

THE POSTAGE STAMPS OF THE SOVEREIGN MILITARY ORDER OF MALTA

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IN recent months a number of articles have appeared in the European philatelic press about the stamps of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. On the one side some contributors view these stamps as merely another attempt to squeeze naive collectors. Others, on the contrary, think that the Order of Malta must be considered as an independent country with the full right of issuing its own stamps and that these merit inclusion in collections. In this article we would like to give the results of the research we have carried out.

A SPOT OF HISTORY

The Sovereign Military Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta was founded in the early years of the 11th century by some merchants from Amalfi. These erected a church and a hospice in Jerusalem to house pilgrims visiting the Holy City. At the time of the Crusades the "religious" character was transformed into that of a "Military - Hospital'er" body. Later on the Order moved on to Acre and from there transferred to Cyprus where it remained until 1310. In that year the Order captured Rhodes and there established its headquarters until it was driven out by the Ottoman Turks in 1523.

In 1530 the Emperor Charles V granted Malta in fief to the Order. That year saw the commencement of a new era for the

Knights. Following the successful defence of Malta by the Knights and by the Maltese in 1565 the Order expanded its fleet and exercised an important role. In 1798, however, Napoleon occupied Malta and drove the Order away from the Island. After the Treaty of Paris confirmed Malta as a British possession, the Order established itself at the Palazzo di Malta in Rome. Later on the Order began to be recognised internationally as an independent and sovereign state (with a title similar to that of the Vatican) and enjoyed extra-territorial right for its property situated in Rome.

This international status is recognised by at least thirty-four countries (amongst which there are the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Malta etc.). It maintains

diplomatic relations with a number of countries in Europe, South America, Africa and Asia. It has "Observer status" with the Council of Europe, with UNESCO and with international organisations in Geneva.

Its principal activities (financed partly through the sale of postage stamps!) consist mainly in programmes of humanitarian assistance. These include the construction, and financial assistance for the running, of hospitals; setting-up and administration of dispensaries, medical research centres and blood banks; donation of ambulances, mobile hospitals, equipment to meet natural disasters etc. Its social and other assistance programmes are recognised by the entire world.

THE ORDER OF MALTA AS A POSTAL ADMINISTRATION

The Order of Malta began issuing postage stamps in 1966. Until 1975 these stamps had no postal validity and were utilised for affixing on correspondence carried by the Order's couriers. These stamps, however, acquired postal validity in 1975. Stamps of this period are found in mint condition or on First Day Cover. From December 1968, and generally once a year thereafter, be-

gan issuing a souvenir sheet for Christmas. Every sheet issued is numbered. The Order's postal administration also issues "Express" and "Postage Due" stamps. It has also started to issue maximum cards and postal cards with imprinted stamps. The first maximum cards were put on sale on the 16th October, 1981. If one judges from the success of similar cards issued by the Azores, Gibraltar, Madeira, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland, then their success is assured.

BI-LATERAL POSTAL AGREEMENTS

On the 4th March 1975 a bilateral postal agreement was signed between the Order and the Maltese Postal Administration. In terms of this agreement all mail bearing the Order's stamps and addressed to a resident of Malta via the Order's bureau in Rome was accepted for distribution to the addressee by the Malta Post Office. From 1975 therefore all the Order's issues become valid for postage. Other bilateral postal agreements were entered into in 1978 (with Liberia) in 1979 (with El Salvador, the Argentine and the Phillipines) and in 1980 (with

Uruguay.

The agreement with Malta lapsed in March 1978 although some negotiations for its renewal are understood to have taken place. It is only fair to point out that the agreement with the Argentine specifically excludes registered correspondence. The Order initialled a bilateral postal convention providing for the acceptance for delivery to addressees in Italy of correspondence posted at the Order's Headquarters and franked with the Order's stamps. Mail addressed to countries with which the Order has postal agreements would also be accepted for transmission franked only with the Order's stamps. This agreement has been signed by the President of the Republic and awaits publica-

tion in the Official Gazette. It is evident that when this agreement becomes effective the stamps of the Order will be on a par with those of the Vatican and San Marino and will attract even more collectors.

In order to check the validity of the claim that the Order's postage stamps are just that I asked a friend of mine in Rome to send me some items of mail from the Order's Postal Bureau. He managed to produce a registered letter from the Order to Uruguay with a backstamp to the latter country. Irrefutable evidence of postal use! The Order is seen as a new "country" to collect. In collecting, of course, one satisfies his own personal choice!

The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Ordore of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes, and of Malta

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Monk of the Community of Our Lady
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S.M.O.M. Checklist

The numbers given are from Scott, unless otherwise noted.

CYPRUS

- 133 Kolossi Castle
- 133 Queen's Window, St. Hillarion Castle
- 178 St. Hilarion
- 218
- 250 St. John Comandaria Wine, Knight and Kolossi Castle
- 496 Kolossi (Europa)

FRANCE

- 797 Maltese Cross and Leprosarium

FRENCH WEST AFRICA

- 74 Maltese Cross, Ambulance work of the Order, Anti-Leprosy Campaign
- GABON
C128 Official visit of the Grand Master of S.M.O.M. to Gabon
- GERMANY
1006 Johanniter-Orden, Maltese Cross
- HONDURAS
C365-8 St. John Ambulance, Hospital, Leprosarium, Cross.
- ITALIAN AEGEAN ISLANDS
60 Arms and Cross of Rhodes
63
65
C20-25 Zeppelin over Rhodes
C44-47 Stag of Rhodes and palace
- JERSEY BAILIWICK
147 Maltese Cross, St. John Parish
175-178 British St. John Ambulance Association Centenary, Knights, ambulances, medieval galley.
455 Knights definitive 4m
514-17 School of Anatomy and Surgery, 300th Anniversary, Grand Master N. Cotoner, Fra' Giuseppe Zammit
518-20 Knights' armour, suits of armour of the Grand Masters
522-33 400th Anniversary of the Consecration of the Church of St. John, the Tapestries
547-48 Europa, Grand Master N. Cotoner monument
--- Tapestries, Grand Master Perellos
--- Restoration of Monuments, 6c Vilhena Palace built by Grand Master Manuel de Vilhena, 8c Citadel of Victoria, 2c For of St. Elmo
558 1979 Europa, sailing vessel of the order called *Speronara*
- MONACO
481 Medieval leper, Maltese Cross
- RHODES
15-23 Galley of the Knights, tomb of a Knight, kneeling Knight
64-68 View of Rhodes
69-79 Map of Rhodes
74-80 Stag and Maltese Crosses
B1-18 Surcharged definitives as above
BE1-2 Stag and Maltese Crosses
E1-4 do.
J1-9 Maltese Cross
Q1-11 Maltese Cross, galley, castle
- RUSSIA
98 Tsar Paul I, de facto Grand Master 1798-1891
- SOMALIA
195-6 Maltese Cross and Somali scenes. Commemorate the Convention S.M.O.M. and Somalia concerning the care of lepers, 11 Nov. 1953
- PSAIN
B108M-N The Battle of Lepanto
1690-2 Battle of Lepanto, Fourth Centenary

Issue of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta

Numbers given are those of Emmanuel Said, Valletta, Malta.

1-9	1966	Various subjects
10-12	1967	Languge Flags
19-22	1967	St. John the Baptist I
23-26	1968	Historical Seats of the Order I
27-32	1968	Ships
33-35	1968	Christmas
36-40	1969	Military Uniforms I
41-46	1969	Grand Masters I
47-49	1969	Christmas
50-55	1970	Hospital Assistance
55-61	1970	Ancient Coins I
62-64	1970	Christmas
65-69	1971	Military Uniforms II
70	1971	Battle of Lepanto
71-73	1971	U.N. High Commission for Refugees
74-76	1971	Christmas

LEBANON

52 Knights' Castle, Tripoli (Anatolia)

61

73

79

87

94

123

179-80

C12

C20

C24

C28

C33

LIBYA

B14 Knights' Castle, Tripoli

J41-44

MALTA

192 Fort St. Angelo

192A

193 Verdala Palace

193A

195 Citadel, Gozo

195A

196 De l'Isle Adam, Grand Master

196A

197 St. John's Church

197A

199 Antonio Manoel de Vilhena, Grand Master, statue

204 Palace Square

246 Great Siege Monument

247 Grand Master Wignacourt Aqueduct

248 Victory Church
 259 Grand Master Cotoner Monument
 260 Grand Master Perellos
 287-90 Great Siege of 1565, Madonna Damascena, La Valette, Assault on Fort St. Elmo
 296 Victory Church (def.)
 300-2 European Congress of Catholic Physicians, Grand Master Cotoner and hospitals
 318 Knights of St. John, definitive 4p
 319 SMOM Navy, def. 4½p
 319A Fortifications, def. 5p
 324 Hall of the Knights, def. ½
 334-40 Fourth centenary of the Great Siege, Knights in battle, ships, mural, arms and medal of Grand Master La Valette
 348-52 Fourth Centenary of the foundation of Valletta
 374 Auberge Castile
 387-90 Fourth centenary of the death of La Valette
 403 Malta University Bicennial, Grand Master Manuel Pinto de Fonseca
 409-16 Knights of Malta art exhibit
 445 Coin, Grand Master's barge
 446 Coin, Great Siege Monument
 77-79 1972 10th Anniversary of Grand Master Majona
 80-83 1972 Ancient Castles
 84 1972 Christmas
 85 1973 St. John the Baptist II
 86-90 1973 Leprosy
 91-93 1973 Christmas
 94-99 1974 Grand Mastres II
 100-103 1974 Four Cardinal Virtues
 104-106 1974 Christmas
 107-109 1975 Blood Bank
 110-12 1975 Holy Year
 113-15 1975 Christmas
 116-18 1976 Seats of the Order II
 139 1976 Christmas
 140-45 1978 Grand Masters III
 146 1978 John the Baptist IV
 147-52 1978 Coinage II
 153 1978 Christmas
 154-58 1979 Coats of Arms I (high values)
 159-60 1979 Church of St. John, Siena I
 161-65 1979 Uniforms III
 166-170 1979 Coats of Arms I (low values)
 171-72 1979 Christmas
 173-77 1980 Coats of Arms II (high values)
 178-79 1980 Church of St. John, Siena II
 SPECIAL DELIVERY
 EX1 1975 Dolphins

EX2 1975 Dolphins

EX3 1976 Dolphins

POSTAGES DUES

PD1-01 1976 Overprints

PD11-16 1976 Maltese Crosses

MINIATURE SHEETS: One sheet was issued for each Christmas issue and one additional for the Holy Year 1975.

Partial list of rulers and famous persons, members of National Associations of the S.M.O.M., who are on stamps or most likely to appear on stamps.

AUSTRIA

Karl I

Empress Zita

BELGIUM

Leopold I

Leopold II

Albert I

Leopold III

Baudouin

Queen Fabiola

Cardinal Mrecier

Prince Albert of Liege

FRANCE

Giscard d'Estaing, Valery

GERMANY

Adenauer, Konrad von

Prince Felix

MONACO

Rainer III, Honorary Chairman,

International Committee for Leprosy

Princess Grace

PORTUGAL

Carlos

Manuel II

SPAIN

Alfonso XIII

Queen Victoria Eugenia

Joan Carlos I, Professed Cross

HUNGARY

Horthy, Admiral Baron Nicholas

ITALY

Victor Emmanuel III

Humbert II (as Prince)

LICHTENSTEIN

Johann II

Franz I

Princess Elsa

Franz Josef II

Princess Georgina

Johann Adam

Countess Kinsky

LUXEMBOURG

Grand Duchess Charlotte

Grand Duke Jean

Princess Josephine-Charlotte

of Honour

Queen Sofia

Franco, Francisco

UNITED STATES

Farley, James A.

VATICAN

Leo XIII

Pius XII

John XXIII

Paul VI

John Paul I