

## The issue for the Olympic Games of 1896

This year, the Olympic Games will be held in Beijing in August. A theme collected by many!



For this article we quote the Greek journal *Philoteia*. In September-October and November-December 2003 (edition 622 and 623), an article by *Mr Georgios Sparis* about the issue of the Olympic Games 1896 appeared, more specifically about its creation, the first printing and the unplanned second printing. The reason for this article was a purchase at the *Karamitsos* auction in April 2001 in the form of a postcard (fig. 1), which had been sent from Athens to Brussels on May 16, 1896 to *Mr Maurice Foulon* at the *Banque de Bruxelles*.



It referred to this special issue and stated the following (translated from French):

*Dear Sir,*

*The same story of the 60 Lepta is being repeated with the 40 Lepta. It definitely appears that there will be no more, since the printhouse claims that it can not guarantee the exact same stamps .... Nevertheless, to the present moment, we know nothing with absolute certainty. (Illegible) initials.*

The sender has unfortunately remained unknown, but the text sparked *Sparis's* curiosity. He went in search of the origin of this special series (unprecedented at the time!) and came across the *Circle Timbrophiles d 'Athènes*, which in its meeting of February 12, 1895 launched the proposal to the crown prince (Constantine), who was also president of the Olympic Committee, to use his influence with the government, to make a commemorative issue appear on the occasion of the games. That got the ball rolling. C.N. Papamichalopoulos, a Member of Parliament, formally submitted an initiative proposal on July 15 of that year. His idea was to use a series of photos of ruins of ancient buildings. However, that idea was not accepted. The images, values and details were finally determined by a Royal Decree of November 9 of that year. An adjustment of the colours for the values of 25, 40 and 60 Lepta and the 2 Drachmas



and a different stamp size (22 x 38 mm instead of the previously agreed 20 x 42 mm) delayed the printing. The order for the print went to the National Print of France in Paris. The day of release was finally set for March 25, 1896. It was previously intended to have the series ready for sale at the ticket booths 25 days before the games were to start, but that was not realistic. In view of the extremely short time schedule, it turned out to be impossible to deliver the ordered quantities in one batch. On March 19, 1896 (6 days before the scheduled release date!) The first delivery arrived in Athens. The 20 Lepta formed a major part of this, while of the values 1, 2, 5 and 10 Lepta only limited amounts were available.

*1 Lepton in block of 4,  
with special (ship)cancel Piraeus*

What stands out with all stamp values are the different colour nuances, but whether they can all be traced back to the different print-runs is the question.

For example, of the 10 Drachmas stamp, only 870 sheets were produced, of the 5 Drachmas 1786, and of the 2 Drachmas 2630 sheets. Not really numbers needing different print-runs, one would say. With the help of information acquired at the Royal Philatelic Society in London an attempt has been made to clarify the course of events.



According to a publication in *Le Timbre Poste* on March 19, 1896, the numbers supplied of the lowest values up to and including 20 Lepta remained far behind what had been ordered earlier. There is no indication that extra print-runs were required for the remaining values.



*The 10 and 20 Lepta in different colour nuances*



With the 40 and 60 Lepta values there is a different course of events. Only a limited number had been ordered in advance. These values corresponded to the rate for a long-distance letter of the 2nd weight (up to 30 grams) and a second weight registered long-distance letter. When collectors noticed this, some tried to obtain larger quantities for speculative reasons. As a result, according to some sources, the 60 Lepta was no longer available the day after it appeared at the counter, according to others this was not the case until a few weeks later. Anyhow, this resulted in a direct response from the government in the form of an order to supply an extra printing.



The 40 Lepta had a similar course of action. The consecutive printing would have been delivered 3 to 4 days later, while on June 15, 1896, a second additional print-run of the 60 Lepta was already in circulation, together with a consecutive printing of the 40 Lepta and the 1 Drachma. Several additional print-runs are known for the lowest values, up to and including 20 Lepta. Probably the other denominations, those of 25 Lepta, 2, 5 and 10 Drachmas, were still printed in



one single print-run. The significant colour differences, especially noticeable in the 2 Drachmas value (not to be confused with the forgery!), would be the result of different ways in which the printing plates were inked. As a result, colour nuances may also occur with stamps of other denominations from one and the same print-run.



*A rare mark on the 10 Drachma: the Pyrgos-Patras train cancel*

Sparis has investigated the circulation numbers of the different values and - due to a lack of official source documents - came across different estimates. Could the confusion be caused by a difference between *sold stamps* and *printed stamps*? After all, a number of

values were later overprinted with a different value and / or overprinted and used up as revenue stamps.

ΕΚΤΥΠΩΘΕΙΣΕΣ ΠΟΣΟΤΗΤΕΣ PRINTED QUANTITIES									
	BRUNEL	KOHL	ΜΕΛΕΤΗ & ΤΡΩΡΥ STUDY & ΤΡΩΡΥ	ΚΟΥΜ COUM	ΡΑΦΤΟΠ RAFTOP	ΝΑΛΤΣΑΣ NALTSAS	FILATELIA ITALIANA	ΒΛΑΣΤΟΣ VLASTOS	ΕΡΜΗΣ HERMES
	20	21	22, 23	24	25	26	27	28	29
1 λ.	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	3.933.750	4.000.000
2 λ.	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	2.494.150	4.000.000
5 λ.	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	3.000.000	2.992.500	3.000.000
10 λ.	2.000.000	2.000.000	2.000.000	2.000.000	2.000.000	10.000.000	2.000.000	1.981.440	2.000.000
20 λ.	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	4.000.000	3.999.950	4.000.000
25 λ.	2.000.000	2.033.670	2.033.670	2.033.670	2.000.000	2.033.060	2.000.000	1.929.700	2.033.670
40 λ.	150.000	153.360_?	153.360	153.360	153.000	153.360	159.000	70.620	150.360
ανατύπωση / reprint	-	?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
60 λ.	20.000	23.760	23.760	23.760	23.000	23.760	100.000	86.380	23.760
ανατύπωση / reprint	-	?	-	229.240	77.000	?	100.000	86.380	221.250
1 Δρ.	200.000	221.250_?	221.250	221.250	221.000	221.250	221.000	120.550	221.250
ανατύπωση / reprint	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 Δρ.	150.000	157.800_?	157.800	157.800	158.000	157.800	158.000	82.060	157.600
5 Δρ.	100.000	107.160_?	107.160	107.160	107.000	107.160	107.000	56.050	107.160
10 Δρ.	50.000	52.200_?	52.200	52.200	52.000	52.000	52.000	16.060	52.200

And - incredible as it may sound - stocks were also offered to the trade under nominal value at the end of the 19th century. The Greek state badly needed the money to be able to get out of the costs ...

*5 Dr with imprint 30 Lepta, used up as a revenue stamp*

