



The Afghan Bulletin



No. 18 May 2026

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The Northern Route via Kushka

In the British Journal of Russian Philately, Vol 105, p.4 (2015)¹ I gave a summary of what was then known about the mail route from Afghanistan northwards through the Russian town of Kushka in 1935-6. It was a one page article as only a handful of covers were known, all originating from Herat in western Afghanistan from where they travelled north to Kushka, an Afghan border town, then crossed to the town of the same name on the Russian side (Kushka, now Serhetabat in Turkmenistan), a distance of about 75 miles. The Russian Kushka was the country's southernmost military outpost and a railway line was extended there from Merv in 1898. There was therefore a direct link to the Trans-Caspian railway. I recorded a total of three, maybe four covers (one might have been double-counted as there was no illustration available). In the following decade a few more covers have come to light which means I can now record twelve (or maybe thirteen) and so it seems like a good time to revisit the subject and update the listing.

- The period of use can be expanded from 1935-6 to 1934-8. Given this five-year period it is perhaps surprising that there are not more covers around.
- There are two Russian Kushka transit postmarks. The commonest reads QUSQA at the top (said by Wilkins to be Uzbek), and KYIIKA in Cyrillic at the bottom. A second postmark, seen on only three covers so far (#1, 2 and 13), reads KYIIKA TYPKM at the top and QUSQA at the bottom. (NB: these Q and Q characters are not exact replications: see the images).
- All the covers are from Herat.
- All seem to be commercial mail (one a postcard).
- Remarkably nine of the covers are to the firm of M & D Aminoff in London – they dealt with, amongst other things, skins and furs, especially Karakul. The cover not seen (#7) may also be to them as it addressed “to a firm in London”, and the cover whose front has not been seen (#1) is also said to be addressed to London. It may be that only one cover (#8, addressed to Berlin) and the postcard (#2, to Czechoslovakia) were not sent to Messrs Aminoff.
- Eleven of the covers are sent at the normal 75 poul surface mail rate. One cover is registered (#8, at the normal 150 poul rate), and the postcard is 45 poul.
- Only one cover (the earliest) has an additional Russian transit of Tashkent; two covers (#4 and 5) have Moscow transits.

The chronological list of known covers and where seen is:

- 1 20th March 1934 (Ebay Oct 2017) to London. Kushka 23/3, Tashkent 1/4. 75 poul (Aminoff?) (NB Kushka pmk is Kushka Turkm in Russian at top, Qusqa in Uzbek at bottom)
- 2 23rd June 1934 postcard (of Meched, Iran) to Prague (Ebay?). Kushka 28/6. 45 poul (NB Kushka pmk is Kushka Turkm in Russian at top, Qusqa in Uzbek at bottom)

¹ Available to read/download on www.afghanphilately.co.uk

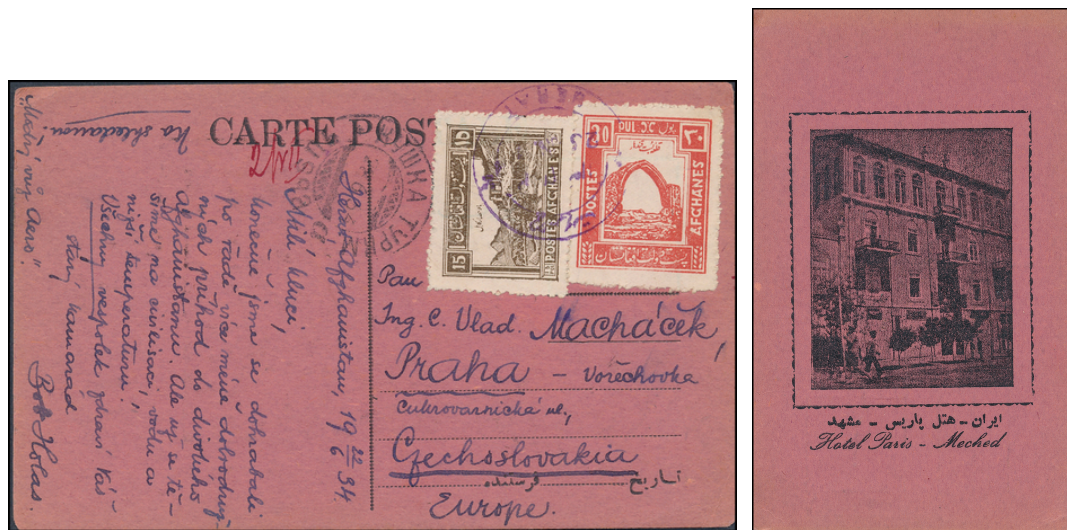
- 3 20th July 1935 (Gartner June+October 2017) to London. Kushka 3/8. 75 poul (Aminoff)
(could be same as #7 below as Kushka date is August)
- 4 13th August 1935 (Hopkins) "to a firm in London" 18/8 Kushka, 23/8 Moscow. 75 poul (Aminoff?)
(NB Wilkins says Kushka is 16/8 but the image is clearly 18/8)
- 5 13th August 1935 (Ebay?) to London. 18/8 Kushka, 23/8 Moscow. 75 poul . (Different to #4) (Aminoff)
- 6 20th August 1935 (Ebay May 2021) to London. Kushka 28/8. 75 poul (Aminoff)
(could be same as #7 below as Kushka date is August)
- 7 August 1935 (Hopkins/Wortman) "to a firm in London". 75 poul (Aminoff?)
- 8 16th July 1936 (BJRP Vol 105) to Berlin. Kushka 23/7, Berlin 3/8. 150 poul registered
- 9 19th October 1936 (Auction July 2023) to London. Kushka 24/10. 75 poul (Aminoff)
- 10 7th December 1936 (Auction March 2026) to London. Kushka 12/12. 75 poul (Aminoff)
- 11 30th March 1937 (Auction July 2023) to London. Kushk 3/4. 75 poul (Aminoff)
- 12 2nd February 1938 (Auction March 2026) to London. Kushk 11/2. 75 poul (Aminoff)
- 13 8th February 1938 (Auction March 2026) to London. Kushka 13th February. 75 poul. (Aminoff)
(NB Kushka pmk is Kushka Turkm. In Russian at top, Qusqa in Uzbek at bottom)

Covers #4 and 7 are referred to in a short piece in *Afghanistan 1840-2002 Postal History Handbook* (John M. Wilkins RFD* at pp.53-54) where he refers to an article by Hopkins in the Postal History Society's *Bulletin*, but gives no year or volume reference. It also refers to a "short article by Wortman" entitled *Northern Postal Routes from Afghanistan 1935*, but again gives no clue as to where the article appeared. I have so far been unable to locate either article.

- 1 20th March 1934 (Ebay, Oct 2017) via Kushka 23/3, Tashkent1/4, to London. 75 poul.
Front not seen.



- 2 23rd June 1934 postcard to Prague (Ebay?) via Kushka 28/6. 45 poul.



- 3 20th July 1935 (Gartner, June+October 2017) via Kushka 3/8, to London. 75 poul.



- 4 13th August 1935 (Hopkins) "to a firm in London" via Kushka 18/8, Moscow 23/8. 75 poul. Image (black and white) from Wilkins, the postmarks look as if they have been 'improved'.



5 13th August 1935 (Ebay?) via Kushka 18/8, Moscow 23/8. 75 poul . (Different to #4).



Messrs. **لندن مراد او د امین او**
M. & D. AMINOFF,
 57, Upper Thames Stre
LONDON. I

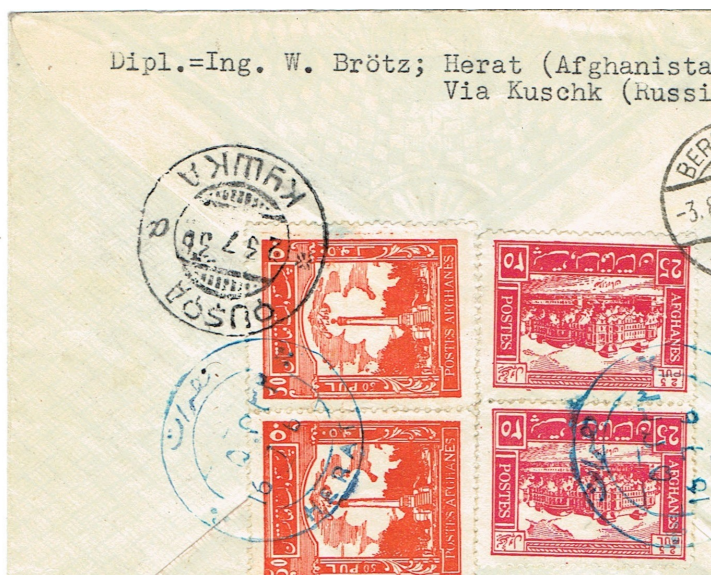
6 20th August 1935 (Ebay, May 2021) via Kushka 28/8, to London. 75 poul.



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7 August 1935 (Hopkins/Wortman) "to a firm in London". 75 poul
 NOT SEEN

8 16th July 1936 (BJRP Vol 105) via Kushka 23/7, to Berlin 3/8. 150 poul, registered.



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 GERMANY

9 19th October 1936 (UPA Auction, July 2023) via Kushka 24/10, to London. 75 poul.



Messrs. **لښن مراد او د اېمین او**
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LONDON, E

10 7th December 1936 (Corbitts Auction, March 2026) via Kushka 12/12, to London. 75 poul.



Messrs. **لښن مراد او د اېمین او**
M. & D. AMINOFF,
57, Upper Thames Street
LONDON, E

11 30th March 1937 (UPA Auction, July 2023) via Kushka 3/4, to London. 75 poul.



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LONDON, E

12 2nd February 1938 (Corbitts Auction, March 2026) via Kushk 11/2, to London. 75 poul.



13 8th February 1938 (Corbitts Auction, March 2026) via Kushka 13/2. to London. 75 poul.



I had wondered if the route was a seasonal one, but the larger number of covers now known shows that they are spread throughout the year so that seems to be discounted.

The route makes sense –it must have been quicker to go that way than travel from Herat by road 500 miles to Kabul, then on to Peshawar and down to Karachi to catch a boat to Europe. Unfortunately only the registered cover to Berlin (#8) has an arrival mark – it arrived in 18 days by surface mail. By comparison, the *airmail* cover below, sent from Herat to Munich via Kandahar and India in June 1939, took 20 days (15 days just to get to the Indian border):

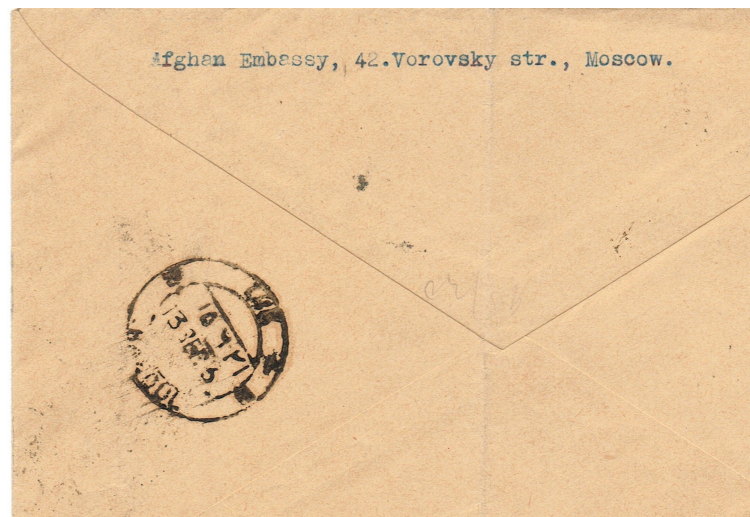
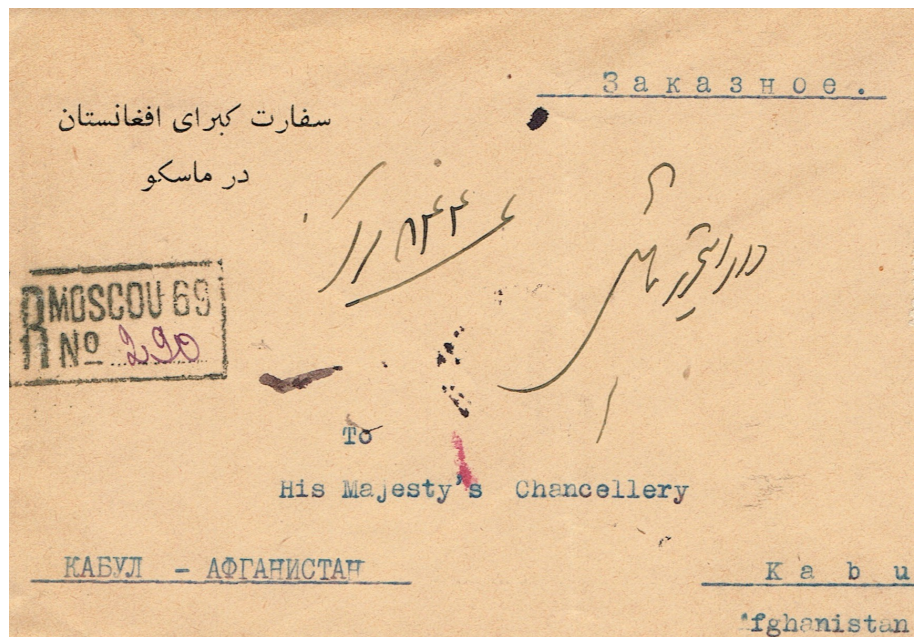


Herat 13th June, Kandahar 24th June, Chaman 27th(?) June, Munich 2nd (+3rd) July, 1939.

I would be pleased to receive details/scans of any other covers using this route so that they can be added to the listing, or the citations for the Hopkins and Wortman articles which I have so far been unable to find.

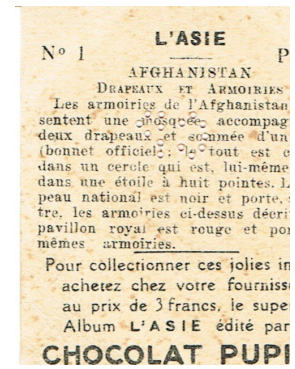
Continuing the mail through Russia theme, the cover below is an inbound cover from Russia to Afghanistan from 1936. Rather frustratingly there are no transit marks so the exact route cannot be determined, but Moscow – Tashkent/Termez – Mazar – Kabul seems likely. It was sent registered from the Afghan Embassy in Moscow to ‘His Majesty’s Chancellery’, Kabul and franked 50 kop (postage) + 80 kop (registration): the rate effective from 1st May 1936. The departure and arrival marks are: МОСКВА 24th August, KABOUL 13th September 1936 giving a 21 day transit time.

The cover is marked ‘заказное’ = registered and has a Moscow registry marking, but no other postal markings. There are no Indian transit markings, which there surely would have been for registered mail had it travelled that way. An additional 1 rouble would have been needed for airmail, so the only alternative seems to be that it travelled overland through Russia and, as it was heading for Kabul, it probably went via Tashkent/Termez rather than Kushka. The only other inbound cover from this period I know of is the airmail cover from Moscow via Termez to Kabul in February/March 1935 illustrated in Bulletin 15.



Chocolat Pupier Trade Cards

The French Chocolat Pupier brand, which dates back to the 1860s, often included trade cards with their products. When a collector completed a set of cards they could either redeem them for a gift, or mount them in a special album. In 1938 they issued a series of cards on the theme of countries of the world. The 'Asia' special album which accompanied these had 28 pages, each with space for 9 cards, the first page of which was 'Afghanistan'. It needed 256 cards to complete the album – that's an awful lot of chocolate!



Card back

AFGHANISTAN

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - DRAPEAUX ET ARMOIRIES

Les armoiries de l'Afghanistan représentent une mosquée, accompagnée de deux drapeaux et sommée d'un kalach (bonnet officiel); le tout est compris dans un cercle qui est lui-même placé dans une étoile à huit pointes. Le Drapeau national est noir et porte, au centre, les armoiries ci-dessus décrites; le pavillon royal est rouge et porte les mêmes armoiries.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN

L'Afghanistan fut reconnu comme royaume indépendant en 1925. Les Russes et les Anglais s'étaient longtemps disputés la prépondérance dans ce pays, auquel sa situation a fait donner le nom de « Vestibule de l'Inde ».

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - MOHAMMED ZAHIR CHAH MOHAMMED NADIR KHAN

Les dissensions des clans royaux amènent de fréquents changements de souverains en Afghanistan. C'est ainsi que le roi actuel, Mohammed Zahir Chah, a succédé à Mohammed Nadir Khan, assassiné. Ce dernier avait eu pour prédécesseur le roi Amanoullah qui avait été contraint d'abdiquer.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - Ruines d'une Mosquée Afgane

La religion dominante de l'Afghanistan est l'islamisme sunnite, de rite hanéfite. - La langue officielle est le persan; mais les dialectes parlés en Afghanistan sont nombreux et variés.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - GRAND BOUDDHA DE BAMIAN

Cette statue du Bouddha, qui est taillée à même le roc, sur la falaise de Bamiyan, près de Kaboul, est haute de 53 mètres. Une autre statue, du même genre, est située à proximité.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - Palais Royal à KABOUL

Les souverains afghans, et tout particulièrement l'ex-roi Amanoullah, ont beaucoup travaillé à l'embellissement de Kaboul. Le palais royal figuré ci-dessus est de construction toute récente.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - Costumes militaires

L'armée afghane a été organisée par des officiers instructeurs européens. Elle possède un armement moderne. Le service militaire est obligatoire en Afghanistan depuis 1923.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - PORTE de HÉRAT

Hérat, ville très ancienne, est, en raison de sa situation à proximité des frontières russe et persane, un centre commercial et un point stratégique très important entre la Russie, la Perse, l'Inde et l'Asie Centrale.

ÉDITÉ PAR LE CHOCOLAT PUPIER.

AFGHANISTAN - Costumes civils

Le vêtement des Afghans rappelle à la fois le costume des Hindous et celui des Persans; pantalon légèrement bouffant, veste longue et ample, turban. Ces vêtements sont généralement blancs.