmail letter from Budapest to Buenos Aires franked with Arcképek stamps

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One of my favorites in Hungarian postal history are frankings with the 1932 set of Portraits Famous Hungarians or Arcképek in Hungarian. During the period that these stamps were used, rates did not change, but with the 14 values of the set, numerous combinations are possible on cover and often give a very colorful result. I try to find covers franked with Arcképek stamps exclusively. For a higher franking this becomes difficult. In these cases, the lower values were meant to be used together with the high denomination stamps of the Nagy Madonna set.



The cover I show here is the highest 'pure' Arcképek franking I found up till now. Sent by airmail from Budapest 62 on November 15, 1934 to Buenos Aires, the letter arrived in Argentina on November 23 as shown by the arrival handstamp VIA AEREA - BUENOS AIRES.

The front of the cover bears a bleu Hungarian - French LÉGIPOSTA - PAR AVION label as well as a red handstamp DEUTSCHE LUFTPOST - EUROPA-SÜDAMERIKA with two stars on both sides. This was the Airmail confirming handstamp of the Lufthansa company for the post boarded at the Stuttgart airport. The red handstamp was used on Zeppelin mail also, but the two Zeppelin flights that left Germany at the end of 1934 don't fit in with the datestamps on this cover. The Graf Zeppelin airship left Friedrichshafen for its 11th South-America Flight on October 27, too early, and the 12th arrived in Recife, Brazil on December 12, too late.

In 1933, Lufthansa had tested a new way of transporting post by the air. An airplane delivered the mail from Germany to a boat waiting on the East coast of Africa. The boat sailed with the mail as well as a small airplane that was catapulted as soon as the airport of Natal, on the extreme eastern point of the South-American coast, was within range. When this service was launched in November 1933, it took four days to transport the mail from Berlin to Rio de Janeiro.

This letter went certainly on one of the regular flights with this scheme. Starting in November 1934, a weekly service was established, and one of the departures was on November 17. After leaving Budapest on November 15, the letter was placed on the plane in Stuttgart on November 17 and reach Rio de Janeiro on November 21. It took another two days to deliver it to Buenos Aires, probably by the German-Brazilian airmail company Condor.

On the front of the cover to the right of the red Lufthansa stamp there is a number that has been crossed out. This number refers to the postage to be paid : 21,68, that is, 21 Pengő and 68 fillér. A foreign letter at this time cost 40f for the first 25 grams and 20f for each supplementary 20 grams, so here it was 40f + 20f for a total of 60f. Airmail surcharge for Argentina was 2P66f for each 5 gram increment. On the extreme left hand side of the front of cover we can decipher the 38gr annotation that was written by the post office clerk with an ink a bit darker shade than the one used by the sender to write the address. For the applicable airmail surcharge, 38 gram means 8 implements of 2,66P for a total of 21,28P. Adding in the 60f letter rate, the grand total came to 21,88P. The 21,68 written on the cover is in the ink of the sender. the postal clerk calculated the correct postage and crossed out the figure. We don't know if the sender or the postal clerk affixed the stamps to the envelope. In this case, thirty 70f and two 50f stamps were used for a total of 22 Pengő. The cover was overfranked by 12f, a small sum when compared to 22 Pengő. Why weren't higher denomination Madonna stamps used? Since the cover was mailed at one of the largest post offices in Budapest (No. 62 located at the Eastern Railway Station) the availability of the stamps would not have been a problem leading to indicate that the clerk at the factory affixed some or all of the stamps. Maybe he didn't have any Madonna stamps or he just wanted to use a stock of lower denomination stamps that was sleeping in a drawer.

The Magyar Wolframlámpa-gyár, a factory of the Orion Radio and Electricity Company, produced light bulbs that were exported all over the world. This letter was sent to Karl Veszprém. Upon arrival, the postman didn't find the recipient at the address written on the envelope, so he applied his circular identification number 1816 and took the letter back to post office. There it was determined that he was an 'abonado' that meant that he had a sort of post office box. The address on the envelope was changed to 'A1 (=to) 8/602' which was the number of his 'abonado'. Maybe Mr Veszprém was a sales representative of the company who, travelling a lot, used this post-box system in order to receive his mail.

References and acknowledgement:

- MBK
- Sieger Zeppelin Post Catalogue, 2001
- Erich Haberer, Katalog über Katapultpost, Teil 2 Südatlantik
- many thanks to Dr. Andres Schlichter from Argentina for his information about the 'abonado' and Csaba Kohalmi for his helpful suggestions

