

The Printings of the first Greek Stamps

The Large Hermes Heads of Greece, 1861–1882

SYNOPSIS

Scope

The Large Hermes Heads were the first postage stamps of Greece, issued on 1 October 1861 (Julian calendar) in seven values from 1 to 80 lepta. They were first printed in Paris in 1861 and then, from late 1861 until 1882, at the National Printing Office in Athens. Changes of press, printing method, plate condition and paper produced a succession of distinct printings. The exhibit sets out to distinguish these printings and to show the stamps in use.

Plan

1. The Paris printing, 1861
2. The first Athens printings, 1861–1862
3. The consecutive Athens printings, 1862–1869, including the cleaned plates of 1867–1869
4. The later Athens printings, 1870–1882: special, thin, meshed and cream papers

What distinguishes this exhibit

Full sheets. The exhibit contains full sheets. The stamps were issued imperforate and were separated at the post-office counter with scissors, so intact sheets are a notable feature. They show the layout and the printing characteristics across the whole sheet, which single stamps and blocks cannot.

Covers. A large number of different covers, many of them hard to find, show how each printing was actually used in the mails. They document the postal use of the stamps and tie the printings to their period of use.

The first 20 lepta printed in Greece. Six examples of the 20 lepta blue from the first Athens printing of 1861–1862, printed in Greece without the control numerals on the back. This is the first 20 lepta stamp printed in Greece, and catalogues rate it extremely rare. Having six examples allows the shades, the background and the impression of this printing to be compared.

The Zante error. The 10 lepta orange on blue of the 1862–1867 Athens printings with the control numerals printed inverted on the face of the stamp instead of the back. A single sheet was sent to the post office of Zakynthos (Zante) in October 1867. Only about fifteen copies are recorded, and it ranks among the rarest varieties of the Large Hermes Heads.

Treatment

The exhibit follows the printings in chronological order. For each printing, stamps, blocks and sheets show the colour, paper and impression that identify it, and covers show it in use. The varieties and errors are placed in the printing to which they belong.

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The Large Hermes Heads of Greece, 1861–1882

Scope

The Large Hermes Heads were the first postage stamps of Greece, issued on 1 October 1861 (Julian calendar; 13 October in the Gregorian) in seven values: 1, 2, 5, 10, 20, 40 and 80 lepta. The design, a head of Hermes in a winged cap, was drawn and engraved by Désiré-Albert Barre, Chief Engraver of the Paris Mint, who also made the typographic plates by direct striking in a coining press.

The first printing was made in Paris in 1861 by Ernest Meyer. The plates were then sent to Athens, where the National Printing Office printed the stamps until 1882. Changes of press, printing method, plate condition and paper over these years produced a succession of distinct printings, which this exhibit sets out to distinguish. The stamps were issued imperforate and remained in use until 1886.

Plan of the exhibit

1. The Paris printing, 1861
2. The first Athens printings, 1861–1862
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4. The later Athens printings, 1870–1882: special, thin, meshed and cream papers



1 lepton, brown
Block of four



10 lepta, orange on blue paper
Block of four with sheet margin



80 lepta, carmine
Block of four