

2.14. PHILATELY

By *Thimi Nika*

Philately in Albania began in the second half of the 19th century. The documents of the time and the current studies state that the first post office under the administration of the Ottoman occupants was opened in Shkodra in 1822, almost 18 years before the first distribution of the mail stamp in the U.K. (1840) and around 41 years earlier than the release of the first stamp of the Ottoman Empire (1863). The first Albanian stamp had two concentric circles, inside of which was written the name of the city in Turkish. Post offices were later opened in Gjirokastra (1866), in Tirana (1871), in Tepelena (1876), in Korca (1890), etc.



Postal card traveled from Gueuridje (Korca) to Dusseldorf, Germany

The post offices of the Ottoman occupants were functional until 1913. By the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, there were two navy organizations in operation. The Austrian navy of Lloyd and the Italian navy of Pulia conducted the postal service in Shkodra, Durres, Vlora, Shengjin and Saranda.

At the beginning of May, 1913, the first Albanian national stamp was released. The six first stamps issued by Government of Ismail Qemali are of special interest. The Minister of Postal Services was the famous philatelist Lef Nosi who dedicated special care to the postal services in general and to the production and release of the stamps, in particular. On July 7, 1913 the Temporary Government of Vlora made a request for membership in the International Postal Union (IPU), which was obtained after 8 years, and by October 1922, Albania became a member of the IPU. During this period there was a high demand of stamps and the Ministry of Postal Services was very efficient and practical.



Envelope mailed from

The first release, or the first stamp, was not like common stamps of today. It was in the shape of a black seal with which 2,232 envelopes were stamped. This stamp-seal cost was 1 "grosh" (i.e. Albanian "cent") and was sold in 14 postal offices, under the jurisdiction of the Vlora Government. The release date is still disputable, but it is either on May 1, 1913 or May 5, 1913.



The second stamp released is similar to the first one. Here again, we have the stamp-single seal, round shaped, with two concentric circles inside which is written: "Postat e Qeverries se Perkoheshme te Shqiperise" ("The Stamps of the Temporary Govern-

Shkodra to Venice
First Albanian national stamp on an envelope from Elbasan to Qukes



Second Albanian national stamp- seal on the envelope from Dukës to Elbasan

ment of Albania"). Its price is not on the stamp, but there are references that it was valued again 1 grosh. This stamp was used from May to November 1913. Aside being pressed on the envelope, this stamp was also cut and stuck on envelopes. This stamp has also been falsified on several occasions by various speculators.

The third issue has an important place in the history of Albanian philately, and remains the most demanded from the philatelists because of its high collectors value. This release was used in the postal offices from June 16 until October 20, 1913. For this release the Albanian post used a considerable amount of stamps from the Ottoman occupying administration during the years 1909- 1910, which were not used earlier. On top of the stamp was the "sursazhi": a double headed eagle and below it the word "Albania". Their values varied from 2 para to 50 piastra, while the productions of 16 pieces (50 piaster) up to 11,607 pieces (the highest production of the 20 para value).



First stamp, plate of the third emission, delivered

Aside the their low production, especially for some of the values, their rareness is related also to the various colors of sursazhimit: black (dominating color), light blue, red, red to brown and violet. This release, the first to be rubbered, due to the times when it came out it has many mistakes, especially in cases of reverse sursazhimit, which are in high demand by national and foreign philatelists. The 50 piastra stamp of this emission in the Michel catalog is of 45,000 German marks exchange value.

As in other countries, the philately of Albania is closely related to its history, and even history has found its adequate reflection in philately. This is better testified between the two World Wars. To note is that we can mention the exact number of releases in the years 1914- 1919, or during World War I. They have been mainly releases of local stamps, such as in Shkodra, Korca, Berat, Vlora, Gjirokastra, Tepelena, Himara, Elbasan, etc. A variety of issues were made by the occupiers in Albania during World War I. These releases circulated together with the dating seals that have writings in the language of the occupier.



An envelope delivered on May 9, 1915 from Durrës, Albania to Bari, Italy. Stamps are from the Central Albania Government of Esat Pashe Toptani

During the years of 1921, 1926, 1932, 1935 and 1936, no stamps were issued.

Aside the low number of issues, the subject has been quite narrow, with the dominant subject being political. Following the tradition of other countries, the stamp displayed more often the portrait of the King Ahmet Zogu (in the period until 1939 most of the stamps have his portrait), while during the Italian occupation, is frequent the

portrait of Victor Emanuel III. The only theme, if can be called as such, were the air stamps, having fixed an airplane figure showing that they served to the air mail, which also corresponded with the high value they had.

The Albanian philately of this period is very interesting. It can be mentioned many issues that have become very rare like the envelopes with the golden seal of stamps with the portrait of Skanderbeg; the envelope with the seal of the Finance Office in Elbasan; the envelope with the seal of Tepelena; the envelope with the seal of Berat; the Gothic release with the sursazhin "Mbr. Shqiptare" ("Albanian Kingdom"); the stamps of the Provisional Control Commission of Korca; the emission of March 29, 1915 dedicated to the setting of the flag in the Shkodra's fortress as well as those stamp issued from the Greek, Italian and German occupation, especially the issue of September 14, 1943 that is noticed for the diversity of mistakes.



Air mail envelope. Stamps with the portrait of King Zog and Queen Geraldina

An impressive tableau presents the period after the Liberation of Albania (1944) until the 1990's. It is noticeable for many issues (an average of 10 issues per year) for a right proportion of national and international themes, for many images on each issue, etc. Generally, the stamps are politicized and ideological. There are also many issues for Enver Hoxha, repeated ones for the 5th anniversary of commemorative historical events, of high production.

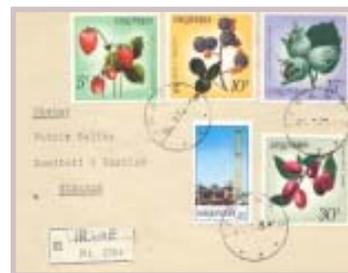


Envelope with stamps by the Provisional Control Commission delivered from Korca to Elbasan on April 16, 1914

In the last decade, aside the oscillations of the transition years, '91-'93, serious commitment has been made to depoliticize the stamps; the quality of their production is also better, since they are printed in Switzerland and Greece. In general, there have been optimal indicators for the production of the stamps driven by the demand and collection.

The catalogue of Albanian stamps numbers more than 2,500 different stamps.

The first Albanian philatelists are from the Albanian Renaissance period. among the most notable to list are: Thimi Mitko, Sami Frasheri, Ndoc Xhuxh e Murat Toptani, and later on Luigj Gurakuqi. However the father of Albanian philately is Lef Nosi who was also the first Minister of Postal Services and who was distinguished for conceptualizing and releases of the first Albanian stamps. The Albanian philately also has an issue with his portrait.



Various stamps from 1970-1973

Albanian philately had a better development between the two World Wars. From the documents of the time, it is found that in this

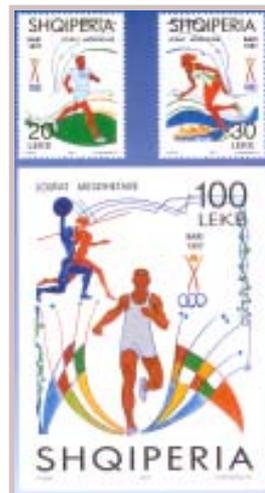
period the first shops for selling stamps opened in Shkodra, Korca and Tirana. In the daily press there were many advertisements for exchanging stamps, and among the best traders were: Zef Prenushi from Shkodra. He was a well known trader and expert of mail stamps, a competent professional and member of the main European cities' philately networks. Aurel Ballamaci was an Albanian stamp trader in Torino, Italy and had his philately shop for 40 years.



a- Stamps with the Albanian Codexes



b- 85th anniversary of the Albanian Post-Telegraph administration



Mediterranean Games, Bari, Italy, 1997

The philatelists became much more organized after the Liberation of the country and in 1947, the Philately Club was established in Shkodra; in 1949, the Philately Group was established in Korca; and the Philatelists' Society was established in Tirana in 1959. Such organizations also existed in Vlora, Puke and other regions. The Federation of the Albanian (stamp) Collectors was set in 1991 and has many philatelist members. This federation became a member of IPF (International Philately Federation in Zürich, Switzerland) and the EFPS (European Federation of Philately Societies in Den Haag, The Netherlands) in 1994. The Albanian Federation of Collectors has its own press "Koleksionisti" (the Collector) and the first edition was published in 1998.



Envelope of the Albanian State Department of Mail and Communication from May 5, 1996

Philately exhibitions in Albania have always been very rare. During the 1990's there was only one national exhibition, and was organized as "KOLEKSPO '93". But there is considerable participation of the Albanian philatelists in international exhibitions presenting rare collections and have been awarded with 28 various medals, among

them 7 first place or gold medals. Albanian philatelists have participated in exhibitions in Greece, Turkey, Romania, Norway, Israel, Russia, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, France, Austria, U.K., Bulgaria, China, Spain, Belgium and Japan.

The most distinguished philatelists are situated in Tirana as well as in other main centres of Albania. Among the best are Robert Ballauri, Ferik Ferre, Shefik Osmani, Niko Xhare, Vasil Xhitomi, Aleksander Josifi, Sokrat Bozo in Tirana, Thoma Pepon, Kristaq Jorgji and Igli Gjancin in Korca, Kole Gjinajt and Idriz Fishtes, Gjush Daragjati, Jul Daragjati and Luigj Shabani in Shkodra; Rudi Nosi and Argjir Panariti in Elbasan, etc.

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