

## The series on the occasion of the 1906 Intercalated Games (or Olympic Games 1906) by Frans Bruna & Frans van Limpt

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Originally published in *Hermes* 202 (February 2024). Now modified and supplemented, among other things based on additional information from an article in *Philotelia* 746 (May/June 2024) about an exhibition in the Louvre, with the cooperation of the Postal Museum in Athens. The original coins were not on display in the Louvre. The same goes for some of the other illustrated items.

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Greece was not at all satisfied about the organization of the Olympic Games in 1900, in Paris. These were overshadowed by the World Exhibition that was held at the same time and close by; the organizers were not very motivated, and the public showed little interest. The same applied to the Games of 1904 in St. Louis, also an addition to a World Exhibition; Only 13% of the participants were non-native Americans. Greece wanted to show that this could be done better - just like in 1896 in Athens - and organized for 1906 "the Second International Olympic Games of Athens". Twenty countries participated, the organization was better, and the games opened for the first time with a parade of participating nations. Many heads of state travelled to Athens (as in 1896), as evidenced by the postcards that are still for sale today.

Just like in 1896, a special series of stamps was produced with images based on proposals by Prof. G. S. Svoronos of the Numismatic Museum in Athens. He had studied in Paris, Berlin and London, and had studied the collection of Greek art in the British Museum. For this series of stamps he selected images of ancient Greek art, mainly on Greek vases and also some ancient coins. But the subjects were also inspired by the reliefs on the Temple of Zeus in Olympia (about which much is known but which are poorly preserved). These reliefs (metopes) depict the twelve so-called Labours of Herakles, which you might know from the series *Hellas* 1145-1155 from 1970.

Michalis E. Tsironis has shown that Svoronos selected the images, that the design was made by the well-known artist E. Gilliéron, and the engravings by E. Mouchon (according to an article by him in the collection *Opus XIII* from 2013).<sup>1</sup> Their style is different from the 1896 stamps!

### The pictures Please note: The short descriptions in the *Hellas* catalogue do not suffice

- **1 and 2 lepta** (*Hellas* 189&190): discus thrower, discus in right hand; on the left a tripod with a prize on it; reference to the Games (in honour of Apollo and Poseidon) on the neighbouring mainland (also depicted on *Hellas* 2303 from 2004 and *Hellas* 1540 from 1980) – After an extremely rare coin (triple siglos, Persian currency) from the island of Kos; I show an example of this coin type.



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<sup>1</sup> And in his book "The Olympic Games Issue 1906" (Athens 2007) pp.150-159.

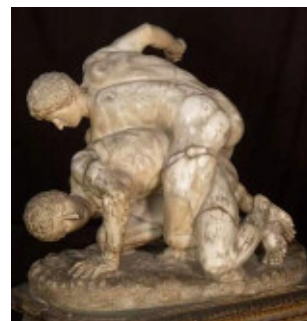
- **3 and 5 lepta** (Hellas 191&192): long jumper with weights in his hands – after a bronze disc from the collection of the British Museum in London (not in the exhibition).



- **10 lepta** (Hellas 193): Nike (Victory) with caduceus (staff, known from the god Hermes) – after a silver coin from the ancient Greek city of Terina (Calabria); I show an example of this coin type.



- **30 lepta** (Hellas 196): wrestlers, with the Acropolis and Ionic columns in the background -- after an alabaster statue found in Rome, now in the Uffizi in Florence (it is a Roman copy of an ancient Greek statue attributed to Lysippus).



- **25 lepta** (Hellas 195): Heracles wrestles with Antaeus, son of the Earth who gave him strength - after an ancient Greek painting on the “crater of Eufronios” (wine/water mixing vessel, from a tomb in Cerveteri) in the Louvre.

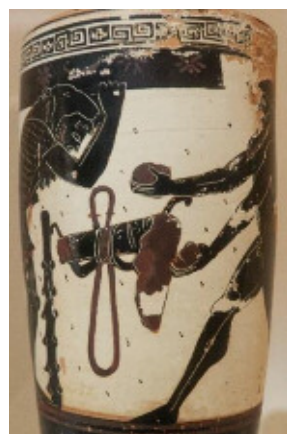


Hellas 1155

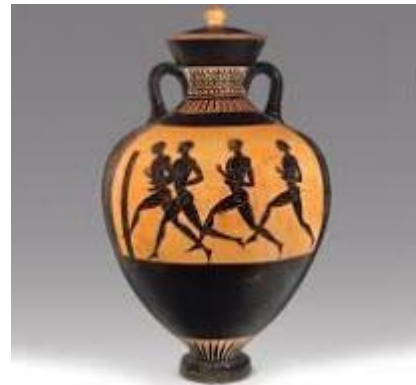
- **40 lepta** (Hellas 197): winged goddess Nike (Victory), Image after a silver coin from the ancient Greek city of Terina (Calabria), not in the exhibition. Here is a somewhat similar example.



- **20 and 50 lepta** (Hellas 194 and 198): Atlas carries the dome of heaven on his shoulders and gives Heracles the golden apples of the Hesperides -- as depicted on the ‘lekkythos (oil flask) of Eretria’ (according to the article in Philotelia), now in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.



- **1 – 2 – 3 drachma** (Hellas 199-200-201): runners. Image on an amphora of “the Berlin Painter”. In fact, the name of the painter is unknown. The Philotelia article does not mention a museum. Amphoras of this type were awarded to the winners at the quadrennial Panathenaic Games in Athens, filled with olive oil.



- **5 drachma** (Hellas 202): At an altar stands a winner at certain Games, with the sacred flame, accompanied by two more winners, and the goddess of Victory. Made after a painting on an ancient Greek vase (‘crater – mixing vessel wine/water - of Nikias’) now in the British Museum (pic. Wikimedia Commons).



## *The Stories.*

**Lepta 1 2 3 5 10 30 40** I have nothing to add to the description of these stamps.

**After this we enter the series of stories of the “Labors of Herakles”** (Hellas 1145-1155), described by Frans van Limpt – Read the full article in Hermes 138 of March 2008!

**Lepta 25 Herakles and Antaios.** In short: Herakles had to prove to King Eurystheus that he was a demigod, by performing a number of almost impossible feats. One of these is defeating the giant Anteus / Antaios. Frans describes it as follows:

On one of his journeys on behalf of Eurystheus, Heracles came into contact with the giant Anteus; he was a son of Poseidon and Mother Earth, and he had the nasty habit of forcing strangers to wrestle with him until they were exhausted. He was not only agile and strong, but also had the advantage that every time he touched the Earth, his strength returned. When Heracles was anointing himself with oil in the Olympian manner, he noticed that Anteus was taking a sand bath and that his muscles were swelling up enormously. Because Heracles quickly realized what this meant, he lifted the giant high above his head, cracked his ribs and, despite the groans of Mother Earth, held him in that position until he died.



Hellas 1155

**Lepta 20 and 50** The golden apples of the Hesperides.

Again, we make use of the description in Hermes 138 by Frans van Limpt:

Far away in the West, beyond the Strait of Gibraltar, there was a mysterious island with a garden on it, in which grew a tree that bore three golden apples; these were a gift from Mother Earth to Hera on the occasion of her marriage to Zeus. Heracles managed to extract the secret of their location from Nereus, an old sea god. After all sorts of adventures and wanderings, during which he even ended up near the Caucasus, he succeeded, with the help of the demigod Atlas, in gaining possession of the apples. After showing them to Eurystheus, he returned them to their rightful owners, the gods. The illustrated stamp shows the moment when Atlas returns with the golden apples, to hand them over to Heracles, who had been carrying the globe (or dome of heaven) on his shoulders during his absence.



Hellas 1147  
with a similar image.

**The images in the series of stamps on the occasion of the 1906 Olympic Games promote the idea that the athletes, like Heracles, will give the utmost of their powers.**

