

CLASSIC AUSTRIAN POSTAL FORMS

By A Taylor

This piece originated in a series of articles by H. O. Pollak in the APSNY Bulletin 23/3 1972; 24/1,2 1973; 25/1 1974; & 26/1,2 1975. It has been mercilessly condensed & ruthlessly abstracted by me (so all the errors of omission are mine), in order to remind 'Austria' readers that the forms used by the Austrian Post Office are more interesting (or maybe just more complex) than might be supposed. As applies generally, there are aspects of the subject I know I don't know, and certainly there are other aspects I don't know I don't know! Maybe some day a more exhaustive and exhausting study may be possible.

One of the most interesting branches of philately is that of the various postal forms which a country's postal system uses. These forms mirror the development of the postal service, and show how the conception of communication became ever richer and more varied. Furthermore, markings which are rare, or even unknown, on pre-stamp covers or early issues will often appear on postal forms. In fact, their use on forms will sometimes be the basic explanation for their existence. There are additional lures for the Austria collector to interest himself in the postal forms of his country of specialisation. The multilingual problems of the monarchy, which affected so many of Austria's cancels, stamp issues (such as the 1867 issue) and varieties of postal stationery, are reflected in the postal forms many decades before they appear (philatelically) anywhere else. Next, during certain periods, stamps used on return receipts were obliterated twice, which explains many of the double cancels found; furthermore, the "Nachfrageschreiben" form used to search for a missing registered letter, or money letter, or package carries a stamp sometimes cancelled three or more times. Finally, the stamp used to pay for a registry return receipt was, during the early part of the classic stamp period, often used to attach the receipt to the letter. This leads to the "pseudo-bisects", as Müller called them, with half a stamp on the receipt, half on the letter, and many a stamp collector fooled into believing he has a genuine (and very rare) bisect. Even more irritating is when the receipt was attached to the letter by a St. Andrews Cross from the first or second issue.

We'll consider postal forms from the pre-stamp period up to the redesign and renumbering in the 1880s of all postal forms. We must begin by noting the fundamental distinction which underlies Austrian postal service of this period, that between the Briefpost and the Fahrpost. The Briefpost (literally "letter-post") carried ordinary letters and registered letters. By the beginning of the period under consideration, it had ceased to carry money letters and goods of value - apparently because this was too unsafe. In 1749, a new service was established: the Fahrpost (literally "travelling post"). It carried money letters, packages, and other items of value – as well as fare-paying passengers. Thus forms dealing with money letters and packages come from the Fahrpost, those dealing with registered letters from the Briefpost.

The variety of forms from the classic period of Austria is very great, both in the functions they performed and the text which they carried. There are for example (A) receipts from the Fahrpost for letters: typically money letters; (B) receipts from the Fahrpost for anything: usually used for packages; (C) mailing receipts from the Briefpost for registered letters; (D) return receipts from the Briefpost for registered letters; (E) mailing receipts for money orders; and (F) Nachfrageschreiben from both postal services. Then there are inter-office lists of registered mail; mailing receipts for telegrams; a form asking the recipient to come to the post office and pick up his mail; receipts for salaries of postillions; tickets for riding in post coaches; etc – the list seems endless!

The literature I know about is sparse. Edwin Müller wrote a series on registry return receipts and Nachfrageschreiben from 1850 to 1880, which appeared in the "Ganzsache", a supplement to the "Postmarke" of which he was the editor, between September 1928 and January 1929. Further remarks on the subject are scattered throughout the 1929 issues of the "Ganzsache". A series of commentaries on pre-stamp Austrian forms appeared in the "Wiener Briefmarken-Spiegel" starting in the February 1967 issue; they are written by H. Weidlich of Mannheim. The supplement to the WIPA catalogue of 1965 contains an article by Dr. W. Tettinek on the postal receipts of the Austrian Post in the pre-stamp

period. Then there is APS Library item 322 "The numbered postal forms used in Hungary between 1830 and 1875" by Denes [this includes a discussion of the various Official Form-Numberings of 1850, 1880 etc and lists of forms; however not all the Hungarian numbers correspond with the Austrian forms]; an article by Dr C Kainz on pp 63-70 of APS Lib item 335 "120 Years Österreichische Philatelisten Club Vindobona"; and "Postscheine" by Himmel-Agisburg on pp 179-195 of APS Lib item 258 "Kärnten 80". Inevitably, an authoritative treatise will have been published in something like the Transactions of the Royal Society of Dreikaiserecke. And, lurking in the Vienna Postal Archives, are several immense and heavy folders containing collections of forms.

According to Weidlich, the first mention of postal forms in the Austrian regulations is March 21 1750 (one year after the Fahrpost was established): Postscheine (postal forms) are mentioned for the first time but only in passing. A Fahrpost receipt from Prig from 1754 has been found in the postal museum in Vienna, and is the oldest known so far. Receipts for the Briefpost, that is for registered letters, were officially introduced only in 1789. Since examples are known from 1783 onward, the official regulation must have been the recognition of a "good thing" which individual postmasters were already practising. Delivery receipts were introduced into the Fahrpost in 1783. There had been a trial of having the recipient sign a book with the details of the sender and the amount (for a money letter), but people complained bitterly that this book gave too much information to business competitors and the idea was changed. Initially this delivery receipt (Abgabsrezepisse) was to be kept at the delivery post office. Then came a regulation that the sender could get this delivery receipt by asking for it, and surrendering his mailing receipt. This now, in the official mind, necessitated two delivery receipts, one for the sender and one for the files. Finally, the modern system of return receipts was developed. The rates for these receipts are very complicated!

The earliest receipts, from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were usually unframed. From about the 1820s into the 1870s they were framed, with the early ones often having beautiful decorative designs. The new series of all postal forms which first appeared in the 1880s once again had no frames. The receipts were initially prepared locally by each postmaster for his own use. There was no required standard text, so that the details vary considerably from form to form and are often quite mysterious as well as misspelled. Since they are local, the early forms also have the post office printed as part of the text - and any attempt at anything like "completeness" is absurd. By the 1830s, centrally produced forms had appeared. In these, there is a space for the particular post office, whose name is filled in either by hand or by a marking for this purpose. As Weidlich and Tettinek have documented, there were also forms for the local posts in Graz and Vienna, and for such distant establishments as the post office for the Austrian troops in the fortress of Mainz.

Languages other than German make their appearance on these postal forms long before they appear on postal stationery, or even on very many cancellations. According to Weidlich, Hungarian language receipts were allowed in 1838, and he shows a mailing, delivery, and return receipt all in Hungarian. He also has a receipt, from Jägerndorf, in Latin! (This is not as absurd as it sounds. Remember that, for example, Stuhlweissenburg had markings reading Alba Regia for much of the pre-stamp period.) But bilingual receipts, German on one side and some other language on the other, make their appearance in the 1840s, and all kinds of interesting combinations have been found.

Let us look at a few of these types in more detail.

1 (A) Mailing receipts from the Fahrpost for letters.

As we have stated, these are for money letters, which were not carried by the Briefpost. The centrally produced receipts, as well as those for Vienna, can be distinguished by the first three words "Ueber einen Brief" (for a letter), after which there is space for the amount of money the letter contained. The earliest centrally produced receipts also have the word "Fahrpost" in the upper left-hand corner. In the numbering system which was instituted in the late 1840s (and then changed in the 1880s) this form, for letters in the Fahrpost, received number 421. The word "Drucksorte", abbreviated "D.S.", which often precedes such numbers, means "printing variety" and apparently indexes the variety of forms and labels which were printed.



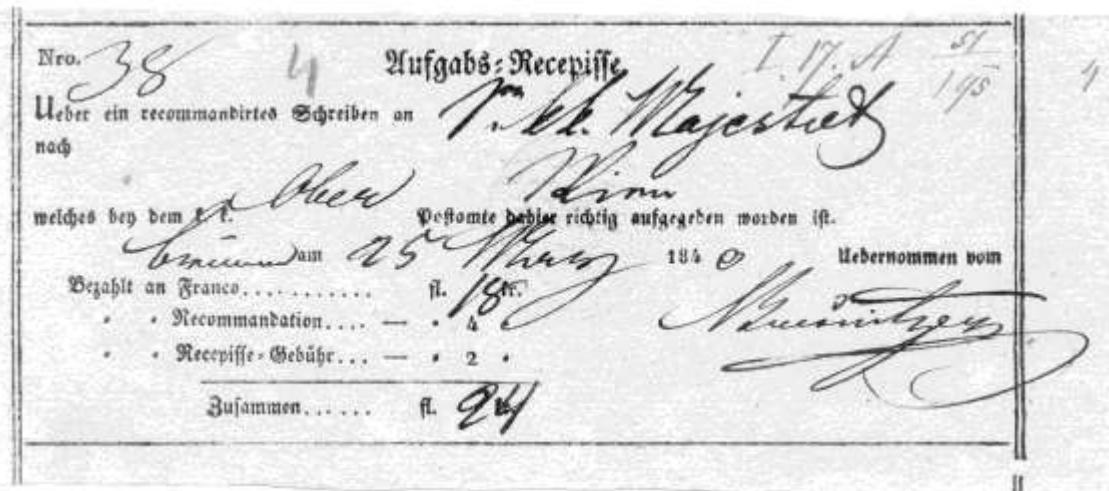
2 (B) General mailing receipts from the Fahrpost.

These were used for packages, for money letters, and presumably anything else carried by the Fahrpost. They can be distinguished from (A), the receipts for letters only, in that they have the first two words "Ueber ein" or "Ueber 1" and then a space to allow the clerk to write one "what". There is now also a line in the form for the weight (since it might be a package) which the letter receipts don't have. Otherwise they are very similar to (A). Again some of the early ones have the word "Fahrpost" in the upper left-hand corner, and the later ones have the printing variety, this time Drucksorte 420. The Viennese receipts get a Drucksorte of their own, namely 573.

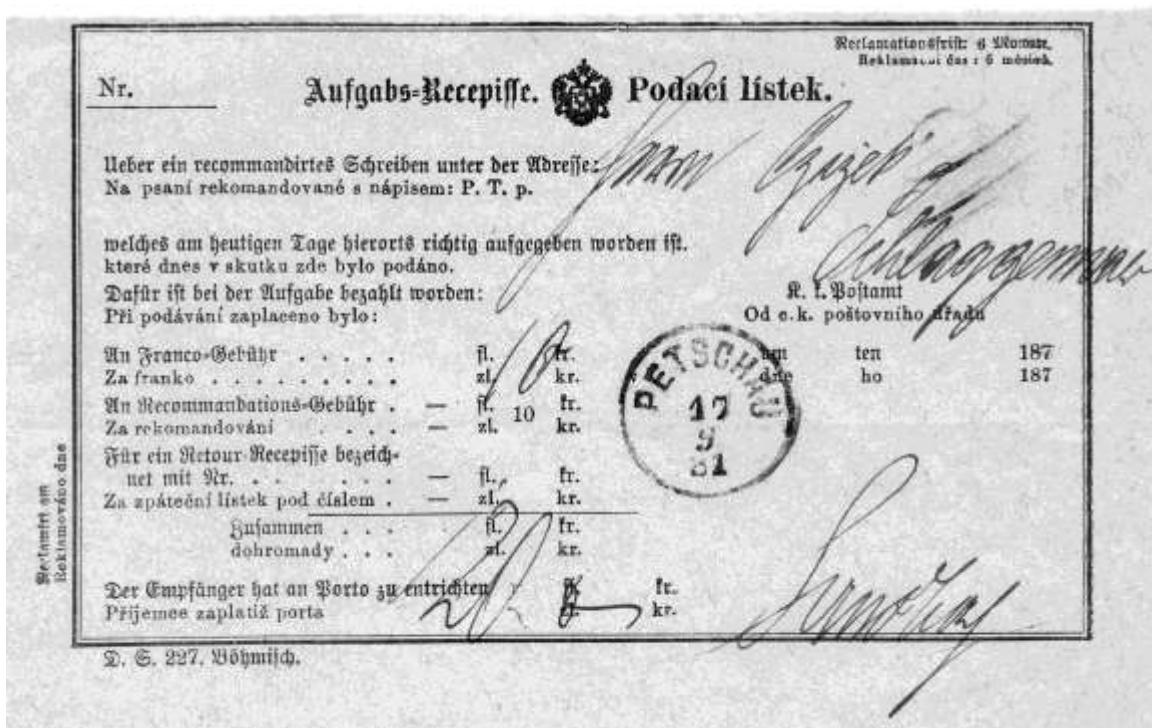


3 (C) Mailing Receipts from the Briefpost for registered letters.

These can be distinguished by a text which begins "Ueber ein recommandirtes Schreiben" - about a registered letter. In the first general numbering system, these received the printing variety number 227; Italian ones are marked "R.L. No. 45".



This is the receipt for a Registered Letter To The Emperor!
The original is on buff-coloured cartridge paper.



This is a dual-language form, German-Czech. Flimsy buff paper.

4 (D) Return Receipts from the Briefpost for Registered Letters.

History has been kinder to us on the rules governing the use of return receipts than on the forms themselves. They were also complicated, but our knowledge of them has not changed significantly since Müller's time. Throughout the pre-stamp period, and until July 1, 1850, the fee for a registry return receipt equalled the lowest letter rate for the same distance. Thus, the rate for registry return receipts underwent all the frequent rate changes of the years preceding 1850. From the beginning of the stamp period, the fee for a return receipt was paid by the sender and accounted for by a stamp. Frequently this stamp was also used to attach the receipt to the letter with which it went, and this led to the many apparent "bisects", especially of 6 kreuzer 1850s, which one sees. According to Müller, this practice was officially declared improper only by an order dated November 2 1877, although most receipts after the 1850s do not seem to have been thus attached.

The original rule for obliterating the stamp on the return receipt called for a pen cancel, but this was countermanded on July 27 1850, at which point a new regulation demanded a regular canceller. This did not prevent some offices from using a special canceller whose current rarity is attributable to this function – in particular, line cancels from the pre-stamp period, which were sometimes used to fill in the town name on the form anyway, received some continued use on stamps in this way.

Another philatelically interesting practice regarding return receipts is the double obliteration of the stamps which is so common in the 1850s and 60s. The idea originated in the Prague postal directorate, which issued the order on October 29 1850, that the receiving post office had to re-obliterate the stamp paying the return receipt fee before returning the receipt to the sending office. This rule was made effective for all of Austria by an order dated May 15 1851, and remained in force until January 16 1866, when it was countermanded. The commonest examples of the use of this rule are perhaps the red Viennese registry cancels on the 10 kreuzer 1858 or 1861, together with a typically black cancel from the receiving post office. These usually come from forms originating from one or another court in Vienna.

In the numbering system which was current during much of the period under consideration, the general receipts were given the number D.S. (Drucksorte) 226, while the special ones for Viennese post offices were numbered 479. The Croatian bilingual receipts had D.S. number 235; the only Hungarian bilingual one seen up to now had no special number. The Italian (monolingual) receipts were, according to Müller, distributed from Verona or Venice, and participated in their own numbering system, which assigned them No. 47 R.L. The receipts which originated from courts rather than post offices were not usually endowed with form numbers, although the Landesgericht in Vienna used forms with No. 10, and a few types from the Handelsgericht in Vienna also had numbers of some kind, as did some of the stencilled forms from the Handelsgericht in Prague.

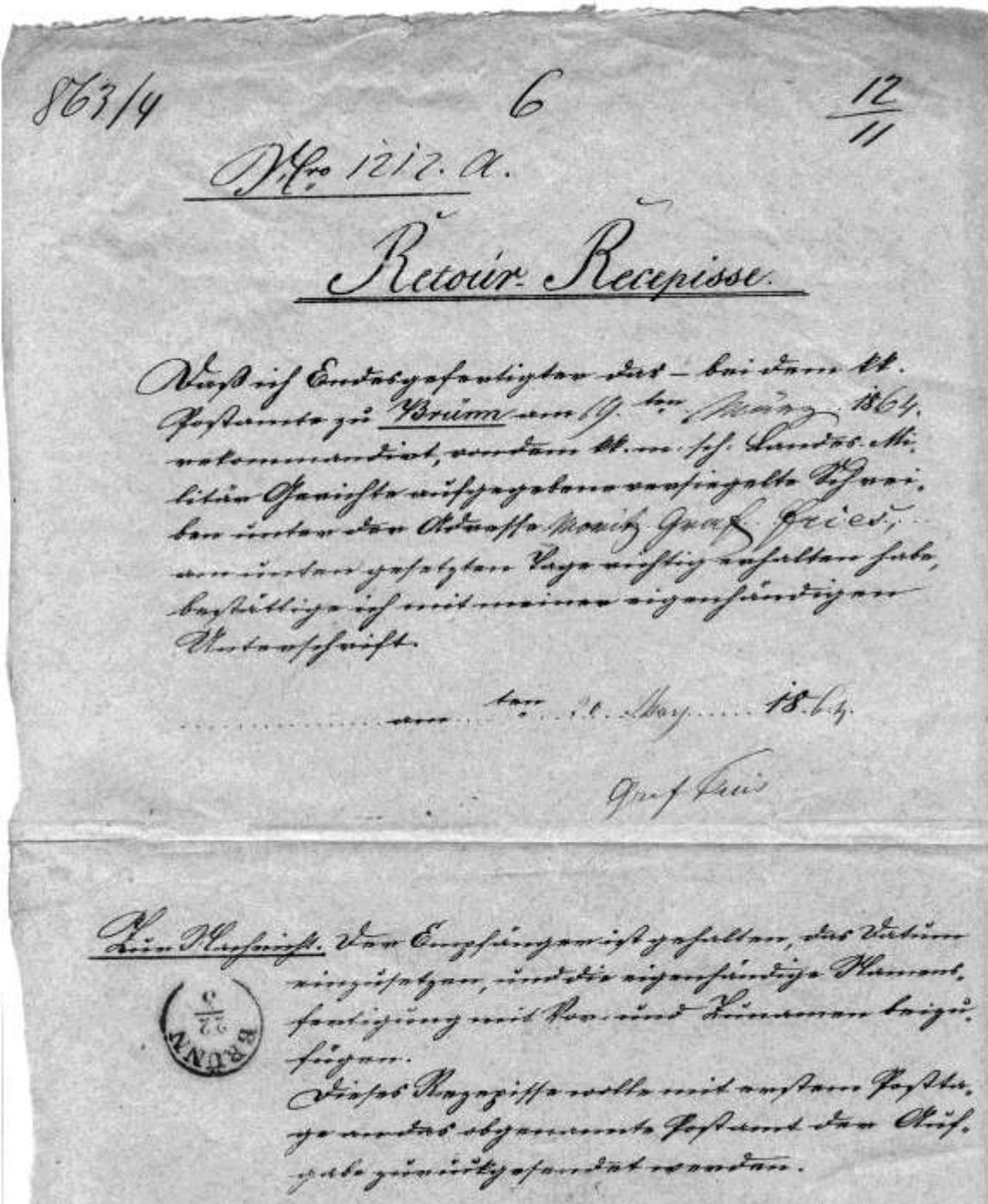
5 Return Receipts Issued by Courts.

We now discuss a variety of return receipts for registered mail from various courts. The volume of business in these courts apparently made it desirable for them to print their own receipts. Just like post-office receipts from the stamp period, they carry the typically double-cancelled (until 1866) stamp. [In addition, there is often a revenue stamp cancelled by a court seal; this was the fee which had to be paid for every piece of evidence introduced in a trial, and return receipts were very often legal evidence.] Receipts have been recorded from various courts, including:

- ❖ Handelsgericht (Commercial court) in Wien
- ❖ Landesgericht (State court) in Wien
- ❖ Bezirksgerichte (District courts) in Wien
- ❖ Bezirksgericht Innere Stadt in Wien (District court for the inner city, which is district 1 of Vienna)
- ❖ Handelsgericht in Prague. This is especially noteworthy since both German and Czech receipts are known.
- ❖ Komitats-Gericht (Regional court) in Szegedin



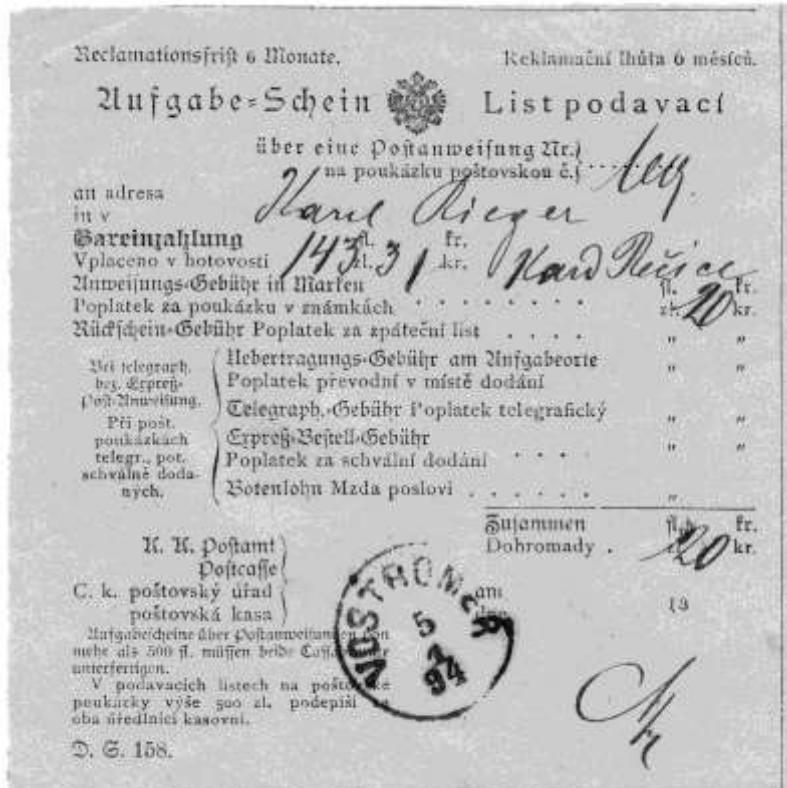
Retour-Recepisse from the Court in Königgrätz



Retour-Recepisse from the Military Court in Brünn, which was apparently hand-written on a stencil and then reproduced by mimeograph machine; the details are completed in thin writing in ink.

6 (E) Mailing Receipts for Money Orders.

According to Müller, money order service was introduced in Austria on March 15, 1867. He writes in "European Classics", Mercury Stamp Journal, No. 17, March 1951, p. 102: "On money order cards, postage stamps were used for the payment of the fee since their introduction on March 15, 1867, but only on money orders up to 25gld, for which the fee was 10 kr. On money orders for higher amounts, the fees had to be paid in cash and postage stamps were introduced only on May 1, 1870." We might



add that in May, 1870, the first card with an imprinted 5kr stamp was issued for money orders - before that cards without imprinted stamps had been used - but that the imprinting of a stamp was abandoned again shortly after 1878 and the money order stationery once again had no stamp on it. There was a fee of $\frac{1}{2}$ kreuzer for the form, but it was not represented by any philatelic imprint. But our subject here is not the money order form itself, rather the receipt (the one illustrated is DS158) which the sender got for the money order.

7 (F) Nachfrageschreiben (or Quästionen).

These forms were used to trace items which were presumed by the sender to be lost, strayed, or stolen in the mails. What kind of items? Registered letters, money orders, packages, and generally anything for which a record was supposed to be kept at every interchange point. Initially, there were separate forms for the Briefpost (letter mails) and the Fahrpost (money and packages). Furthermore, each service had two forms, a short one and a long one. These were distinguished by the number of possible entries for which the text was pre-printed. The short form, printed on both sides of one piece of paper, had room for four entries besides that of the originating office; the long form, with an additional piece of paper, had room for 24 entries.

A Nachfrageschreiben form from Italy is shown next.

