



Greece - Collecting with unlimited possibilities.

In 2011 it was 150 years ago since the first Greek stamps were issued. You probably know them well, they are called the Large Hermes Heads (LHH). Does the design look familiar? This is not surprising, because it was made by the Frenchman J.J. Barre, son of the creator of the famous French Ceres issue. Barre junior simply took the design of his father and changed the coin with the Ceres-head to that of Hermes. And of course the texture and value blocks, because they had to be in Greek. But for the remaining part the Greek edition is exactly identical!



The first issue of the LHH was printed in Paris. Then the plates were sent to Athens with the first printings of the stamps. There, inexperienced employees initially had the greatest difficulty to obtain a product of the printing press that approached the quality of the Parisian printings. But eventually they succeeded quite well for a time, in the period from 1862 to 1867. After that period the Athenian printers were no longer able to uphold to the previous fine and detailed printing quality. In the course of the years, one can observe a wide range of different quality and colour varieties in these issues of the Large Hermes Heads. The paper also differs and so do the colors of the 40

lepta value in 1871 and the issues from 1875 and later on. Sometimes the printing quality is so depressing that you wonder if you're not dealing with a fake stamp! Quality standards were not applied at the time; at most, the plates were cleaned occasionally. And that was applied with varying success. Greek printers were certainly not delivering the finest of quality in the 19th century.

In addition, the Greek government (and therefore the postal authorities) permanently faced tight budgets. At that time as well! Because of that, the post decided to print new stamps only when the need arose - rather than to provide a whole new series of stamps. Of course it was cheap to just keep using the same motif. The fact that all this time the stamps –until 1891!- did not have a perforation also helped reducing the cost. Copies with perforation are known, but they are of private origin and were never officially issued. Only on April 1st, 1886 the LHH have been replaced by their smaller successors. Specialized collectors collect these with railway and shipping-cancellations.



Both categories, large and small Hermes heads, are among the most beloved classic fields of collecting Greek stamps.



Greece, of course, was the cradle of Western civilization. This is reflected in a large number of beautiful designs, where many thematic collectors may find joy. Think of all the beautiful temples of the past, now ruins but still impressive. Like the Acropolis in Athens and the sanctuaries of Delphi, Epidauros, Dodona and Olympia. Many issues are devoted to these so beautifully situated archaeological sites.

In addition, we regularly see all kinds of artefacts that are of an artistic, religious or practical nature that were found during excavations, returning in different stamp-issues. History and culture lovers can enjoy themselves here!



This is also true for nature lovers: many Greek landscapes have in the past years been the subject of beautiful stamps. And in recent years, also the flora and fauna were included.



Greece is also the country of many islands. Landscapes of many of them have been used for illustrating stamps, but there are plenty of maps of the

islands depicted on stamps as well.



And also don't forget the influence of the Byzantine culture! Who does not know the famous Greek monasteries and their murals? These and many other notable buildings and the three known types of Greek columns are a wonderful motive for admirers.



An inexhaustible source are the Greek gods and mythology, honoured in the past by many temples and statues. But also plenty of vases, plates and coins are adorned with them. On that theme only, today you already can build an impressive collection. Do not forget the seven

wonders of the world, amongst them the colossus of Rhodes!



The god Hermes, the famous messenger of the gods himself is worth a separate collection! In addition, we know Greek art, but also Greek drama, theatres and famous Greek philosophers and writers like the legendary Homer, who made verse of the Battle of Troy and the Odyssey. And let's not forget the classic inventors and scholars!

And what to think of the Olympic Games, brought back to life again in 1897 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin after nearly 2000 years? Today we know the summer and winter games. Also a lot of vases, cups and bowls were found with images of sports activities of the ancient Greeks. They are depicted on many an Olympic issue. This is also a very popular subject, almost inexhaustible when you expand your collection to the issues of the countries where the Olympic Games once were held



Then, for the lovers of paintings, we have of course El Greco, the Greek painter who made his name in the 16th century in Spain and the Netherlands. And then the modern painters!

Today we know Greece as a republic, but not so very long ago it was a military dictatorship (Colonels regime!) And before that it used to be a kingdom. You can start a very fine collection of the Greek royal family, just like one of our own royal family. In the 1950's we see several issues with members of the Greek royal family (always stamps in large format!).



We already mentioned the coins. The classic antiquity is renowned for them. In this context we should also mention Alexander the Great. Did you know that the image of one of Italy's longest-running series of the 50's, 60's and 70's, the Syracuse-coin actually originated in a former Greek colony? Syracuse, Agrigento and Selinunte in Sicily were once thriving Greek trading posts!

And let's not forget that Italy for a long time occupied groups of Greek islands.



And then there is the period of occupation by the Italians and then the Germans during World War II.

Who is acquainted with the fact that Turkey has issued many mandatory stamps (not valid for postage, but solely to support charities), should have a look at Greece. Of this type of stamps more than hundred different were issued with beautiful motifs. But give it a try to collect them all



postally used, on letters, postcard, stationary and printed matters! At least they always provide a colourful display.

And regarding the subject of mail and postal history, Greece is also the country of long standing censorship. We see many military censors from the Balkan wars onwards, when many foreign powers were involved: French, British, Italians, Russians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Austrians and of course the Greeks themselves. And in the Second World War: the Germans, the Italians, the British. During the Colonels regime censorship was also applied. But since the Greek Drachme was not stable and often came under pressure, due to sometimes very hard economic conditions, a number of inflation periods (yes, you read that right!) brought with it, a monetary censor. Of the latter, there is a whole range of cancellations and markings!



Airmail lovers may find many beautiful series, again often with landscapes or mythological motifs. Some of them are very hard to find on letter or postcard. And collectors of postal stationary can enjoy themselves as well: there are the often beautifully illustrated picture postcards from the period of the emission of the Flying Hermes (1900/1912), and in the 70's and 80's there are beautiful airmail letters with illustrations of Greek archaeological sites

on the backside.



Also the collectors of local costumes and song and dance find among the Greece issues various attractive issues.

In short: when you start collecting Greece, a whole new world with many philatelic and post historic challenges will open up to you!