

Go Forth

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As a thematic exhibitor with an Fédération Internationale de Philatélie (FIP) Large Gold medal, I can say that there is a huge difference between what you collect and what you exhibit. Thematic exhibiting has evolved so much in the last twenty years such that what may have gotten you a gold medal in yester year, may only give you a certificate of participation today.

Today thematic exhibiting is all about the story, it is not enough to exhibit a subject called “Trains,” but you need a story line, such as “How Trains helped build America” or something like that. Now, it is no longer simply about trains, and you need material that, in your opinion, has nothing to do with trains, and you don’t have the material either way. Fair point, no one can tell you what to collect, but an exhibit is a different story.

Now in my own exhibit, *The Jewish Homeland, our struggle for survival*, I want to use the Bible phrase: “The LORD said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will guide you to.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

To display that, I need the best item possible. In the international arena, stamps are pretty, but not always the best item to use. In earlier years, it was simple: there is an Israeli special cancel from 2009, with the Bible phrase, “Go Forth”. For many years, I was happy because that was the best item I could find. But is it?

A good friend said that I should look into French Maritime mail with the letters Q.D.C. Why? What? Huh? Well, Q.D.C. or Que Dieu Conduise, translates to "May G-d Guide" or as we say today “Go with the Lord.” This is in essence exactly what I am looking for -- G-d guiding someone to a specific place.

From approximately the end of the 17th century until the beginning of the 19th century, French maritime mail used marks such as QDC. These three letters, added

together with the name of the ship and the captain, showed that the fee for the mail was paid for, although it was quite often carried for free. They were then distributed locally, free of charge at the destination port. It seemed to be acceptable practice that the marks + the name of the ship + the name of the captain meant that postage had been paid, either free or not, so no further fee was charged. Similar markings do exist on maritime mail from other countries such as "Which God Protect" (WGP) (English), "Che Dio Guardia" (Italian), or "Que Deus Guia" (Portuguese), but in all fairness, I have never seen these or looked very hard.

I recently came across this item (figure 1), it is a letter sent in 1689 from Acre in what was then Turkish Syria (now Israel) to a Francois Venturini in Livorno, Italy. It was endorsed 'per Capt. Carbonneau' via Marseille with Q.D.C. notation. It is missing the name of the ship, but these were early days. The X or + shows that postage was paid for, by the sender.



Figure 1 1689 Letter from Acre

Francesco (also seen as "Monsieur Francois") Venturini was a merchant, banker and ship owner in Livorno and had agents in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as the Holy Land. He died in 1690, a year after this letter was sent.

The town of Acre during this period was a part of the Ottoman Empire. It was mostly ruined and neglected, having only a port which served as a busy trading post. There were only 200 houses in the entire town including a few European merchants. The ships leaving Acre consisted mainly of cotton but also ashes from local plants burnt to be used in the manufacture of glass and soap.

In an auction catalog of well know firm, a collection of these surfaced, known as the “Livorno” archives, but few are known from Acre. For me it was a nice addition to my exhibit and provided the perfect philatelic example of the Biblical phrase in my exhibition story. Unlike Traditional or Postal History exhibiting, you have a wide range of fields to choose from to illustrate your points in Thematics. So, research, keep your eyes open to new possibilities, and enjoy!