

## *Fabulous Firsts:* **Thurn & Taxis** (January 1, 1852)

*(This article is based on a series of articles by B. W. H. Poole in Mekeel's Weekly, January 30-February 13, 2015, with images added and notes in brackets. JFD.)*

Thurn and Taxis did not represent a political or geographical division of the German Empire, but is a designation applied to the stamps issued in connection with the postal monopoly held by the princely house of this name. In the *Stamp Collector's Magazine* for February, 1863, Mr. Mount Brown gives a short history of this house and its post to which I am indebted for much of the following information.

Thurn and Taxis was formerly an independent house in Germany which came originally from Italy. The oldest authentic historic ancestor of the family is considered to be Martin I della Torre, Lord of Valsassina, who accompanied the Emperor Conrad I in his crusade, and died a prisoner of the Saracens in 1147. Since 1259 eight della Torres were, one after the other, lords of Milan, until Guido the Rich perished in a feud with the Visconti family.

[In the 12th century, the Lombardic family Tasso (meaning Badger) was resident in the mountain village of Cornello now Cornello dei Tasso near Bergamo in Val Brembana. The badger (German: Dachs) became Taxis in the family coat of arms. In 1624 the family became counts (Grafen). In 1650 they changed their name to Thurn (Tower) und Taxis.]

Martino della Torre was one of the popular leaders, and appointed anziano or elder of the people of Milan. Such was his power that he sequestered the property of the see, and forbade the archbishop-elect to appear in Milan; for which he was excommunicated by the Pope. His successors continued to enjoy the popular favor for some time, until one of them was suspected of aspiring to sovereign power, and Ottini Visconti, the archbishop, seized the opportunity for striking a decisive blow. A combat ensued in which the

Torriani were defeated, and Visconti entered Milan a perpetual lord. So much then for the Torre, (or Thurn, to give it its Teutonic equivalent) branch of the family.

One of the sons of Guido the Rich, Lamoral I, settled in the territory of Bergamo, and took from the mountain Tasso (one of his possessions there) the name del Tasso and afterwards del Tassis, from which the German Taxis was derived. His great grandson inherited the possessions of his predecessors, united their titles, and was known as Roger I of Thurn and Taxis. He was knighted by the emperor Friederich III, in 1450, and founded the fame of his house by the establishment of a post in the Tyrol. The emperor, Leopold I, granted to Count Engen Franz von Thurn and Taxis (right) the dignity of Prince of the Empire. The grandson of the latter obtained the office of Imperial-General Hereditary Post Master, held in fee from the Empire.

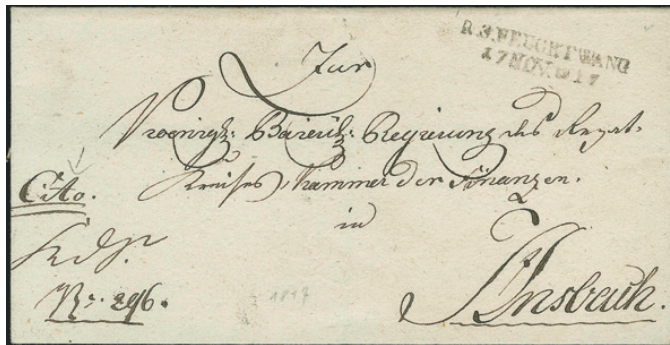


The Tyrol post established by Roger I marks him as one of the earliest postal benefactors. He must have known how to manage the post he established; for instead of it dying out, like so many other knightly ventures, it proved to be the initial step towards the foundation of a service whose functions only ceased with the Prusso-Austrian war of 1866.

So successful was the conduct of his enterprise that, in 1516, his son was charged by Maximilian I to form a post from Brussels to Vienna, certainly no mean undertaking in those days. In 1522, on account of the war with the Turks, an imperial post was established from Nuremberg to Vienna, which ceased on the return of peace. On this Charles V ordered Leonhard, Count of Thurn and Taxis, to establish a permanent post, which went from the Netherlands through Treves, Spires, etc., to Wurtemberg, Augsburg, and Tyrol to Italy. In 1543, he created the Count Oberpostmeister of the German Empire.

About the end of the sixteenth century the Thurn and Taxis post fell into disuse, but rose again under the favor of emperor Rudolf II. But the Palatinate, Wurtemberg, Saxony, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and other states of the empire formerly included under Thurn and Taxis, had in the meantime established posts in their own states, and refused to recognize the validity of the office. Thereupon Count Lamoral of Thurn and Taxis was raised to the rank of Baron of the Empire, and received the imperial post in fee for himself and male heirs, which was subsequently extended to his female descendants. It was under this somewhat attenuated postal monopoly that stamps were issued in 1852.

Folded letter with "R. 3. Feughtwang/27 Nov. 1817" two-line Thurn & Taxis datestamp (upper right), a late "Cito" Letter with manuscript "Cito" (haste) endorsement and registry number at left.



The Thurn and Taxis Post Office had its headquarters in Frankfort, and the extent of its monopoly about the year 1850 has already been detailed. From the latter it will be seen that the field of its operations extended to States in both Northern and Southern Germany.

In the Northern States the currency was in silbergroschen while in South Germany it was in kreuzer, thus necessitating two series of stamps.

Before, therefore, describing the stamps themselves some explanation of the monetary system obtaining in the states affected by the Thurn and Taxis postal administration seems desirable. In his article in *Gibbons' Stamp Weekly* for September 19th, 1908, Mr. W. P. Barnsdall gives a very clear exposition of the somewhat mixed currency then in vogue which I cannot do better than quote in extenso.

The Northern group, with a few exceptions, had for its unit the thaler, equal to about 3s (72¢) of our money [at that time]. This was as a rule sub-divided into 30 silbergroschen, groschen, or neugroschen, each of which was equivalent to 12 pfennige. Thus in English money 1 silbergroschen equalled 1/5d (2-2/5¢).

In Hanover and Brunswick the thaler was divided into 24 gutegroschen or 12 pfennige, whilst in Bremen 72 grote made up that unit. In Hanover in 1858 300 pfennige=30 groschen=1 thaler, thus coming into line except as regards the lowest denomination; whilst in Mecklenburg 48 schilling made up the thaler of 30 groschen. Schleswig, Hamburg, Lubeck, and Bergedorf employed the Hamburg mark (our 28¢) as the unit, it being divided into 16 schilling. Practically, therefore, all the currency of North Germany can be reduced to silbergroschen.

The monetary unit for the Southern States was the gulden or florin, divided into 60 kreuzer. This was at one time worth 2s (48¢) or two-thirds of a thaler, so that 3 kreuzer exactly equalled 1 silbergroschen. Eventually the value of the gulden fell to about 1s 8d (40¢), but, as will be seen later, the equation mentioned served as the basis of issue of concurrent series of stamps.

### **THE FIRST ISSUE.**

The Thurn and Taxis Post Office, as I have already stated, had its central administration at Frankfort, and, as it joined the German Austrian Postal Union in 1851, it became necessary to provide postage stamps, to conform to one of the regulations of the convention. This Postal Union, as has been pointed out in the history of the stamps of



*1/2 sgr, Scott 3; 1 sgr, 4 (on dark blue) and 5 (on light blue paper)*



2 sgr, Scott 6

Baden, Bavaria, etc., was of considerable importance since by it the postal arrangements over a large portion of central Europe were regulated



3 sgr, Scott 7

and uniform rates established.

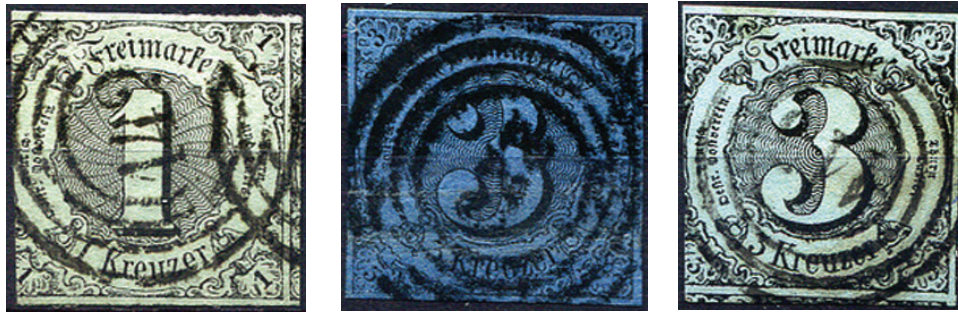
As the operation of the Thurn and Taxis office included states using two distinct currencies, two sets of stamps were necessary, one with values expressed in silbergroschen and the other with values in kreuzer. By the terms, of the Postal Union, stamps of 1 kreuzer were allowed to correspond to those of 1/2 silbergroschen—a distinct advantage to the southern states as will be seen from the currency equivalents quoted above.

The design adopted was somewhat similar to that used by Baden, Bavaria, and Wurtemberg about the same period. They were printed in a similar manner to the emissions of those States and on paper of different colors. A contract was made with a paper manufacturer at Hanau on November 15, 1851, for a supply of suitable paper; and a few days later another contract was made with the firm of C. Naumann, a Frankfort printer, for the construction of the plates and the printing of the stamps.

The stamps were issued on January 1, 1852, there being four values for each division, those corresponding of the different currencies being of the same color. The stamps of the Northern States, with values in silbergroschen, show large uncolored numerals of value on an engine-turned ground, the pattern of which differs for each denomination. Enclosing this centerpiece is a square frame measuring about 22 mm outside and 14 mm inside. In the upper part of this frame is "Friemarke," in German lowercase with capital initial; in the lower portion is the value in "Silb. Grosch.," in Roman lower case with capital initials; on the left is "Deutsche-Oestr. Postverein," and

on the right “Thurn and Taxis,” both inscriptions being in two lines of German diamond lower case with capital initials. In each of the angles are small posthorns and immediately below these, encroaching on the background of the centre, are small shields showing the numerals of value on a ground of solid color.

The stamps for the Southern States, with values in kreuzer, show similar inscriptions but on a circular band, the small posthorns separating the inscriptions. The large numerals of value in the centre are on an engine-turned ground of circular shape and, as in the case of the silbergroschen series, the pattern of this differs for each denomination. The rectangular shape of the design as a whole is obtained by the addition of ornamental scrollwork at each angle, there being small numerals of value in the centre of the decoration at each corner. The inscription at the left on all these stamps is simply the German rendering of “German Austrian Postal Union.”



*1 kr, Scott 42; 3 kr (on dark blue), Sc. 43; 3 kr (on blue), Sc. 44*

Mr. Westoby tells us that “the dies were engraved in the establishment of Naumann, in relief by chemotype, and the electrotypes were also made there.” There were



*6 kr, Scott 45*

150 electrotypes for each value and these were clamped together in a chase in fifteen horizontal rows of ten each to form the printing plates. They



*9 kr, Scott 46*

Thurn & Taxis  
 Southern District  
 1852-53 1kr black  
 on light green, 6kr  
 black on rose, and  
 block of four of 9kr  
 black on brownish  
 yellow (Sc. 42, 45,  
 46) tied by "148" in  
 target cancels and  
 "Reichelsheim 3/5  
 1857" circular dat-



estamp on folded cover to Pittsburgh Pa., also with French transits, red "New York Paid 30 May 19" credit datestamp and various transit backstamps.

were all printed in black on colored papers and were issued imperforate.

As these stamps continued in use until 1859-60, when the system of printing them in black on colored papers was abandoned, there were several printings, especially of the two lower values of each series. There are, therefore, several shades of each value. These stamps are scarce, in fine unused condition but still comparatively plentiful in used state as a study of catalogue quotations will show.

### **Reference List.**

#### **1852. Typographed. Imperforate.**

##### **Northern District.**

1. 1/2 sgr black on green, Scott's No.3.
  2. 1 sgr black on blue, Scott's No.4 or No.5.
  3. 2 sgr black on rose, Scott's No. 6.
  4. 3 sgr black on yellow, Scott's No.7.
- Southern District.
5. 1 kr black on green, Scott's No. 42 or 42a.
  6. 3 kr black on blue, Scott's No. 43, 43a or 44.
  7. 6 kr black on rose, Scott's No. 45.
  8. 9 kr black on yellow, Scott's No. 46 or 46a.

#### **THE SECOND ISSUE.**

On January 1st, 1854, the rate on single local letters, prepaid by stamps, posted and delivered within the area comprised in the Northern States, was reduced to 1/4 sgr and a stamp of this value was issued. It is similar in



1/4 sgr, Scott 1

design to the others of the series but has the value in the centre on a ground of wavy lines. It was printed in black on red-brown paper the size of the sheets apparently being



1/3 sgr, Scott 2

the same as those of the other denominations—viz. 150 stamps in fifteen rows of ten.

On July 1st, 1858, another new value was issued of 1/3 sir (equal to 4 pfennige), this being intended for the purpose of franking printed matter, posted and delivered within the district where the currency was in silbergroschen. This stamp was also of similar design to the others, the large central numerals being on a background of a pattern resembling a repetition of interlaced 3's. This, denomination printed in black on a, flesh colored paper was, like the others, issued imperforate.

**Reference List.**

**1854-58. Typographed. Imperf.**

**Northern District.**

9. 1/4 sir black on red brown, Scott's No. 1

10. 1/3 sir black on flesh, Scott's No.2.

**THE THIRD ISSUE.**



1/4 sgr, Scott 8

In 1859, the Thurn and Taxis office abandoned the use of colored papers and, instead, printed its stamps in color on white paper. As the stocks of those



10 sgr, Scott 14

on colored paper became used up those on white paper were substituted. But before any of the stamps of the existing values were issued on white paper, two new denominations were issued in both currencies, viz., 5sgr and 15kr





1 kr, Scott 47

printed in lilac, and 10sgr and 30kr printed in orange. The designs somewhat closely resemble those of the other stamps then current, but the side



30 kr, Scott 52

inscriptions are shown in one line of type instead of two as previously. The central background of the 5sgr and 15kr consists of a network pattern in which the figures “5” and “15” respectively are repeated in Arabic and Roman characters. The background of the higher values shows Arabic numerals only. There appears to have been but one large printing of these four stamps and that they were in but small demand is obvious from the scarcity of used specimens. These values were never officially rouletted, like the lower denominations, and those specimens that occasionally turn up rouletted or perforated are of a private nature and have no philatelic value.

The other denominations printed on white paper are exactly similar to those of the 1852-58 issues in design, the same plates being employed. All of the kreuzer stamps and the 1/2 and 1sgr appeared during 1859; the 2 and 3sgr appeared about November, 1860; while the 1/3sgr was not issued until 1863 owing to the fact that the stock in hand of the black on flesh paper was very large. The color of this value had by then been altered, but the others were printed in the same colors as those of the paper on which they were first printed.

The only exception is the 3sgr which was printed in red brown instead of yellow though the corresponding value in the kreuzer set duly appeared in yellow. I have never seen any explanation that would account for this change of color. Specimens of the 3kr are known printed in green—the color of the 1kr. These were, at one time, considered an error of color. Indeed, Mr. Westoby says of it, “This error was caused by printing a sheet in the wrong

color, and it was not discovered till the greater part of it had been sold; and as the sale was made in the evening by artificial light, this may account for the oversight." Most specialists now discredit this variety as an "error" and regard it as nothing more than a proof.

**Reference List.**

**1859-60. Typographed. Imperf.**

**Northern District.**

- 11. 1/4sgr red, Scott's, No.8.
- 12. 1/2sgr green, Scott's No. 9.
- 13. 1sgr blue, Scott's No. 10.
- 14. 2sgr rose, Scott's No. 11.
- 15. 3sgr red brown, Scott's No. 12.
- 16. 5sgr lilac, Scott's No. 13.
- 17. 10sgr orange, Scott's No. 14.

**Southern District.**

- 18. 1kr yellow green, Scott's No. 47.
- 19. 3kr blue, Scott's No. 48.
- 20. 6kr rose, Scott's No. 49.
- 21. 9kr yellow Scott's No. 50.
- 22. 15kr lilac, Scott's No. 51.
- 23. 30kr orange, Scott's No. 52.

**THE FOURTH ISSUE.**



*1/4 sgr, Scott 15*

In March 1861, the Prussian Postal Administration addressed a circular to the various States forming the GermanAustrian Postal Union proposing that uniform



*3 sgr, Scott 20*

colors should be adopted for stamps of the same or corresponding values. The proposal met with general approval and, accordingly, the States comprised in the Union agreed to issue stamps in the regulation colors as the stocks of those in use became exhausted. The colors adopted by the Union were green for the stamps of the 4 pfennige or 1/3sgr, yellow for those of 6pf or 1/2sgr, rose for those of



3 kr, Scott 53

1sgr, blue for the 2sgr and brown for the 3sgr. By this time the value of the gulden had deteriorated and was now worth about 40¢ U.S. currency instead of 48¢ as



9 kr, Scott 55

before. The 1sgr was, therefore, equal to 3 1/2kr; but in the Union 1kr was deemed equivalent to 1/3sgr and 3kr to 1sgr. The adoption of this “color scheme” by Thurn and Taxis necessitated five changes in the stamps for the Northern District, and but three for the Southern District as the 1kr was already green.

These changes of color began to take effect in 1862 when, in April, the 1sgr. appeared in rose. This was followed by the 1/2sgr in yellow in February, 1863, and by the 1/3sgr in green three months later. In September of the same year the 3sgr was issued in bistre and in January, 1864, the 2sgr appeared in blue. In July of the same year the 1/4sgr was printed in black, the alteration in this value evidently being made to prevent possible confusion with the yellow or bistre stamps. Corresponding changes were made during 1862 in the colors of the 3, 6, and 9 kreuzer. These stamps were all issued imperforate. As I have already stated there was an ample stock on hand of the 5 and 10sgr and 15 and 30kr so that no fresh printings of those denominations, were made.

### **Reference List.**

#### **1862-64. Types as before. Imperf.**

##### **Northern District**

- 24. 1/4sgr black, Scott’s No. 15.
- 25. 1/3sgr green, Scott’s No. 16.
- 26. 1/2sgr yellow, Scott’s No. 17.
- 27. 1sgr rose, Scott’s No. 18.
- 28. 2sgr blue, Scott’s No. 19.
- 29. 3sgr. bistre, Scott’s No. 20.

### **Southern District**

- 30. 3kr rose, Scott's No. 53.
- 31. 6kr blue, Scott's No. 54.
- 32. 9kr bistre, Scott's No. 55.

### **THE FIFTH ISSUE.**



*1/4 sgr, Scott 21*



*1 kr, Scott 56*

In 1865, it was decided to introduce the convenience of perforation, this taking the form of rouletting which was much in favor among the German States at that period. This work was entrusted to Naumann, the printer of the stamps, and the rouletted varieties began to appear in November. The



*3 sgr, Scott 26*



*9 kr, Scott 59*

rouletting was colorless and was done rather roughly, evidently it was somewhat of an experiment so far as Naumann was concerned. The electrotypes forming the printing plates were clamped much too closely together, so that there was no space left for the rouletting, which frequently cuts right into the design of the stamps. The colors were the same as before, though for the most part they were in paler shades, showing that new printings were made.

### **Reference List.**

#### **1865. Colorless roulette.**

### **Northern District**

- 33. 1/2sgr black, Scott's No. 21.
- 34. 1/3sgr green, Scott's No. 22.
- 35. 1/2sgr yellow, Scott's, No. 23.
- 36. 1sgr rose, Scott's No. 24.

- 37. 2sgr blue, Scott's No. 25.
- 38. 3sgr bistre, Scott's No. 26.

**Southern District**

- 39. 1kr green, Scott's No. 56.
- 40. 3kr rose, Scott's No. 57.
- 41. 6kr blue, Scott's No. 58.
- 42. 9kr bistre, Scott's No. 59.

**THE SIXTH ISSUE.**



*1/4 sgr, Scott 27*

The colorless roulette gave considerable dissatisfaction owing to the manner in which it cut into the stamps and in 1866 this defect was remedied by rearranging the electro-casts so that there was a space of about 1 1/2 mm. between them. In the spaces between the electros, both vertically and hori-



*3 sgr, Scott 32*



*1 kr, Scott 56*



*9 kr, Scott 59*

zontally, brass strips known as “printer’s dotted rule” were inserted. This rule has a sharp edge divided into short lines (in this instance 16 in the space of 2 centimetres) and stands a trifle higher than the printing surface of the electro-casts. Consequently when the stamps are printed the rule is inked as well and cuts into the paper forming the variety known as “rouletting in colored lines.” This system not only saves time, for the stamps are printed and perforated at one operation, but it has the advantage from obsolete for a period of no less than 43 years. This reprinting took place in 1910 but under whose authority I cannot trace. The list of stamps reprinted is as follows: a collecting point of view, of making the stamps perfectly

centered. The stamps, rouletted in colored lines, began to appear in February, 1867, and as soon afterwards the office was transferred to Prussia, used specimens of some of the values are quite scarce.

**Reference List.**

**1867 Rouletted 16 in color.**

**Northern District**

- 43. 1/4sgr black, Scott's No. 27.
- 44. 1/3sgr green, Scott's No. 28.
- 45. 1/2sgr yellow, Scott's No. 29.
- 46. r rose, Scott's No. 30.
- 47. 2sgr blue, Scott's No. 31.
- 48. 2sgr bistre, Scott's, No. 32.

**Southern District**

- 49. 1kr green, Scott's No. 60.
- 50. 3kr rose, Scott's No. 61.
- 51. 6kr blue, Scott's No. 62.
- 52. 9kr bistre, Scott's No. 63.

The above were the last stamps issued under the Thurn and Taxis administration, for in 1867, Prussia purchased the entire postal rights throughout Germany from the Prince of Thurn and Taxis for a sum of three million thalers, or about \$2,250,000. The use of the stamps ceased on June 30th, 1867, and on the following day Prussian stamps were used. The ordinary Prussian stamps served for those States comprised in the Northern District, for they were in the silbergroschen currency, but a special series, with values in kreuzer, had to be issued for use in those parts forming the Southern District.

*The most common cancellation found on Thurn & Taxis stamps is the 4 ring cancellation with a number inside. Different numerals were assigned to each town and exist from number 1 to 424 and 573. Shown here is a cover to New York with the 142 (Offenbach) ring cancel and an Offenbach c.d.s. upper right.*



## **REMAINDERS.**

That there were large remainders of the 5 and 10sgr, and 15kr and 30kr of 1859, and of many values of the 1862-67 issues is obvious from the low prices at which they are listed unused in current catalogues. Whether the whole stock of remainders was ever sold or not I have been unable to find out. In fact, very little seems to have been published on the subject of these remainders, the only note I can trace on the subject being that by M. Hanciau in an article in the *Monthly Journal* for July, 1903. I quote the paragraph in extenso :—

The office of Thurn and Taxis, after its suppression, placed its stamps and envelopes on sale at a certain reduction from face value; but it never, so far as I know, made up its mind to dispose of them in bulk, the stock being perhaps too large a one.

## **REPRINTS.**

None of the stamps of Thurn and Taxis were reprinted until they had been obsolete for a period of no less than 43 years. This reprinting took place in 1910 but under whose authority I cannot trace. The list of stamps reprinted is as follows:—

### **Northern District**

1852-58 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 1, 2 and 3sgr.

1859-60 1/4, 1/2, 1, 2 and 3sgr.

1862-64 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 1, 2 and 3sgr.

1865 1/2 and r.

### **Southern District**

1852-58 1, 3, 6 and 9kr.

1859 1, 3, 6 and 9kr.

1862 3, 6 and 9kr.

1865 1kr.

Of each variety 25 sheets were reprinted and as the sheets contained 150 stamps there were, thus, 3,750 copies of each value. The colors of the reprints are generally brighter than those of the originals and the paper is also thicker. They are, however, easily distinguished for each stamp has the letters "N. D." (neudruck=reprint) printed on the back in purple ink, and they are not gummed.

At the same time 25 sheets of each of the 10sgr, 15kr and 30kr were printed in black on blue paper.

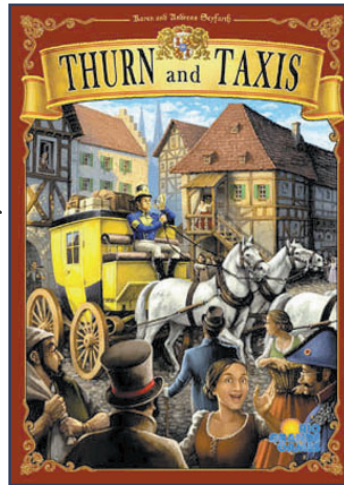
What the value of these reprints is nowadays, I am unable to say, but at the time of their appearance, they were sold in sets at the rate of about 16¢ per stamp.

**A few interesting notes:**

The house of Thurn and Taxis is one of the wealthiest in Germany. The family's brewery was sold to the Paulaner Group (Munich) in 1996, but still produces beer under the brand of Thurn und Taxis. (Above, one of the Thurn & Taxis beer trucks.)



Some collectors will have heard of a board game, "Thurn & Taxis" (shown). This is a game in which players build post office routes across Bavaria and surrounding regions. The board shows a map of all the towns, with roads leading from each one to some its neighbors. There are various colored regions around the board, most with one or two towns, and a large region with all the Bavarian towns in the center.



Finally: Did you know that the word Taxi comes from the Taxis Post coaches?



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