



Dear Friends of Thematic Exhibiting,

I am delighted to inform you that this is the first number of the *TCNews* bulletin issued under the current term since 2022.

You may be interested to know why this message was written by me as the Acting Chairman and what is going on with the original Chairman. In this regard, please read the Thematic Commission Activity Report (2022-23) on page 2 for more details.

Our Thematic Commission has not been active for the past few years, but we still managed to arrange three seminars. The first one was a FIP Qualifying Seminar held in TAIPEI 2023 (FIAP exhibition) with Mr. Kim Chang-Han and Mr. Tono D. Putranto as the speakers, the second one was a lecture held during EFIRO 2024 in Romania with Mr. Paolo Guglielminetti as the speaker, and the third one was in JAKARTA 2024 with Mr Tono D. Putranto and Daniel Szeto as the speakers. The powerpoint files in respect of these seminars can be found in our Thematic Commission website.

Besides seminars, we had formed a technical sub-group led by Paolo to answer questions from exhibitors. If you have any enquiry on matters regarding your exhibit, either on materials or regulations, etc. you are welcome to send in your question.

The TC Bureau members had a zoom meeting on 12 July 2025, all agreed that the tasks pressing in on one's eyelashes are firstly, to re-issue the *TCNews* bulletin and secondly to review the Guidelines and to consider the removal of "innovation" in treatment and the related 5 points to be put under Knowledge, personal study and research. In so doing, the marking scale will be the same as other major classes.

When you read this bulletin, you would know that our first task has been accomplished. As regards the review of Guidelines, while we examined the amendments in detail, we also took into consideration the comments and proposals forwarded by Mrs. Stephanie Bromser from Australia and Mr.

Bargi Rajesh Kumar from India before. A revised version will hopefully be ready for circulation to delegate for comments in August 2025. After consolidating the valid comments received, the revised Guidelines will be submitted for approved in the TC Conference in Dubai 2026 and finally to be approved by the FIP Board in the 78th FIP Congress in MACAO 2026.

Finally, I thank you all for your patience and continued support. Please let us have your view on the revised Guidelines, I am waiting to hear from you soon.

Enjoy your summer holidays and happy collecting.

Daniel SZETO,

Acting Chairman,
FIP Thematic Philately Commission
28 July 2025 ■

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FIP Thematic Commission (TC)

Activity Report to the FIP Board 2022-23

Election of new Commission members

Despite the activity of philately over the world was severely interrupted due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission was able to meet on 8 August 2022 during the 76th FIP Congress held in INDONESIA 2022. A new Chairman, Secretary and the Continental Bureau Members were elected to serve the term from 2022 to 2026 as follows:

Chairman	Tono D. Putranto (Indonesia)
Secretary	Daniel SZETO (Hong Kong)
Bureau member for FEPA	Paolo Guglielminetti (Italy)
Bureau member for FIAF	Luis-Fernando Diaz (Costa Rica)
Bureau member for FIAP	Chang-Han Kim (South Korea)

The FIP Co-Ordinator for Thematic Philately Commission is the FIP Director, Peter Suhadolc (Slovenia). No activity had ever been held after the election of the new Committee till the end of 2022.

Change of Chairman

The FIP President announced in early 2023 that the membership of Indonesia was suspended due to arrear of membership fee. As a result, Tono D. Putranto of Indonesia had to withdraw from the post of Chairman of Thematic Commission. According to the current Guidelines, the Secretary Daniel Szeto had been asked to take over as the acting chairman and serve until the next Commission's Conference in 2026. The Secretary is replaced by one Bureau Member for this period.

New Committee formed

After taking the advice from the past Chairman and other veteran Bureau members, the FEPA Bureau member, Paolo Guglielminetti (Italy) was considerable as a suitable person to be the new Secretary and Koenraad Bracke (Belgium) as the new FEPA member. Afterwards, Yosuke Naito (Japan) accepted to be a co-opted member and Charles Bromser (Australia) as the webmaster. The most difficult task then was to find the editor of TCNews. It was not until late 2023 that both Jari Majander (Finland) and Koenraad Bracke (Belgium) agreed to be the co-editors. The new Board was then confirmed and fully operational with the composition as follows:

Acting Chairman	Daniel SZETO (Hong Kong)
Secretary	Paolo Guglielminetti (Italy)
Bureau member for FEPA	Koenraad Bracke (Belgium)
Bureau member for FIAF	Luis-Fernando Diaz (Costa Rica)
Bureau member for FIAP	Chang-Han Kim (South Korea)
Co-opted member	Yosuke Naito (Japan)
Co-editor TCNews	Jari Majander (Finland)
Webmaster	Charles Bromser (Australia)

Activity

Although the board was only confirmed in late 2023, it does not mean that the Commission was dormant or hanging around. A FIP Qualifying Seminar was arranged and held on 14 August 2023 during TAIPEI 2023:

Name of Speakers: Kim Chang Han and Tono D. Putranto
 Title of Seminar: *How to improve the thematic exhibit*
 The powerpoint file of this Seminar is available in the TC Website.

A general lecture on Thematic Philately jurors had been planned for EFIRO 2024 and a bi-lingual seminar during CHINA 2024 in Shanghai.

Meetings

The acting Chairman had held informal meetings with the FIP Co-ordinator and most of the Bureau members during IBRA 2023 in May 2023 and during THAILAND 2023 in November 2023. All members agreed that the Thematic Commission would resume its full operation after the new Board was confirmed. The main missions ahead included:

1. Update and improve the information in the TC Website;
2. Resume the issue of TCNews
3. Form a technical sub-group to answer questions from the collectors
4. Review and fine-tune the Guidelines
5. Study the feasibility of issuing a simplified Guidelines
6. Review of the thematic class marking scale to make it the same as the other classes
7. Prepare for the biennial Thematic Commission meeting in the 77th FIP Congress in PhilaKorea 2024

Daniel SZETO
Acting Chairman,
FIP Thematic Philately Commission
21 May 2024 ■

FIP Thematic Commission (TC)

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Postal Rates in Thematic Philately

How to use and describe them

This study has been originally published as an handbook of C.I.F.T.— Centro Italiano di Filatelia Tematica (Italian Centre for Thematic Philately) and it presented here, with some updates, thanks to the authorization of C.I.F.T.

TEXT AND IMAGES BY PAOLO GUGLIELMINETTI

Part 1: What is the postal rate

1 Introduction

One of the basic elements, among others, in the development of a thematic exhibit is the presentation of material that results appropriate from both a philatelic and postal point of view.

The **Guidelines** issued by the FIP for judging thematic philatelic exhibits, fix a detailed list of the criteria for selecting the appropriate material, and the importance of the elements related to the postal rates is clearly highlighted:

(Section 3.3 “Qualification of philatelic material “):

When selecting qualified material for the exhibit, preference and greater importance has to be given to:

(...)

- genuinely carried items **with correct postage** and relevant thematic cancellations, as opposed to favour cancellations, often with underfranked postage, or, even worse, cancellations on stampless covers (“blank cancellations”) unless due to a free postage privilege

(...)

- **correct postage frankings**, preferably as multiple franking of a thematically important stamp, as opposed to overfrankings due to philatelic reasons (e.g. complete sets)

- meter frankings **with correct postage**, as opposed to favour cancellations (e.g. “000”), unless the latter is a “specimen” or it has a justified postal reason.

Therefore, an accurate check of the selected material from this point of view is necessary while developing a thematic exhibit for exhibition purposes.

There are exceptions of course (very rare cancels, for example, may be exhibited even on documents not having a correct rate), but in the process of improving his exhibit the exhibitor should carefully consider these issues and progressively give preference to items with correct franking. Needless to say, this operation requires that the exhibitor owns the basic elements to analyze and determine the exact rates.

This need derives from one of the basic principles of the Guidelines indicating, among the evaluation elements at item “Philatelic knowledge” (Art. 4.2.2),

the appropriateness of postal documents.

The Guidelines indicates among these elements also

the appropriateness and correctness of philatelic text, when required.

Concerning the ‘rates’ aspect, philatelic notes are important, and “necessary”, in several cases, such as:

- When the postal rate, in itself, is a thematic element (for example, reduced or free postage for specific categories of senders or addressees – as a result of position, condition or status of one of the parties – which have a significant thematic aspect, or in the cases of surcharges due to the use of particular postal transport means or routes having thematic relevance).

- When the document may appear over-franked and or not genuinely carried (e.g. franked with many stamps of the same set or a large multiple of the same stamp), so that the description of the postal rates looks appropriate in order to demonstrate the correct adhesion to the criteria fixed by the above-mentioned Guidelines (or even to prove the genuineness of rare or important documents).

- When the document presents a rather complex franking (e.g. due to additional postal services) and therefore worthy of explanation to enhance the piece and demonstrate the philatelic knowledge of the exhibitor.

These aspects justify the growing interest by the thematic collectors in the subject of postal rates. At the same time, there is much debate about which pieces actually deserve of a complete description of the rates, the “weight” that these aspects shall have on the jurors’ evaluations, as well as how to collect

the basic information required for the analysis of the postal rates. The last element is particularly challenging, considering that the thematic exhibitor has to find out such data – within his exhibit – for items of different countries and periods, then having to find a wide variety of sources, which are not always available.

The aim of this series of articles is to address the first and third of these points and help to solve them.

We will not develop here instead the aspects related to the evaluation of the exhibits, which goes beyond the objective of this paper aimed to support thematic collectors in both the selection and presentation of the material in their exhibits.

Over 25 years ago the handbook *The Philatelic Elements in Thematic Exhibits* by Michele Picardi was published; it has been the milestone for all or most of today's thematic exhibitors. Michele had all the knowledge to analyze the 'postal rates' issue (in fact, he was an international juror also in postal history) and in that basic work he documented and described

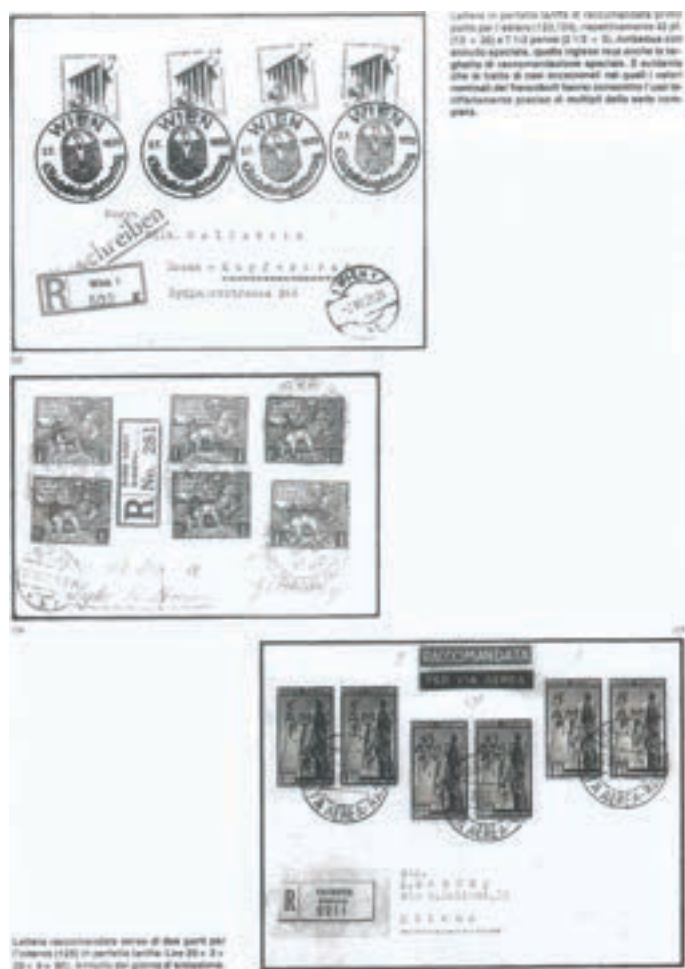


Figure 1. One of the pages concerning the 'rates' in the booklet *The Philatelic elements in Thematic exhibits* by the famous expert and thematic juror Michele Picardi, published in 1988 by Circolo Filatelico Peloritano on the occasion of the exhibition *Peloro '88*



Figure 2. Another page extracted from the same booklet *The Philatelic elements in Thematic Exhibits* by Michele Picardi.

several mailed documents, explaining the right fares as per the registered letters exhibited in the two pages shown before.

Michele, however, while showing good examples of correct rates [Figures 1-2] – extremely valid also from a thematic point of view – expressed some skepticism on the opportunity and the necessity of analyzing and describing the franking of the letters. After listing the wide variety of existing rates and highlighting the multiple rate changes over the years, he concluded, "How do you know and how can you remember all these countless variations? You can't do it, that's all, it's too hard. It becomes simply impossible if we enlarge the study from Italy to the whole world", then insisting on the difficulty for jurors to memorize the rates and then to verify them during the exhibitions.

Michele has been one of the greatest thematic masters and it is not easy to disagree with such an authoritative opinion. But much water has flowed under the bridge since the above mentioned publication, and I do not hesitate to say that those concepts are no longer valid.



Figure 3. An example of a thematic passage by showing a piece correctly franked, from the exhibit *Mushrooms and us* by Ermanno Musso. The description of genuine carried items with additional postal services (in this case the 'registration fee') is appropriate and necessary to show the proper use of the 5 stamps depicting the subject needed for documenting the thematic passage.

First of all, thanks to the practice of sending the photocopies of the exhibits in advance (now generalised for the Italian exhibitions, as well in some other countries), each juror, can now check easily at home the correctness of all the rates before the opening of the exhibition. This will not require any mnemonic effort, but simply consulting the documentation on the matter, or the numerous websites reporting any kind of information concerning the historical rates of many countries, or even asking for an opinion to experts in postal history of a certain country or a certain time lapse.

The same is also true especially for the exhibitors, who have now many possibilities, unthinkable in the past (the ones just mentioned), to acquire these data, and, **if necessary**, even mention them in the philatelic text accompanying the item [Figure 3].

Michele taught us that 'Thematic' Philately is in the first place PHILATELY. Therefore, common sense suggests us to analyze thoroughly these topics. As I wrote some time ago in *Notiziario Tematico* (the CIFT bulletin), the correct description of the items particularly relevant from a postal point of view is not a dogmatic idea of the jurors. Instead, it is primarily a requirement of those looking at our exhibits, since they are obviously eager to understand more about the most unusual documents we present.

Furthermore, the search for this information also adds thematic elements: for instance, a special rate or free franking, granted only to certain entities, prove their particular relevance or official status in certain historical phases.

Finally, studying in detail the postal rates helps us to select more appropriately the items we buy, so that they are likely to get higher value in case of subsequent sale, should this become necessary.

An item correctly franked, and travelled through the mail system, has a 'market value' much higher when compared with a beautiful over-franked envelope, probably never mailed. This approach shall be implemented judiciously.

The description of normal rates is worthless (e.g. in the case of 1st rate letters or picture postcards) as well as there is no reason to introduce a philatelic description of each piece in the exhibit. Even in an advanced exhibit, the items worth of 'postal rate' description are typically not more than 5–6 per frame (with some exceptions for exhibits dealing with topics with high connection with postal history). By using a bit of 'common sense', what may appear at a first glance like a difficulty for the exhibitor shall become instead an enjoyable challenge, related to the continuous research.



Figure 4. The correct description of rates, when necessary, nowadays is a common practice in thematic exhibits. The page shown comes from Jonas Hällström's exhibit *The Square-rigged Sailing Vessels*, awarded many times with international large gold. The letters are franked with multiple stamps relevant for the theme, with additional services (transport by air according to the "horseshoe" route of BOAC – the letter from India – and registration fees – the letter from China). The exhibitor made a correct philatelic description in smaller font than the one used for the thematic text, indicating place of origin and destination, date of shipment, routing, censorship (the two letters were mailed during periods of world wars) and describing the correct postal rates.

In fact, this is the normal approach of a thematic collector combined with additional positive outcomes: adding value to the exhibit's items and making easier their comprehension by both jurors and visitors, as already stated [Figure 4]. We really hope that this paper can help exhibitors, as well as any thematic philatelist interested in this subject.

The first part of this article deals with the concept of postal rates and the (many) elements that can trigger their changes. It also shows some "case studies"

as examples of what has been highlighted in the second chapter.

Then, the second part, to be published in a future issue of *TCNews*, will give guidelines on "when" and "how" it is worth describing postal rates in a thematic exhibit. We will also share basic guidance on the available information sources (printed works and web) to find the data needed for the analysis of rates concerning different periods and countries.

2 What is the postal rate

The postal rate is the monetary value that a postal administration charges the user for shipping and delivering a postal item. It is usually based on a government's decision that is officially approved and released. The postal rates are calculated to cover the costs of the service. Thus, they allow the users to give a correct value to the postal service, stimulating an informed utilization of it.

As we will see later, the history of the postal services shows also many cases of special rates, significantly reduced to promote the use of specific mail services (such as the distribution of newspapers, letters mailed to soldiers engaged in war operations, or election advertising).

The changes in postal rates had in the past, and in some cases still has today, a considerable importance for some economic activities that are strongly dependent on the postal service, such as mail order sales, advertising mail and so on... As mentioned before, in most cases the rates reflect the production cost of the service and, consequently, they shall change according to their variation.

High inflation normally generates frequent rate changes, while the efficiency of the postal network or the removal of specific operative barriers can lead to their reduction. All these elements contribute to define the postal rate.

2.1 What are the components of a postal rate

The postal rate for domestic mail has typically two components:

- the basic rate, which depends on the type of object (letter, postcard, printed matter, etc.), on its weight and, in some cases, also on the transport distance;
- one or more surcharges to pay for additional services, if required, such as the registration, the special delivery, the airmail.

So, the study of the franking of a given item is based – for the first component – on

- a) the identification of the type of the postal object (usually an easy job since – in most cases – the simple examination is sufficient)
- b) its weight (more difficult to determine when the document is incomplete, e.g. an envelope missing its content),
- c) and, if relevant, the carriage distance (e.g. in Italy during the Kingdom the rates different when the destination was within or out of the borders of the departure postal district).

As far as the additional services are concerned, they normally are identified thanks to special **signs** or

seals or **labels** written/affixed by the sender and/or by the accepting post office. Some surcharges, such as those for the airmail, also depend on the weight, while others are fixed, regardless the characteristics of the envelope/parcel.

Prior to the foundation of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) or before the joining date to this organization of the departure or arrival countries, the rates of the postal documents depended typically also on the selected routing across the transit countries. Such complex arrangement was reinstalled with the opening of the airmail services; different rates were defined depending on the destination country as well as on the selected air route, with the possibility of alternative routings with different rates.

The analysis of a postal document aiming at determining the likely appropriate rates, and then checking whether the postage is correct, is an exercise as much complex as higher is the number of the additional services, the possible weight ranges as well as whether the object was carried within the country or abroad.

2.2 Before and after the UPU

The establishment of the Universal Postal Union (or General Postal Union, as named at that time¹) was decided in 1874 and become operative on 1st July, 1875. It was a key step in the development of international postal relationships, even in the evolution of postal rates.

Article 1 of the UPU Chart stated a basic principle still leading the international trade of postal objects: the joining countries form a single postal territory for the reciprocal exchange of letter-post items.

The foundation of the UPU was accompanied by the harmonization of fees paid to each country for the mail carried within the Union (this second statement was amended in 1989, giving flexibility to each country to reduce or increase rates compared to the basic ones).

Before the UPU, international postal relations were based on bilateral agreements. In the absence of such conventions, usually the sender paid the domestic rate until the border while the recipient paid the domestic rate of his own country. It was also necessary to compute any further rates for the countries of transit and/or carriages by sea (these extra rates were generally paid by the recipient, unless there was an agreement between the originating and the transit countries to pay also the 'transit rates' when paying the initial shipment at the beginning of the postal journey).

Twenty-two countries joined the UPU at the begin-

¹ The name "Universal Postal Union" was adopted in 1878.

ning: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, United States, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Since other countries joined the UPU later, the transition between the “pre-UPU” and “post-UPU” did not happen at the same time for all territories. For this reason, a letter from a UPU country to a non-member continued to follow the previous rules even after the creation of the Union.

Another element to be highlighted is that at beginning the UPU common rates covered only the basic postal items (letters, postcards, printed matter) while different items and/or services were subject to harmonized rules in a second moment only; some countries undersigned specific treaties (and in some cases they did it later than they became effective). **Table 1** summarizes the first effective dates of the UPU rules for different types of objects and postal services.

Type of mail	Effective dates for first introduction of GPU / UPU regulations for the given type of mail
Letters	1 July, 1875
Postcards	1 July, 1875
Printed matter	1 July, 1875
Samples without value	1 July, 1875
Avis de reception-AR	1 July, 1875
Commercial papers	1 July, 1875
Money order	1 April, 1879
Insured letters	1 April, 1879
Parcels	1 October, 1881
Insured parcels	1 April, 1886
Special delivery (Express) letter mail	1 April, 1886
Cash on delivery-COD	1 July, 1892

Table 1. The first effective dates of UPU rules for different types of objects and postal services. Source: H. Mouritsen, *Judging Postal History Exhibits of the early Second Period (1875-1914)*, 2nd Philatelic Summit Papers Number 2, Malmö, 2012.

2.3 Why the rates change

The collector who approaches the study of postal rates must be aware of the fact that their evolution depends on well-defined factors, partially not even depending on the postal system.

In the domestic postal traffic, the main drivers of such changes are:

- the increase or reduction of service production costs connected with the general cost of living (inflation/deflation) or with specific events in the organization of the postal administration (adoption of new means of transport, sorting and distribution of mail; increase in staff salaries; network efficiency, etc.);
- the need to harmonize certain aspects with the provisions of the international rules (UPU);
- the will to encourage the exchange of specific postal items, by reducing their rates;
- the implementation or elimination of special facilitations concerning specific categories of users (such actions being linked, for instance, to changes in their institutional status).

The decision to change the postal rates has been traditionally a prerogative of the government (and this is still true for those postal services that are part of the so-called “universal service”). Consequently, the changes did / do not take place at the same time of the changes in the listed above drivers, but they are implemented normally with some delay due to the need of preparing, approving and publishing the relevant decisions.

2.4 Postal routes

In the pre-UPU times, the international mail rates depended on the chosen route. For example, the mail from the Lombardo Veneto to Veneto to France could be forwarded via Sardinia, or via Switzerland or via Germany; for each route a special rate system was established including the postal fees to be paid to the two countries of arrival and departure, and to those of transit.

In the sea transportation there were specific rates depending on the carrier and/or the chosen routing. For example, between 1861 and 1863 a 1st class letter (up to 7.5 grams) from Italy to Egypt and vice-versa could travel by British steamers paying 60 cents or by French ones for 80 cents, or 1.00 Lira if via Trieste (since 1862, but in this case up to 15 gr.).

In the same period, 1st class letter for Jerusalem could enjoy a similar rate if forwarded by French ships (up to 7.5 g.), or 1.00 Lira by Austrian ones (up to 15 gr.), or even 1.10 Lira via Brindisi – Alexandria (up to 10 gr.), and 1.35 Lira via Trieste (up to 15 gr.). The sender decided the routing depending

Rates related to the specific routings chosen by the sender emerged again after 1920, with the development of airmail services that, initially and until the II World War, had specific rates depending on the type of chosen airline and the decision to use air transport up to the final destination, or only for a part of the journey. A letter departing at the end of the 1930's from Italian East Africa to the USA [**Figure 5**] could be forwarded by air until Rome and then by sea, or entirely by airmail with several alternatives: via Lisbon, or via Friedrichshafen (by Zeppelin) or via Rio de Janeiro². Different routes meant different

In Italy, for instance, in the years of the kingdom and until 1947, such reduced rates existed for letters mailed in the same postal district of the sender (for both the letter and postcards, and up to 1920 for some additional services). The “district” was under the jurisdiction of a single post office and could comprehend one or more neighbouring municipalities; the towns, even if served by more than one post office, were always classified as a single district. This scheme of local rates existed in many countries: in



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France, from 1849 until 1878, there were even three rates for letters within the city, within the district (arrondissement), and for the letters from Paris to Paris.



Figure 6. 1860 letter franked with 2 and 0,5 shillings stamps of Lübeck (the first two stamps issued by the Free City post), corresponding to 3 Mecklenburg shillings for a letter weighing 1 lot and travelling more than 6 miles, according to the rate rules of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (where the letter was posted) and the postal agreement with Lübeck. This letter appears in Damian Läge's exhibit *Fascinated in feathers*.

2.6 Postal items

One of the key variables differentiating the postal rates is the 'nature' of the postal item that is shipped. In fact, the rates generally depend on the specific type of item, which in turn influences:

- specific processing mode and routing, more or less rapid and therefore more or less expensive;
- incentives, i.e. reductions aiming at facilitating the shipment of particular type of mail.

Initially (until the second half of the 19th century)

the types of postal items from the rates point of view were not many (letters, printed matters and newspapers), but this number has gradually increased over time. For example, if we make reference to the period of the Kingdom of Italy (1861–1945), according to one of the classifications available in the literature³, the main types of mail items with specific rates are about twenty:

1. letters
2. avis de reception (AR)⁴
3. newspapers sent from publishers
4. printed matter
5. handwritten texts not having a nature of communications (e.g. books drafts, legal and professional papers, artist works etc.)
6. samples without value
7. postal cards and postcards from the private industry
8. letter cards
9. business cards
10. announcement cards
11. embossed character cards for blinds
12. open commercial invoices
13. bookseller's order forms
14. newspapers' account statements
15. books sent by publishers
16. medicine samples
17. small packets
18. boxes with value
19. judicial acts
20. complaints to the postal service

3 It represents, at the same time, a specific mail item and also an additional service: it is a form that travels joined to the shipped registered item and, once signed by the addressee, is returned to the sender.

4 "Unificato" Catalog of Postal History, Volume 2: Mail services of Kingdom of Italy – RSI – Lieutenancy – Allied Occupations, 2005–2007.



Figure 7. Italy, 1949 – Embossed character cards for the blinds: 1 Lira plus 2 Lira for registration fees (both rates were reduced vs. the basic ones). This franking allowed the perfect use of a single 3 Lira stamp from the *Risorgimento* (Italy unification) set. This blind letter is from Claudio Manzati's exhibit.



Figure 8. A particular type of postal item: “train station letter” posted directly by the sender to the ‘travelling post office’ (that cancelled the franking), transported out of the mailbag, and then collected by the recipient upon arrival of the train at the destination station. In Germany the rate of this kind of items was similar to that for ordinary letters (in this case 7 million marks for the 2nd weight rate; this rate lasted 10 days only, during the German inflation) but the users of this service had also to pay a monthly fee. From the Regency Superior Auctions, 2014.

In addition to these items of the “basic mail service”, there were other items pertaining to other postal related services, such as the **parcel service**, the **money transfer service** and the **telegraph service**.

Looking at other countries and other periods, more particular items with specific postal rates can be found, such as electoral advertising, cassettes and recorded discs, aerograms, postcards for prize competitions, train station letters [Figure 8] and so on.

As already stated, the first step to identify the correct rate is the proper identification of the postal item. There are cases in which two or more alternatives are possible, and very often additional scripts or identification seals are not sufficient. For example, in the case of “open envelopes” which originally might hold handwritten letters or cards, or printed matters... In such cases, the deep and accurate study of the franking allows the correct classification. However, in most cases the simple aspect of the item and/or the identification marks on it shall allow a correct classification from the postal rate point of view.

The thematic collector – in addition to verifying the correctness of the franking of his own items – may be interested into the mail item itself because – in some cases – its actual “nature” can be used from a thematic point of view. There are several examples of

this specific utilization: embossed character cards for the blind [Figure 7] in exhibits related to disability, newspapers and the related statement accounts in exhibits on communication media, or the medicine samples in exhibits about chemistry or medicine.

In such cases, the postal item, combined with its rate, represents a useful and interesting contribution to the thematic development, genuinely mailed and often historically important. This is a typical demonstration of how thematic philately and postal history are closely linked in many respects.

2.7 Additional services

The other important element in interpreting a franking is the presence, or absence, of signs of additional services depending on the choice made by the sender (or more rarely imposed by the post office) to utilize specific services provided by the postal administration, for which a particular rate is fixed (usually as a surcharge over the standard rate).

Such services typically imply a particular processing mode, routing and/or distribution, and consequently higher costs. As in the case of postal items, the variety of additional services offered by the post office has increased during to the evolution of the mail service, although some of them are no longer in use.

Taking again the period of the Kingdom of Italy as an example, the main additional services were the following ones:

1. Registration
2. Insurance
3. "Force Majeure" Insurance
4. Special delivery (Express)
5. Urgent Express
6. Air Mail
7. Cash On Delivery
8. Poste restante
9. Pneumatic mail

Most of these services, such as **insurance**, **airmail** or **cash on delivery**, were available not only for the ordinary mail but also for the postal parcels. Other services requiring a specific rate – available in other countries – were the so-called **late collection service** or **late posting** concerning the mail posted after the closing of the mailbag departing for the required town, for which an immediate departure was wanted anyway. Other particular services are those requiring special transportation means, such as the Dutch "**floating safes**" for which the UPU Congress in Madrid 1920 agreed upon a special rate (Netherlands issued even a special set for that).

In recent times, several special services for quicker delivery of the mail have been implemented (such **Postacelere**, **Fast International Courier** and **Registered Letter 1 day** in Italy, the **Colissimo** packages in France etc.). The rates for such fast services are typically "all inclusive", i.e. they are not defined as a surcharge but as total special rate.

The additional services (if any) are normally easily identified on the postal object thanks to the fact that they are indicated by specific labels or markings stuck at the time of posting or registration at the post office. Actually, most of these services become effective by submitting the letter at the post office, such as in the case of registered and insured letters, and cash on delivery items. In the case of letters mailed by special delivery or airmail, this procedure is not required since the sender affixes distinctive labels (printed and distributed by post offices or by private entities) or write short text indicating the particular service requested. In doubtful cases the careful observation of the franking, and the consequent interpretation of the rates, can help to understand whether additional mail services were requested and paid for.

2.8 Reductions and facilitations

The last element to be considered in the interpretation of a postal rate concerns the special discounts or rate reductions in favour of the sender and/or the addressee. For instance, the two most known and widespread reductions in Italy were:

- from 1874 to 1961 the **mail between Mayors** (or from them to State offices), was franked with 50% of the normal postage, with the exception of the additional services.

- **mail addressed to troops**, valid until August 1999: a reduced rate than established usually at 50% of the basic rate with the exception, also in this case, of the additional services.

The best-known facilitation is the so-called "**simple rate paid by the recipient**", firstly implemented in 1866 for the letters sent by soldiers during the Independence War. In practice, unfranked letters were shipped and taxed at destination according to the normal rate (rather than applying the surcharge for unfranked letters). After World War I, this kind of facilitation was granted to government offices, also extended – in some cases – to the surcharges for registration and insurance services. The relevant "franking" in this case is made up of "postage due" stamps for an amount corresponding to the basic rate of the item sent by the offices.

Other reductions or facilitations are due to particular types of mailed objects, as in the case – in Italy – of the embossed character cards for the blinds or the election advertising, as already mentioned in paragraph 2.6. Needless to say, such kind of reductions and facilitations existed also in other countries. For instance, the "simple rate paid by the recipient" for the mailing from government offices existed also in France (**taxe simple**) since 1889.

The large area of free franking mail and exemption of postage payment is out of scope of this paper.

3 Three case studies on postal rates

Before examining the study of rates from a thematic exhibition point of view, it may be useful to illustrate some postal rate periods in order to provide concrete examples supporting the illustration of the general descriptions on the main franking variables that has been just presented in Chapter 2.

3.1 The inflation in Germany

A "classic" example of postal rates evolution with distinctive interest is given by the German inflation period in the years after World War I (the importance of the topic "inflation" also in other countries from the thematic point of view will be further analysed in the second part of this article).

At the end of the war, the value of the German mark deteriorated progressively mainly because of the effects of economic reparation imposed on the



Figure 9. An airmail express letter in the inflation period, from the exhibit of Damian Läge, *Fascinated in Feathers*, awarded 98 points and the Grand Prix at the European Championship of thematic philately in Essen in 2015. The description properly reports the explanation of the rate and the fact that the following day it would have been necessary an amount greater over twenty times because of the sudden further increase. Another noticeable aspect is that – despite rising shipping costs – further airmail stamps were not issued; therefore, the 200 marks are the highest face value for airmail postage stamp ever issued in Germany. Moreover, airmail to Leipzig operated only during the days of activity of the famous city fair, to allow fast communication for companies therein. Due to limited available space, the exhibitor – in his philatelic description – has highlighted the topic of the fee change, the most important, and has left out the other two aspects.

defeated Germany. To cope with the budget deficit and pay the war debts, the government continued to issue currency (regardless of the actual stock of the gold reserves that **were** supposed to grant the value), resulting in an unbridled growth of inflation, far severe than in the rest of the continent. The r.o.e. (rate of exchange) against the dollar rose from 4 DM to 1 US \$ before the war, to 65 DM in 1921, then to 162 DM at the beginning of 1922, to get to 7000 DM the end of that year. The impossibility to pay for war reparations on time was the excuse for France to occupy the Ruhr; the German government ordered passive resistance against the attempts of the French and Belgians to keep mines and industries working to repay the due amount. The occupying powers reacted by blocking the whole economy of the Ruhr which remained isolated from the rest of Germany causing the further deterioration of the economy of the country.

The r.o.e. thus increased to 160,000 DM to the dollar on 1 July, 1923, and by 20 November reached

the unbelievable amount of 4.2 trillion per dollar. On that date, buying one kilogram of bread required more than a pound of banknotes. The situation “normalized” only in January 1924, when a new currency was introduced: the *Rentenmark*, which corresponded to 1000 billion “old” marks.

The consumer prices augmentation unsurprisingly interested also postal rates, with great difficulty in franking the letters properly to meet the growing rates [Figure 9]. For this reason special seals **Gebühr Bezahlt**, i.e. tax paid, were often used to replace the stamps. Table 2 in the next page shows the evolution of the rates for the more common postal items. As reported, in slightly more than 2 ½ years, postal rates were multiplied by 125 billion times in the case of a postcard, 167 billion for a letter and 200 billion for the registration fees. Such evolution caused the issue of stamps with continuous increasingly face value, but also the use of very high multiples, with very composite franking delighting the lovers of postal history of that period.

Date	Inland letter up to 20 gr. (in Deutsch Marks)	Inland postcard (in Deutsch Marks)	Registration fee (in Deutsch Marks)
1 April, 1921	.60	.40	1
1 January, 1922	2	1.25	2
1 July, 1922	3	1.50	2
1 October, 1922	6	3	4
15 November, 1922	12	6	8
15 December, 1922	25	15	20
15 January, 1923	50	25	40
1 March, 1923	100	40	80
1 July, 1923	300	120	300
1 August, 1923	1.000	400	1.000
24 August, 1923	20.000	8.000	20.000
1 September, 1923	75.000	30.000	75.000
20 September, 1923	250.000	100.000	250.000
1 October, 1923	2 million	800.000	2 million
10 October, 1923	5 million	2 million	5 million
20 October, 1923	10 million	4 million	10 million
1 November, 1923	100 million	40 million	50 million
5 November, 1923	1 billion	500 million	1 billion
12 November, 1923	10 billion	5 billion	10 billion
20 November, 1923	20 billion	10 billion	20 billion
26 November, 1923	80 billion	40 billion	80 billion
1 December, 1923	100 billion or 0.10 new DM	50 billion or 0.05 new DM	200 billion or 0.20 new DM

Table 2. Postal rates in Germany during the inflation period between 1 April, 1921 and 1 December, 1923.

The stamps issued during these years were mostly ordinary ones with the face values indicated in figures, therefore apparently without low thematic interest. However, postal items mailed in that period, and properly described from the rates point of view, can be appropriate in some exhibits on specific themes such as Economy, explaining the concept of inflation, as well as History, documenting the period between the two world wars, for instance showing letters sent at beginning, during and at the end of this particular phase [Figures 10-11].

Concerning the use of letters franked with stamps showing specific subjects, as mentioned before in that period there were mainly ordinary stamps without little thematic appeal (values in figures, post horn, symbols of Germany).

Among the few exceptions, some stamps depicting various labourers (blacksmiths, miners, farmers) were issued in 1921 [Figure 12]; the highest face value was 20 marks and depicted a plough driven by a farmer and drawn by a horse. Other with the same

Figure 10. A letter addressed to Switzerland mailed during one of the shortest 'rate period', from 5 to 11 November, 1923, utilized to document the effects of inflation in Germany in an exhibit on the historical period between the two wars; rate of 4 billion marks for letter first port abroad. On 12 November it was increased ten times to 40 billion marks. From Alviero Batistini's exhibit *After two world wars, the European Union*).



Figure 11. Another example from a thematic exhibit with two items with franking in thousands – at the bottom, 31 August 1923 – and millions of marks, above, on 31 October of the same year. The exhibitor did not describe the rates in detail, but the evolution of rates appears clear from the magnitude of the franking of the two letters. However, the explanation of the postal rates would make clearer the concept, even highlighting the exhibitor's knowledge. The item above, for instance, is an inland letter insured for 3 billion marks, with rates as follows (period 20 October–31 October, 1923): 14 million for a letter of 2nd port + 10 million registration fee + 60 million for insurance (rate: 0.2 million per 10 million value). From Giorgio Sini's exhibit *Versailles 1919 Warsaw 1939*.



Figure 12. Front and backside of a foreign letter up to 20 gr., rate period 15 December 1922–14 January, 1923, correctly franked 80 marks by using 2 x 20 DM *Post horn* stamps and 40 stamps of 100 pfennings (= 1 mark) stamp from the ordinary set depicting blacksmithing. It is a typical “wallpaper” franking during the inflation period which can be properly used to show that particular activity, for instance in a thematic exhibit on iron or on labour.

subject but higher face values were issued on 24 February, 1922. On 2 April, 1922, another set was issued to celebrate the Munich Fair with face values up to 20 marks. All these stamps were valid until 30 September, 1923, but the fast evolution of the rates made them out of date much sooner.

On 19 February, 1923 three values of ordinary set “labourers” were overprinted with a surcharge to help the Rhine and Ruhr regions under economic blockade; also their validity expired 30 September, 1923. Due to the high amount of the surcharge, letters franked with these stamps are very scarce.

Other ordinary “labourers” stamps were overprinted with new face values of tens of thousands of marks

(since the size of overprints make the illustration of the stamps almost invisible, in a thematic exhibit on labour or related topics it would be better to use stamps without such overprints).

3.2 Air mail in the French Colonies

The stamps issues of the French Colonies are among the most interesting of the colonial period, even from a thematic point of view. From the 1930's onwards the subjects become more colourful and various, and thanks to the work of important artists such as the engravers Delzers, Piel, Gauthier, Gandon and others, the drawings of the stamps are remarkable also for their aesthetic beauty.

Needless to say, the subjects are mainly related to the colonies (indigenous, landscapes, plants, animals, local buildings, colonial soldiers, explorers) but there are also subjects of more general interest, such as airplanes, boats, religious buildings, bridges, medical care and so on. The consequence is that these stamps can be easily used in many thematic exhibits.

The exhibitor, in order to break the monotony of showing them as single stamps or perhaps using the most valuable but not (normally) unobtainable colour or artist's proofs, takes into consideration showing them on mailed documents. Such choice is enhanced if the document is franked with multiple copies of the same stamp, this emphasizing the thematic element.

Therefore, both the correct interpretation and description of the rates become important. However, being very often air-mailed documents, this task can become relatively difficult. Thus, we will introduce hereafter the basic rules of the postal rates in force, with reference mainly to the period from 1920 to 1945, at the beginning of airmail services. It is a rather complex period in terms of rates' evolution and variety, so deserving to be described and explained).

The mail shipped by airmail from the French colonies had to pay during the period (as it was usual then):

a) a **basic rate**, depending on the weight and destination; for the latter element – in particular – there were two different rate levels: (A) mail to the French Community, i.e. France and all its colonies, and (B) mail to foreign countries;

b) an **airmail surcharge**, again varying according to the weight and the destination.

The French colonial rate system, for the element a), looks simpler than the ones of most other countries (for example, each British colony could have postal rates different from the ones of the homeland). The airmail surcharges are much more complex instead, because there are many variations depending on whether the correspondence was directed to France (1) [Figure 13], to another colony or country served



Figure 13. Airmail letter from Equatorial French Africa to France, 14 January, 1940. Rate for a letter up to <20 grams within the French community (1 Franc) & airmail surcharge of 3 Francs (<5 grams). The total is 4 francs paid with a pair of the stamp issued to commemorate the centenary of the arrival in Gabon of the Commander Bouet-Willaumez with the sailing ship *Malouine* in 1839 (beginning of the French colonization of the territory).

directly with an airline (2), or to other colonies or countries not directly connected by air (3) [Figure 14].

In the cases (1) and (2), specific air surcharges were officially defined in the postal regulations. In the case (3), the mail was dispatched by air to France and there, depending on the sender's choices and available air connections, it was necessary to define whether the further carriage from France to the final destination should take place by air (by adding the corresponding air surcharge from France to the final destination) or via surface transport (i.e. land or sea). These variables (similarly to what happened, for instance, for the Italian colonies) often made necessary handwritten notes by the senders indicating his choice (e.g. *Par avion jusqu'à France* = airmail up in France, or *Par avion jusqu'à destination* = air mail to the final destination). This practice – that greatly facilitates today's collector in “reading” the postal rate – unfortunately was not very usual.

Another interesting element of the mailing of these territories, causing – at the same time – higher grade of complexity, is that the rates' changes, although fixed in the same way in the entire French empire, were actually implemented in different dates (with weeks, or even months, of delay). This situation was due to the time needed for the publication on the respective official bulletins, and the inevitable slowness of circulation of information between the homeland

and its colonies. As an example of this situation, **Table 3** in the next page shows the evolution of the basic rate for letter up to 20 grams in the territories of France and its main colonies in the period from 1926 to 1945, according the work done by Robert Piccirilli of France & Colonies Philatelic Society⁵. Other colonies, such as Indochina, used a rate system even more complex with two different rates for internal mailing within the colony, and for the mail to France and other colonies.

As for the airmail surcharges, even the direct ones (i.e. for air routes directly linking the colony to the destination of the letter) present a wide variability and complexity. Only thanks to the work of more recent scholars (such as Piccirilli who we have already mentioned) such surcharges may be more or less easily understood without the need for direct consultation of the official postal rate tables of the period. The latter, on the other hand, are not easy to find, not at all and – moreover – not always provide exhaustive information.

In general, however, it shall be assumed that the airmail surcharges varied (typically) every 5 grams of weight, while the echelons for the simple letter were 0–20 grams, 20–50 grams, 50–100 grams.

5 Robert E Piccirilli, *Postal and Airmail Rates in France & Colonies 1920–1945*, France & Colonies Philatelic Society of Great Britain, 2011.



Figure 14. Airmail letter from Equatorial French Africa to Alexandria in Egypt, 4 November, 1938. Foreign letter rate (<20 grams) 1.75 Francs; air mail surcharge to France 3 Francs (<5 grams) = total 4.75 Francs, paid with various stamps portraying Emile Gentil, explorer and colonial administrator. As stated by the sender, the airmail surcharge was paid until France (Marseille) from where the letter had to be dispatched to Egypt by sea.

Date of the actual implementation of the changes in the domestic (i.e. the French Community) postal rates for a letter up to 20 gr.						
	50 c.	65 c.	90 c.	1 Fr.	1F50	2F
France	9 Aug, 1926	12 July, 1937	17 Nov, 1938	1 Dec, 1939	5 Jan, 1942	1 Mar, 1945
Algeria	18 Aug, 1926	15 July, 1937	21 Nov, 1938	1 Dec, 1939	5 Jan, 1942	1 Mar, 1945
Morocco	15 Aug, 1926	12 July, 1937	25 Nov, 1938	1 Dec, 1939	14 Jan, 1942	16 Mar, 1945
Tunisia	9 Aug, 1926*	12 July, 1936	1 Jan, 1939	1 Jan, 1940	11 Jan, 1942	1 Mar, 1945
AEF**	9 Aug, 1926	Aug, 1937	17 Nov, 1939	1 Dec, 1939	1 Jan, 1944	1 Apr, 1945
AOF***	1 Nov, 1926	1 Aug, 1937	1 Jan, 1939	1 Dec, 1939	1 Mar, 1942	1 Apr, 1945
Madagascar and Réunion	1 Jan, 1930	14 Aug, 1937	2 Dec, 1938	1 Jan, 1940	10 Dec, 1942****	3 Apr, 1945

* The rate for direct mailing within Morocco was 40 cents. from 16 January, 1927 to 5 January, 1928.

** AEF = Equatorial French Africa

*** AOF = Western French Africa

**** The rate for direct mailing within Madagascar remained at 1 Franc until 15 May, 1944.

Table 3. The evolution of the basic rate for letter up to 20 grams in the territories of France and its main colonies in the period from 1926 to 1945, according to *Postal and Airmail Rates in France & Colonies 1920-1945*, by Robert E. Piccarelli, France & Colonies Philatelic Society of Great Britain, 2011.



Figure 15. Airmail letter from Senegal (French West Africa) to France, 16 May, 1929 franked 3.50 Francs with stamps of the set “traditional local market” of 1922–1926, corresponding to first rate for the letter to French area (50 cents) + airmail surcharge 0–10 grams (3 Francs).

A 45 grams letter mailed by airmail, for example, paid thus the second step basic rate + 9 times the airmail surcharges. However, there were exceptions by using the weight levels for airmail surcharges similar to the ones of the normal letter, for example the case of airmail letters from AOF to France in the 1920's [Figure 15].

It was not simple for users or postal officials to enter the thicket of rates and surcharges, especially during periods of rate changes. Cases of incorrect but



Figure 17. Airmail letter from Cameroon to Morocco, 4 May, 1950 franked 10 Francs with stamps of the 1946 set “local subjects”; second rate for letters within the French area, effective 1 January, 1949, the airmail surcharge was no longer imposed.

tolerated franking or under-franked letter are not infrequent, especially in the months following the rate changes. However, for the mentioned reasons, such items are in any case example of genuine mail; they need a proper explanation, but they shall not be “dropped” because of a shortage of a few centimes of francs [Figure 16].

Finally, we have to outline that, after WWII, the air surcharges to/from the French colonies were abolished, so that understanding the rates becomes much simpler [Figure 17].



Figure 16. Airmail letter from Ivory Coast (AOF) to U.K. 19 February, 1938, with 5.50 Francs franking with various stamps of the period, corresponding to 1st letter rate (0–20 g.) to foreign countries (1.50 Francs) + 5–10 grams airmail surcharge (2 Francs each 5g = 4 Francs).

In reality, since 9 January, 1927, the 1st foreign letter rate increased to 1.75 francs, but despite of that the previous rate franking was still accepted. This was due probably because the former rate lasted 11 years and was far more familiar to postal officials who were not updated or did not have time to check, as probably happened to the mail-guard in service on the Abidjan–Bouaké train who accepted this letter.

3.3 The early years of the Italian Republic

The years from 1946 to 1948 are particularly interesting from a thematic point of view, since the stamps issued in that period celebrate important events concerning various themes, especially the historical ones:

- 31 October, 1946: *Establishment of the Republic*, 8 stamps with images reminiscent of the Medieval Republics of the country (Amalfi, Pisa, Siena etc.);
- 1 August, 1947: *50th Anniversary of the Invention of Radio*, 6 airmail stamps, with allegories of the radio messages over the earth, over the sea and in the sky;
- 3 January, 1948: *6th centenary of the death of St. Catherine of Siena*, 6 stamps, including two airmail stamps, with various images of the saint in different situations, and in the background places connected to her;
- 12 April, 1948: *Proclamation of the new Constitution*, two stamps;
- 5 March, 1948: *100th anniversary of the "Risorgimento"*, 13 stamps – of which 1 express (special delivery) – depicting the main events of the Italy unification process;
- 3 October, 1948: *Rebuilding of the Alpine army's bridge in Bassano del Grappa*, 1 stamp;
- 23 October, 1948: *100th anniversary of the death of Gaetano Donizetti*, 1 stamp.

Thus, the exhibits that can use stamps issued within that period are not a few. Obviously, the exhibitors try to find such stamps franking mail that was actually posted.

The set "Risorgimento", for instance, goes through five rate periods for domestic mail during its validity, until the end of 1949 [Figure 18]:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1) 1 February, 1946 | – 24 March, 1947 |
| 2) 25 March, 1947 | – 31 July, 1947 |
| 3) 1 August, 1947 | – 10 August, 1948 |
| 4) 11 August, 1948 | – 9 September, 1949 |
| 5) 10 September, 1949 | – 31 December, 1949 |

while the rate periods for foreign ordinary mail were just three:

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1) 1 April, 1946 | – 31 August, 1947 |
| 2) 1 September, 1947 | – 10 August, 1948 |
| 3) 11 August, 1948 | – 31 December, 1949 |

Finally, five rate periods for overseas airmail surcharges:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1) 1 May, 1946 | – 30 June, 1947 |
| 2) 1 July, 1947 | – 24 August, 1947 |
| 3) 25 August, 1947 | – 14 May 1948 |
| 4) 15 May, 1948 | – 15 May 1949 |
| 5) 16 May, 1949 | – 1 September, 1951 |



Figure 18. To talk about Goffredo Mameli (the author of the Italian anthem) the 100 Lira stamp of the 1948 *Risorgimento* set is very appropriate; the cover holds 3 copies of the stamp to pay the correct rate of 300 Lira for a registered letter to Argentina. The franking is properly explained in the caption (CIFT collective exhibit *ITALIA 150*).

As for the rates of the two countries investigated in the previous chapters, it is clearly important that the exhibitor classifies and describes correctly the items shown, mainly if they are franked with unusual rates (i.e. additional services such as special delivery and/or registration, or letters mailed to foreign countries, in particular by airmail). **Figures 19–22** is a selection of this kind of items, correctly franked by stamps having also an important thematic interest. ■



Figure 20. Airmail letter from Milan (15 January, 1949) to Argentina: 140 Lira franking (40 L. 1st overseas letter; 100 L. airmail surcharge) paid with a block of four of the 35 Lira stamps *Risorgimento* depicting Neapolitan risings of 15 May, 1848. From Claudio Manzati's exhibit.

Figure 21. Airmail letter from Rome (05/07/1955) to New Zealand franked for 1145 lira (2nd overseas rate 95 L. + airmail surcharge 7 x 150 L./5gr.) paid with eleven 100 lira *Capitol* stamps + 50 lira *Italy at Work* (excess franking of 5 L.). From Claudio Manzati's exhibit.



Figure 22. Letter to a mayor from Pontassieve (30th October, 1948) to Siena, reduced rate (7.5 L., rounded to 8 L.) paid with two copies of 4 lire *Risorgimento* stamp depicting the Padua risings of 1848. From Claudio Manzati's exhibit.



Figure 19. Letter with a reduced rate for mail to a soldier, from Messina (3 November, 1947) to Catania: 3 Lira rate paid with 3 x 1 Lira *Beginning of the Republic* stamps showing the ancient Republic of Amalfi. From Claudio Manzati's exhibit.

The second part of this article will be published in the next issue of TCNews.

Thematic Exhibiting Storytelling Through Philately

Thematic exhibits at stamp shows have broad appeal, connecting with attendees not only through the philatelic material being displayed but also through the stories they tell. In this article, Jean Wang explores different approaches that can be taken by thematic exhibitors to tell their stories.

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Storytelling is an ancient bond between the storyteller and their audience. Before written records, stories were a means by which to pass down traditions and preserve customs. Creation myths explained the natural world and folklore provided entertainment – indeed, most modern forms of entertainment continue to be rooted in stories.

Humankind uses storytelling to imagine the future and chronicle the past. Stories help us to build connections and expand our universe, making us feel like we're part of something bigger than our individual lived experience.

Little wonder then that thematic exhibits at stamp shows have broad appeal, connecting with attendees not only through the philatelic material being displayed but also through the stories they tell.

Thematic exhibits have at their core a non-philatelic story. At the same time, thematic exhibiting is a gateway to the full breadth of philately – any philatelic element can be used to help illustrate the story, as long as a clear thematic link can be made with the item's postal aspects. Thus, thematic exhibitors enjoy the best of both worlds – a connection with their audience through storytelling and at the same time the opportunity to learn about and showcase interesting and diverse material that would not be out of place in traditional, postal stationery and postal history exhibits.

In this article, I explore different approaches that can be taken by thematic exhibitors to tell their stories. My goal is two-fold: one, to encourage collectors to look beyond stamps and postmarks for interesting thematic material and two, to encourage the use of analogy as a literary device to elevate the storytelling and convey ideas that may otherwise be difficult to depict.

First, let me share a little bit about my exhibiting journey, as many of you may have traveled (or are traveling) a similar path. Just over ten years ago, my stamp collection was stalled. Up to that point, I had mainly been a country collector, filling album pages with used stamps, but it was getting harder to find very recent stamps and the early ones I was missing were expensive. I needed a fresh perspective and a

new challenge. Around that time, I ventured into organized philately, joining a local stamp club and an online stamp forum, and with their encouragement I decided to start a collection of stamps depicting blood donation and transfusion, a topic related to my profession as a hematologist.



Figure 1. Semi-postal stamp issued in 1942 for the Red Cross charity in Hungary. Véradás = blood donation.

I began as many collectors do, acquiring all the stamps I could find on my chosen topic [Figure 1]. However, as I searched online auction sites like eBay and especially Delcampe, I soon realized that much more varied material was available. My searches turned up examples of machine cancels and meters with related slogans [Figure 2], pictorial postmarks [Figure 3], and postal stationery [Figure 4]. These were items I had never previously considered, but which I happily added to my collection.

Eventually I gathered enough material to put together a two-frame thematic exhibit about blood for my local club's annual show. Although I didn't know it at the time, this was the beginning of my journey of discovery into other aspects of philately.

Figure 2. The slogan on this British meter mark makes a national appeal for blood donations in Northern Ireland.



Figure 3. This special postmark from Portugal highlights the importance of blood donation during the Christmas holidays, and raises awareness of different blood types.

Before we continue, let's clarify the difference between "topical" and "thematic", two terms that are often used interchangeably but that have very different connotations in philately.

A topical collection is one in which every item (stamp, postmark, stationery, etc) bears an image of the chosen topic. For example, a topical collection about butterflies would include only philatelic items that depict various kinds of butterflies – think of it as an illustrated catalogue. On the other hand, a thematic collection would include not only items depicting butterflies but also items related to different aspects of a story about butterflies, such as their importance to plant life, their metamorphosis or their migration. Often, as collectors read and learn more about their topic, a broader story emerges and the topical collection expands and becomes thematic. A thematic exhibit is simply a storytelling device, a vehicle through which to share a multi-layered



Figure 4. "Your blood saves many human lives | Become a blood donor" on a 1959 postal stationery envelope from Romania showing an illustration of a blood collection bottle.

story that develops a theme and explores its context within the natural world and the impact on human society, all of it illuminated by philatelic material.

The “rules” of competitive thematic exhibiting can be summed up as follows. Like any good novel, the story in a thematic exhibit should progress logically through the chapters and have a defined beginning, middle and end. Philatelic items should be selected to show thematic details through their postal aspects, and each item should advance the story while avoiding repetition.

Thematic exhibitors should strive to incorporate both a wide variety of philatelic elements and a wide range of material from pre-philatelic to modern periods. Within these rules, thematic exhibitors have the freedom and the luxury of drawing upon all branches of philately in their search for items to illustrate their story. Thematic connections can be made to any aspect of an item that was initiated, introduced or approved by the postal service in order to move the mail.

My exhibit – titled *Blood: A Modern Medicine* – traces the evolution of blood from its ancient symbolic roots into a modern medicine, and explores the science and societal impact of blood donation and transfusion. Over the past decade, I have continually revised it, gradually adding interesting new items and, in the process, learning much about diverse areas of philately.

While my philatelic knowledge is certainly not as deep as that of specialists in any particular area, I have derived a great deal of enjoyment from discovering new items that are perfectly suited to illustrate specific thematic details and researching the little corner of philately that they represent.

At first, my focus was mainly on finding thematically-connected items other than stamps to fill the pages; this remains an ongoing effort. More recently, I have also tried to think outside the box by illustrating certain ideas through analogy, which allows for the inclusion of thematic details that cannot be directly shown on philatelic material. Let's consider these approaches in turn.

Incorporating a diversity of philatelic elements

When thematic collectors (including me) set out to create a new collection or exhibit, they will often start by looking for stamps and postmarks – after all, that is what attracted many, if not most, of us to the hobby. However, the challenge (and the fun!) lies in looking for more diverse material including items from traditional philately, postal stationery and postal history. Indeed, for exhibitors of modern themes, finding thematically-connected postal stationery or postal history allows incorporation of older material, and the philatelic descriptions often

provide interesting anecdotes that complement the thematic story. The following are some examples from my exhibit.

One of blood's main functions is to transport oxygen from the lungs to the rest of the body. Most of the oxygen in blood is bound to hemoglobin inside red cells, with a small amount dissolved in solution. In earlier versions of my exhibit, I used stamps, postmarks and meters to show hemoglobin and oxygen. Recently, I was able to acquire a Mulready lettersheet [Figure 5] with not one but two printed advertisements for “oxygenous water”, a sparkling solution with supposed health benefits.

Mulready postal stationery lettersheets and envelopes were introduced as part of the British postal reforms of 1840. Lettersheets with advertisements printed on the inside were sold to the public by printers with reduction of postage, subsidized by the advertising. As this practice was tolerated by the Post Office, thematic connections can be made to the printed ads. Thus, this lettersheet is a perfect item for illustrating how blood transports oxygen and adds significant philatelic interest to the exhibit page.

Early advances in transfusion medicine were in large part driven by the needs of war. In World War I, and particularly World War II, blood transfusions saved the lives of countless wounded soldiers. To illustrate wounded soldiers in WWI, I use a 1918 cover mailed to a Canadian soldier serving overseas who was wounded shortly before the letter was posted, bearing a scarce “WOUNDED” auxiliary marking that was applied at the receiving Field Post Office in France [Figure 6].

For WWII, I use a 1942 postal card issued by the Italian Army General Staff [Figure 7]. Such cards were given to soldiers in war zones who could send them free of charge via military post to anywhere in Italy. This particular card shows the exploits of an alpine unit in which a scout is wounded and leaves a trail of blood for his comrades to follow.

The collection of donated blood was promoted as one of the many functions of the Red Cross as early as the 1930s. After WWII, the National Red Cross Society in many countries became involved in organizing civilian blood transfusion services. Not surprisingly, there are numerous stamps that depict blood donation and transfusion services by the Red Cross.

In my search for a more significant Red Cross item, I came across an article in a medical philately journal describing the existence of covers such as the one shown in Figure 8. In September 1914, the postmaster general of Trinidad and Tobago authorized the use of a Red Cross Society charity label for one day only (on September 18), to mail approximately 900 unsealed envelopes containing

[illegible]

Messrs Arnold & Co.
Ink Makers
153 Abchurch Lane St.

PROOF OF THE PRESS

Figure 5. A Mulready lettersheet with multiple advertisements printed for the proprietors by Charlton and Meredith, including two advertisements for oxygenous water.



Figure 6. A cover mailed in 1918 to a Canadian soldier serving overseas who was wounded shortly before the letter was posted, bearing a scarce “WOUNDED” auxiliary marking that was applied at the receiving Field Post Office in France. The cover was redirected to the Concalescent Depot to where the soldier had been transferred. By the end of World War I in November 1918, about 61,000 Canadians had died, and 172,000 were wounded.

Figure 7. A pictorial military postcard issued by the Italian Army General Staff. Such cards were given to soldiers in war zones who could send them free of charge via military post to anywhere in Italy. This card was published in a set of 7 different “cartoon cards” printed in 1942 by the I.P.S.-O.C.V. (the state printer) in Rome. It was sent to Rome, 1942 Posta Militare N.59 cds, assigned to Isonzo Division operating in Yugoslavia 11 April 1941 to 8 Sept 1943, HQ in Novo Mesto.



- ① Boys, we must take the summit at any cost this day;
- ② I need a trusted alpine to open a passage in the barbed wire.
- ③ Randi says "I'll go Captain because I have steady hands."
- ④ He loses blood, he is certainly wounded. It does not matter, if the passage is open.
- ⑤ It does not matter that the opening is marked for his comrades by his blood.
- ⑥ "They have passed" someone tells him, and the wounded alpine is happy.



Figure 8. In September 1914, the Postmaster-General of Trinidad and Tobago authorized the use of the Trinidad Red Cross Society's charity label as a postage stamp for one day only, Sept 18. The letters were mailed at the ½d rate for unsealed letters and the labels were postmarked. This letter was returned to the Society's office and redirected to Blanchisseuse Ward, endorsed by Society Treasurer Mrs. E. M. Phillips to avoid tax upon forwarding.

a fundraising appeal letter. The cover I acquired still contains the original appeal letter.

Potential blood donors may be deferred if they have recently traveled to a malaria risk zone, as malarial parasites can be transmitted in the blood of an infected person. Plenty of stamps have been issued promoting malaria eradication; many of these depict mosquitoes, which breed in wetlands such as marshes and swamps and transmit the parasites through their bite.

To increase the variety of philatelic material on the page dealing with malaria, I added an 1811 letter sent from Lapalud, France [Figure 9], which takes its name from the surrounding marshy areas (malaria is also called “swamp fever”, or paludisme in French, from the Latin palus meaning swamp), and a 1954 surcharged postal stationery card from Portugal printed with the social hygiene message “Destroy flies and mosquitoes, which spread the disease” [Figure 10].



Figure 9. Pre-philatelic cover with postmark 89 | LA PALUD, mailed in 1811 in Lapalud, France. The Rhône River often burst its banks and flooded everything. Lapalud took its name from the surrounding marshy areas, first as two words, then as one. The Latin name for a marsh is “palus,” for several marshes “paludis.”

Blood donors are considered to be Good Samaritans. This is an abstract idea that is hard to illustrate: although it's possible to find stamps that show blood donors extending a helping hand [Figure 11], the concept of being a Good Samaritan is implied and not explicit.



Figure 11. Blood donors giving a helping hand on a stamp issued in Spain in 1976.

Figure 10. A surcharged postal stationery card is issued in Portugal in 1954, with a printed message “Destroy flies and mosquitoes, which spread disease”. The Portuguese League for Social Prophylaxis (LPPS) is a non-profit organization founded in 1924 with the aim of raising awareness, educating and positively act on pressing social problems. Nine different cards with social hygiene messages were issued for their 30th anniversary.



In my search for a better item, I came across the existence of an official Ottoman post office that operated from 1903 to 1914 at the Good Samaritan Inn (Khan al-Harthur) on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. The reason for establishing a post office was the emerging tourism to the Holy Land. I was able to acquire a postcard that was posted from this post office to London that bears four violet bilingual “Bon Samaritain” postmarks [Figure 12]. Traveled postcards are scarce, as most tourist cards were favor canceled.

Looking beyond the printed image or text

For the items I have shown to this point, the thematic connection has been made to printed images or text or to a postal marking. In some cases, however, a thematic detail is better demonstrated by a deeper aspect of a philatelic item that goes beyond what is merely printed. These layered connections can provide an added dimension to both the the-



Figure 12. A postcard mailed from an official Ottoman post office operating at the Good Samaritan Inn, established to comfort “touristic” pilgrims between Jerusalem and Jericho. The stamps on this card were cancelled with violet bilingual (Arabic and French) “Bon Samaritain” postmarks. Genuinely mailed tourist cards with this postmark are scarce as most of them were cancelled to order.

matic story and the philatelic description, as the following examples demonstrate.

In 1900, Austrian physician Karl Landsteiner published the first description of the ABO blood types. This landmark discovery made transfusions significantly safer, for which Landsteiner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1930.

Landsteiner appears on a 1993 stamp from Guyana [Figure 13], part of a large series depicting famous people. Along with his portrait and a drawing of red cells in a blood vessel, the stamp depicts four blood grouping cards labeled with the ABO blood types. However, careful inspection backed by subject knowledge reveals a significant design error – the labels for the “O” and “B” blood types have been switched. Thus, this stamp is perfect for illustrating not only the ABO blood types but also the care that must be taken to avoid errors in blood grouping!

Blood donation by volunteers is an essential service – a donor base of approximately 1% of the population is needed to meet a society's basic requirements for blood. Demonstration of the essential nature of blood donation in a thematic exhibit is not easy in the absence of a stamp or other philatelic item with



Figure 13. Austrian physician Karl Landsteiner on a stamp issued in Guyana in 1993. Landsteiner was the first to describe the ABO blood types. There is a design error on this stamp: the labels for the O and B blood typing cards have been erroneously switched!

a printed statement to that effect. Although many stamps promoting blood donation declare that blood saves lives, or that blood donation is a civic duty, there are none that I know of that comment on the fact that blood donation is an essential service.

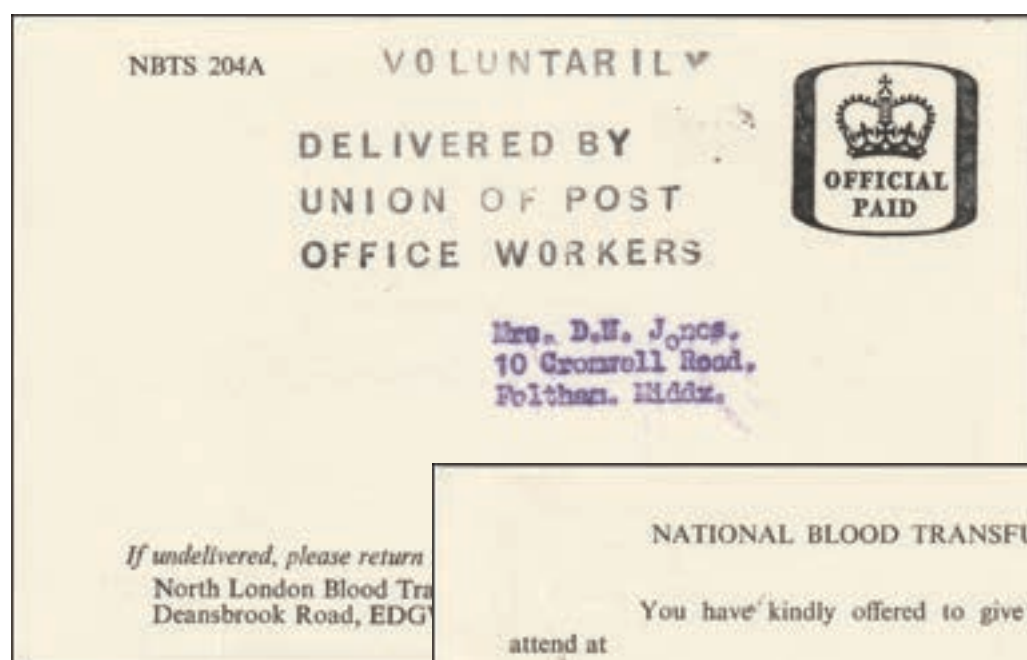
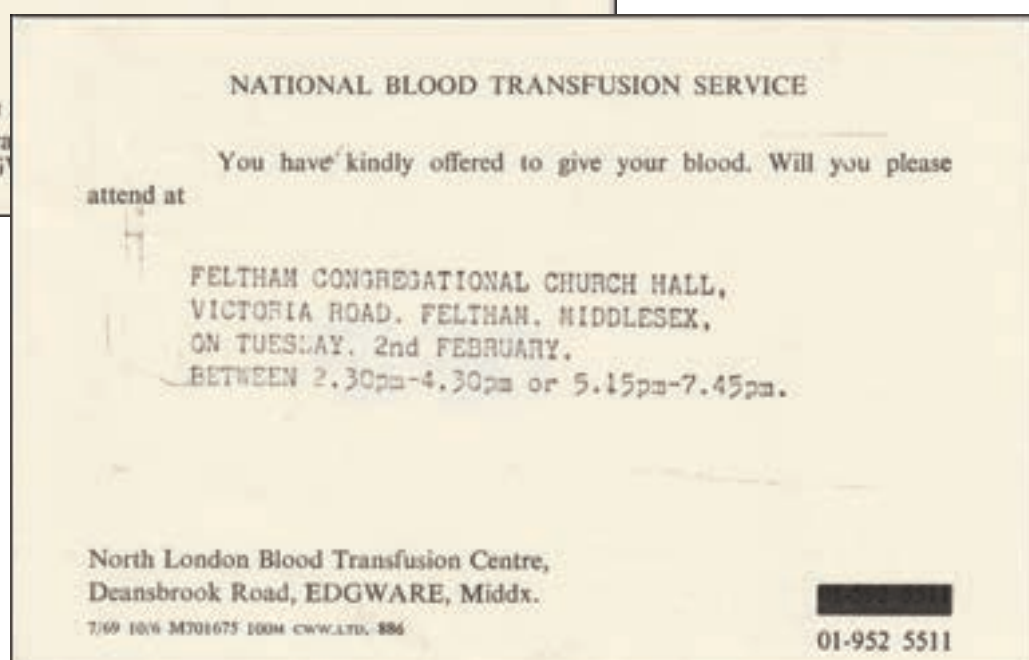


Figure 14. Printed-to-order postal stationery card sent by the North London Blood Transfusion Centre during a seven-week national postal strike in 1971. This card was delivered voluntarily by the union of post office workers, perfectly conveying the importance of blood donation in our society.



Blood transfusion services often send out information to potential donors about upcoming clinics. In Great Britain, reminders were mailed using printed-to-order postal stationery cards that can be used in a thematic exhibit. I was quite happy to find a scarce example of such a card that was delivered voluntarily by postal workers during a seven-week national postal strike in 1971 [Figure 14]. The handstamp applied on the card, when considered together with the origin and purpose of the card, perfectly conveys the fact that blood donation is an essential service in our society.

Making literal connections to a thematic detail

Now let's consider the other extreme – illustrating a thematic detail by making literal use of a word or phrase (or even just a letter) on an item that may not otherwise be thematically related. Ideally, this approach should be taken as an opportunity to incorporate a wider variety of philatelic elements in the exhibit. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the literal element must have been originated or approved by the post office or somehow involved in the process of moving the mail.

In my exhibit, I use this approach in the subchapter discussing blood groups. When Landsteiner first described the ABO blood types in 1900, he actually named them A, B, and C (the C was later changed to O). I use an “A B C” perfin on a 1925 British Empire Exhibition stamp to show this thematic detail [Figure 15].

Every individual has two genes that together determine their ABO blood type. The US non-denominated postage stamps issued in 1978 and 1981 are perfectly suited to a graphical representation of how these blood types are inherited, with the letter de-

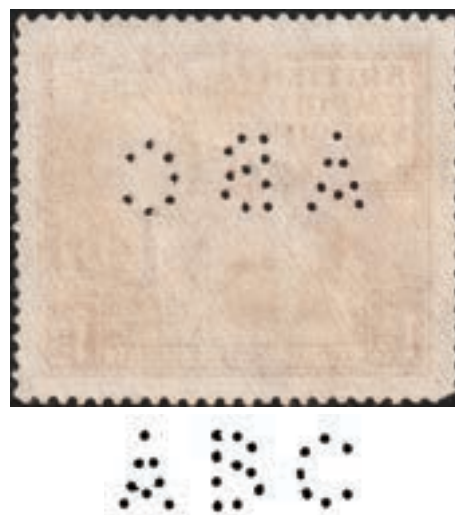


Figure 15. “A B C”, a British perfin, known only on the 1925 British Empire Exhibition stamp issue, can be used to illustrate the blood types originally identified and named by Karl Landsteiner. The blood type C was later changed to O.

nominations A, B, and C standing in for the different blood group genes [Figure 16]. Furthermore, definitive stamps offer an opportunity to incorporate interesting varieties such as the imperforate pair shown in **Figure 17**.



Figure 17. Imperforate pair of the US non-denominated definitive stamp issued in 1981, B=18c, valid for domestic mail.

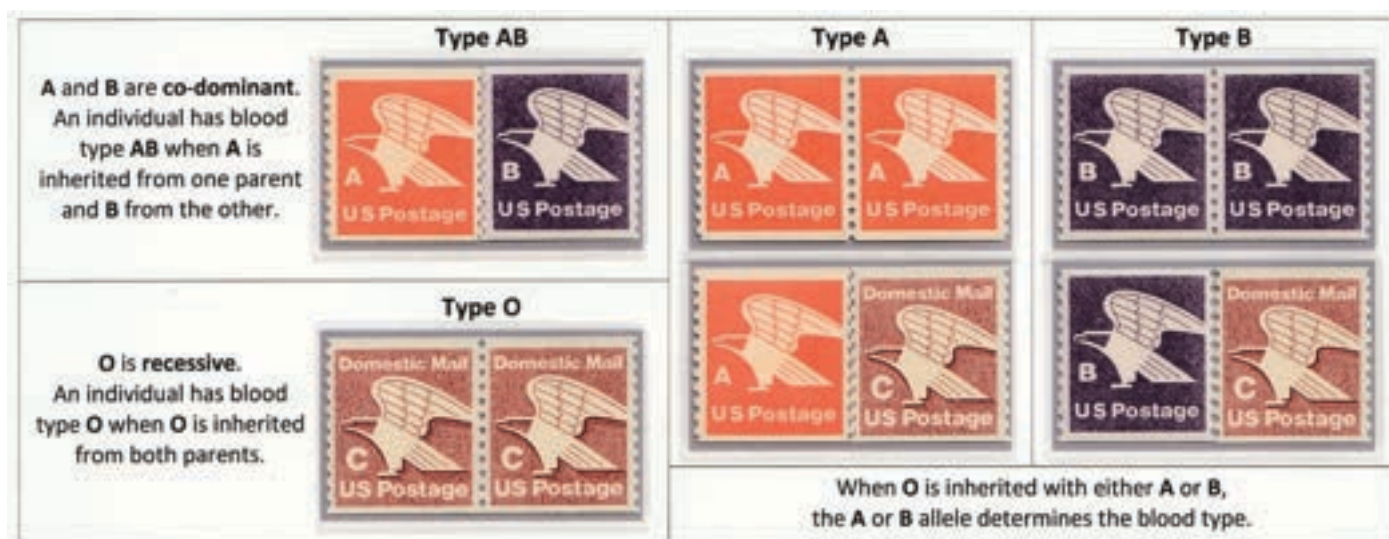


Figure 16. Non-denominated postage stamps issued in the United States in 1978 and 1981 are suited to a graphical representation of how the blood types are inherited.



Figure 18. A typographical cancel from an issue of La Dépêche (The Dispatch), a regional daily newspaper published 1883–1891 in Chalon-sur-Saône.

Another philatelic element that can provide a literal connection to a thematic detail is a typographical cancel.

Typographical canceling of newspapers occurred in France from 1870 to 1908. Stamps were used to pay postal tariffs on newspapers and periodicals. To save time, the stamps were applied to blank newsprint and the subsequently printed text served to cancel the stamps, thereby fulfilling a postal function. Thus, the text of a typographical cancel can be used to make a thematic connection.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the first volunteer blood donation service was organized in London by Percy Lane Oliver, who worked for the Camberwell division of the Red Cross. Whenever a patient needed a transfusion, a messenger was dispatched to bring a suitable donor to the hospital. I illustrate this fact

with a typographical cancel from an issue of La Dépêche (The Dispatch), a regional daily newspaper published 1883–1891 in Chalon-sur-Saône [Figure 18].

Illustrating thematic concepts through philatelic analogies

Analogy is a literary device used to convey an abstract concept by comparison with a more concrete one. The goal of an analogy is not only to show, but also to explain. For example, “...as useful as rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic” is an analogy for futility, since we understand the task to be a useless one.

The first permanent facility for collecting and preserving donated blood was established in 1937 at

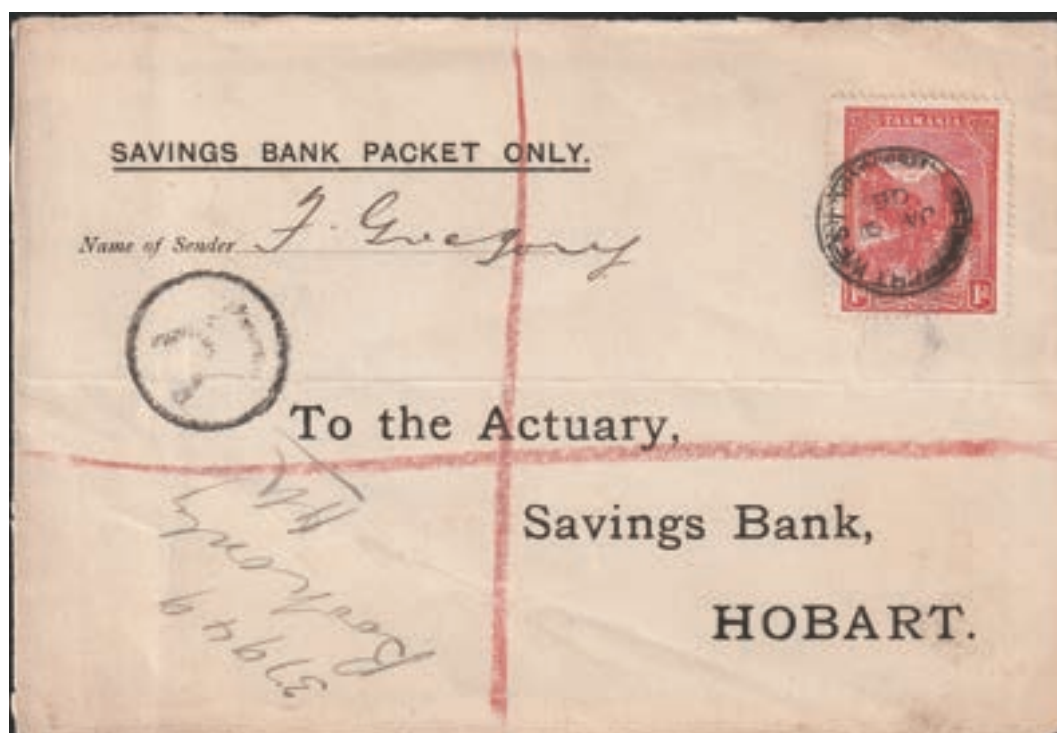


Figure 19. A Tasmanian pre-printed envelope addressed to the Actuary, Savings Bank, HOBART, mailed at a special savings bank concession rate that included registration (circular ‘R’ cachet alongside). According to the Tasmanian Postal Rates of 1888 “... deposit books ... may be forwarded ... at a charge of one penny only ... if bearing the endorsement “SAVINGS BANK PACKET ONLY.” and the signature of the sender. Postmasters are bound to register these packets without fee.”

Cook County Hospital under Dr. Bernard Fantus. He conceived the idea of making blood readily available when needed, rather than having to collect it on the spot; withdrawals would be supported by deposits, analogous to financial banking. Fantus named the facility a “blood bank”. I illustrate banking with a scarce 1906 Tasmanian preprinted envelope mailed at a special savings bank concession rate [Figure 19]. In this case, the banking analogy is an integral part of the story and there is a direct thematic connection to the philatelic item.

The use of analogy in a thematic exhibit can also be extended to instances in which the storyteller is trying to explain a concept that may be difficult to show directly on stamps or other philatelic material. In such cases, a valid approach is to illustrate the thematic detail with an item that itself serves as a philatelic analogy, either visually or functionally. This approach allows for inclusion of items that at first glance don't have an obvious connection to the story, but for which a connection can be revealed through the associated thematic and philatelic text.

Visual philatelic analogies

Visual analogies are a very powerful way to convey an idea quickly and effectively.

One of the most striking examples of a visual philatelic analogy I have seen appears in Iva Mouritsen's

beautiful open class exhibit titled *A Royal Ménage à Trois and its Historical Consequences*. Her exhibit tells the story of Danish King Christian VII, Queen Caroline Matilda, and his physician/prime minister (and her lover) Johann Friedrich Struensee. Struensee was eventually arrested and executed by quartering – Iva effectively illustrates this detail with an 1857 divisible stamp from the Duchy of Brunswick (German: Braunschweig), split into quarters. When I first saw her exhibit in Toronto in 2019, this brilliant use of analogy struck a chord, and later I borrowed the idea for my own exhibit.

It occurred to me that I could use the same approach [Figure 20] to illustrate the idea that donated blood is separated into four components: red cells, platelets, and plasma, which are used to treat patients, and white cells, which are thrown away. I took the analogy one step further by finding a letter franked with three-quarters of a stamp [Figure 21], representing the three blood components that are used clinically.

Blood donors are motivated by altruism – they remain anonymous to the people that benefit from their donations. The idea of anonymity is abstract and a potentially difficult one to illustrate directly. However, this concept is very effectively communicated by an 1891 Liberian postal stationery card on which the indicium has been scratched out before postmarking [Figure 22]. The story behind this unusual postal treatment is interesting, if somewhat



Figure 20. A divisible postage stamp from the Duchy of Brunswick, issued in 1857, with face value 1 Gutegroschen, and split into four quarters. The stamp was meant to be quartered for use on local letters paying the lowest postal rate: the local delivery fee was $\frac{1}{4}$ Gutegroschen. The divisible stamp was intended to avoid having to issue additional $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, and 1 Gutegroschen stamps in addition to the existing $\frac{1}{4}$ Gutegroschen stamp for local mail.

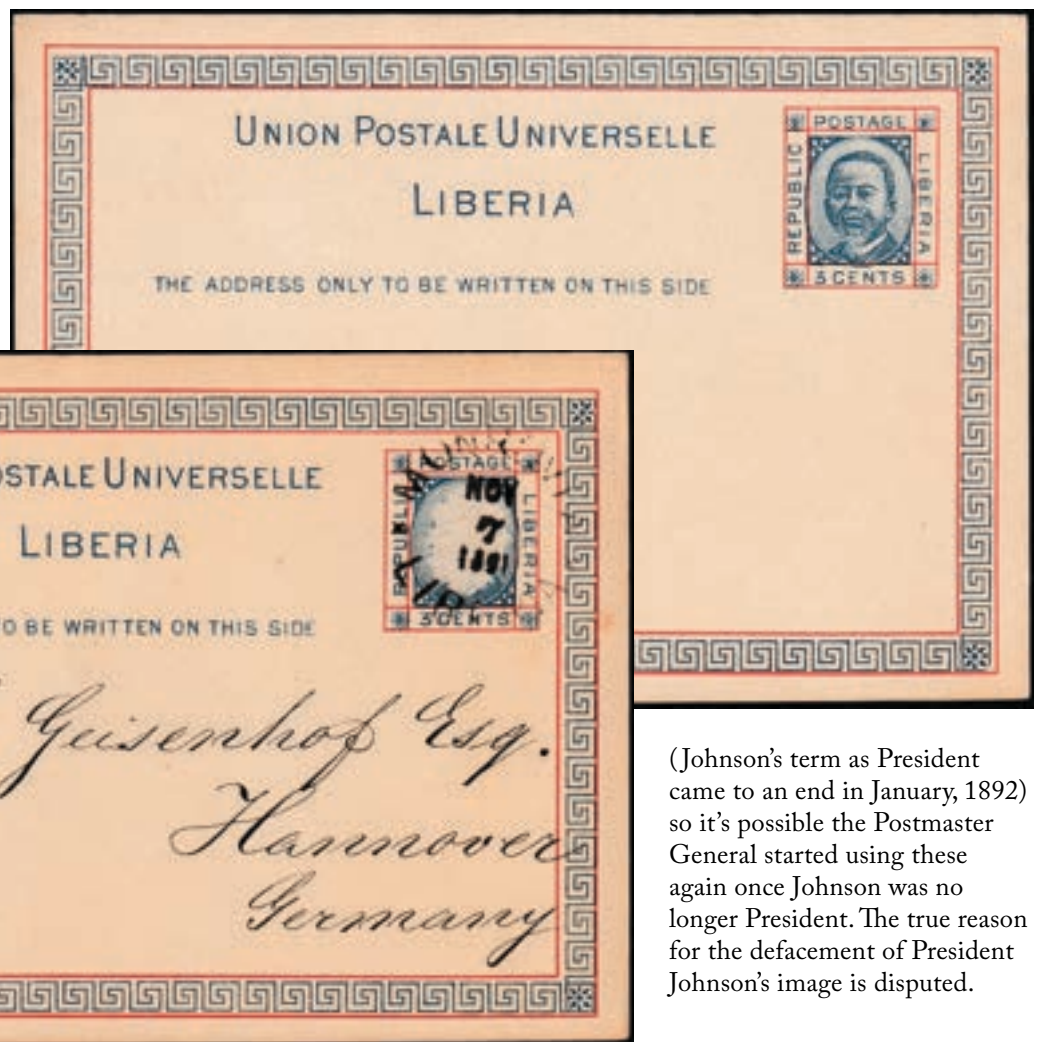
Figure 21. Three quarters from two divisible postage stamps from the Duchy of Brunswick, the 1857 issue. Postage rate for this cover from Helmstedt to Königsutter was $\frac{1}{2}$ Gutegroschen (distance ca. 16 km) plus $\frac{1}{4}$ Gutegroschen for the local delivery fee at destination, paid in advance



controversial – one theory is that President Johnson, whose image appears in the indicium, absconded with the Treasury in 1891, causing the postmaster general to order his portrait deleted. A perhaps more plausible theory is that the poor quality of the image was behind the postmaster general's order. Regardless, the loss of the portrait on the modified card clearly evokes the concept of anonymity.

A recent acquisition that I am planning to add to my exhibit is the postal stationery envelope shown in **Figure 23**. The indicium showing a profile of George Washington is albino – embossed but not inked; this happens when two envelope blanks are drawn into the press at the same time and only the top one is inked. As a bonus, the inside of this envelope also has an offset printing of both the car-

Figure 22. Postal stationery card issued in Liberia in 1891, unused, and used with the defaced indicium removing the image of President Johnson. The cards used through 1891 (when Johnson was President) have almost all been defaced and the full face ones were used mostly in 1892



(Johnson's term as President came to an end in January, 1892) so it's possible the Postmaster General started using these again once Johnson was no longer President. The true reason for the defacement of President Johnson's image is disputed.

Figure 23. A two cent postal stationery cover issued in 1907 in the United States. The George Washington indicium is embossed, but erroneously left uninked during printing. Postally used albino postal stationery covers are scarce.



mine indicium and a black corner card, indicating that it was drawn into the press after a missed blank.

Examples of albino envelopes are not hard to find, but ones that are postally used in period are scarce. This particular cover has been inspected and allowed to pass through the mails with an “OK” marking in blue crayon. The colorless indicium provides a perfect visual analogy for the fact that in 1799, nearly four liters of blood were drained from Washington after he developed a throat infection, likely causing his death.

Functional philatelic analogies

While visual analogies are easy to grasp, it can take a bit more effort to understand a functional philatelic analogy, where a thematic concept is explained by virtue of its similarity to a type of postal service or a postal treatment, for example. However, I personally find this aspect of thematic storytelling to be

the most gratifying – it provides a creative outlet for innovation, and I love the “Eureka” moment when I discover a particularly suitable philatelic item that lets me illustrate a difficult concept.

In some cases, the functional parallel between the thematic storyline and the philatelic item is straightforward. For example, I use a disinfected cover [Figure 24] to illustrate the fact that donated blood is treated to destroy infectious viruses, and an ambulance cover [Figure 25] to illustrate the idea that an ailing patient (like a damaged cover) needs transportation by ambulance.

In other cases, the connection may be less obvious, and it is the job of the exhibitor to provide the link through both the thematic text and the philatelic description.

During the process of blood donation, typically about one pint is collected, approximately 10 per-



Figure 24. A disinfected letter from the Austrian Empire, sent from Salonich (Saloniki, now in Greece) to Trieste, featuring a black circular “Sigillum Sanitatis” eagle departmental cachet. Before sanitizing, holes were applied with a rastel.



Figure 25. Salvaged cover from Air France Douglas DC-3 bound for London that crashed onto a factory on 4 September, 1946. This badly burned cover was folded and forwarded in an ambulance cover to Slough with a cachet explaining the delay and requesting that the cover not be taxed.

cent of an average person's blood volume. I link this last fact to a 1946 cover from Belgium, franked with stamps that have been overprinted “-10%” [Figure 26]. As part of measures taken to relaunch Belgium's struggling post-war economy, postal rates were re-

duced by 10 percent – a parallel to the 10 percent reduction in blood volume following a donation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) organizes an annual celebration called *World Blood Donor*



Figure 26. A registered cover mailed from Zaventem to Brussels in May, 1946, franked with Leopold III with “V” and crown stamps provisionally overprinted “-10%”. As part of measures taken to relaunch Belgium's struggling post-war economy, postal rates were reduced by 10 percent on 20 May 1946. Rather than print new stamps to meet the new rate requirements, postmasters were instructed to overprint existing stock to indicate a reduction in face value by 10 percent.

Day to raise public awareness of the need for blood donation, in essence, “spreading the word”.

A philatelic analogy for this important function of the WHO is found in the phonopost service, in which voice messages recorded on cardboard discs could be sent through the mail at special rates introduced in the 1939 Universal Postal Union Convention [Figure 27]. In this case, the thematic link is made not to the contents of the message but to the

act of sending the message, thereby “spreading the word”.

Mobile blood units reach donors in smaller communities that don’t have permanent facilities for holding blood drives. The model of a mobile unit serving a small community can also be found in philately. **Figure 28** shows an 1865 letter sent from Gardonne, France that was carried in a mobile mailbox (BOITE MOBILE) to the nearest town with a post



Figure 27. A phonopost cover from Argentina, enclosing a cardboard disc with recorded voice message, mailed at special rate introduced by the UPU Congress in 1939 in Buenos Aires. This innovation was modern at the time, but short-lived.



Figure 28. An 1865 letter sent from Gardonne carried in a mobile mailbox to the nearest town with a post office, in this case, Libourne, a distance of 46 km. Note the circular mobile box (BOITE MOBILE) postmark applied at the post office in Libourne. At that time the mobile box provided convenient postal service for Gardonne, which did not have a post office of its own until 1875.

office (in this case, Libourne). The mobile box provided convenient postal service for Gardonne, which had a population of 381 in 1866 and did not have a post office until 1875.

Epilogue

Philately is all about stories, whether they are focused on the philatelic aspects of the material, on the history behind the material, or on the printed images and text. Thematic exhibitors have the luxury of exploring broad aspects of philately in the telling of their stories.

The use of analogy, which provides an outlet for creativity, both enhances the storytelling and enriches the collection through the inclusion of unusual and unexpected philatelic items. There's no limit to where thematics can take you, and every collection is unique.

For me, thematic collecting and exhibiting has been a gateway to a wider world of philately, both challenging and rewarding, with endless learning and enjoyment.

I invite you to come along for the ride! ■

Resources

1. American Philatelic Society. "Jean Wang, Topical and Thematic Collecting and Exhibiting," APS Stamp Chat, August 2023. youtu.be/rTvtvQAvQys
2. Cortese, Michael, Charles Epting and Jean Wang. "Jean Wang: Thematic Collecting," Conversations with Philatelists, Episode 92 (26 September 2022). youtu.be/j92PDviBqUU

3. Congrove, Jack R., Dawn R. Hamman and Martin Kent Miller (editors). *Topical Adventures*, ATA Handbook 168 (American Topical Association, 2020).

4. Mi Oficina No. 604: "Jean Wang, Blood: A Modern Medicine – Storytelling in Thematic Exhibiting," October 2023, youtu.be/HXtPcnS0w1A

5. Mouritsen, Iva. "A Royal Ménage à Trois and its Historical Consequences," museumofphilately.com/collection/90

6. Wang, Jean. "Chalybeate Waters – Wading Into Thematics," *The Canadian Philatelist* (January/February 2019).

7. Wang, Jean. "Thematic Exhibiting: Connecting Through Creativity," *The Philatelic Exhibitor* First Quarter 2023.

About the author

Dr. Jean Wang is a hematologist and leukemia researcher in Toronto, Canada, with an interest in medical philately. She is the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada delegate to the FIP Thematic Commission, a member of the Board of Directors of the Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation, and from 2018 to 2025 was a member of Canada Post's Stamp Advisory Committee. In 2023, she was the first Canadian to be appointed to the Board of Trustees of the American Philatelic Research Library.

Jean has given numerous presentations on medical philately and thematic collecting and exhibiting and her articles on these subjects have appeared in various philatelic journals including *The Canadian Philatelist*, *The American Philatelist*, *Topical Time*, and *The Philatelic Exhibitor*. At CANPEX 2019, her exhibit *Blood: A Modern Medicine* became the first thematic exhibit to win the grand award at a national level show in Canada. Interested readers can follow the evolution of the exhibit from the very beginning on bit.ly/BloodThematicExhibit.

An American Express Mail Service

The Famed Pony Express

The Pony Express, the famed and fast mail service in the western United States, operated for only 18 months—from April 3, 1860, to October 1861. This legendary enterprise is part not only of American postal history but also of the broader history of the United States, serving as an important unifying factor.

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JOHANN VANDENHAUTE



Figure 1. Route between Sacramento, California and St. Joseph, Missouri, covering 2,000 miles (3,200 km).

Since the days of the Romans, Genghis Khan's couriers, and the imperial riders of the 15th century, no one had dared to organize a fast mail service: covering 2,000 miles (or 3,200 km) from California to Missouri using 190 relay stations, 80 riders, and 500 horses to carry shipments from Sacramento to Saint Joseph. These riders crossed the snowy Sierras, deserts, Rockies, and prairies—then largely controlled by Native Americans or outlaws of the Wild West—delivering mail in just 10 days using only horseback couriers instead of stagecoaches [Figure 1].

By the mid-19th century, there was a pressing need for fast transcontinental mail: California had joined the Union in 1850, and the Gold Rush brought a huge influx of people. The telegraph and railroads had not yet been built. It took over a month for a letter to reach the Pacific Coast from the Atlantic by ship or rail via the Isthmus of Panama [Figure 2].



Figure 2. An insufficiently prepaid letter travelled from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast via the Isthmus of Panama in 1867.

1. Operations

The First Rate Period:

March 1, 1860 – August 14, 1860

The Pony Express was founded by three Missouri businessmen: William H. Russell, Alexander Majors [Figure 3], and William B. Waddell. In 1849, they formed the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company, which became the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company in 1850, a major freight carrier for the U.S. Army in the West, with 3,500 covered wagons and 4,000 drivers. They later diversified into passenger and mail transport.

Some of the first letters carried by Pony Express riders have been preserved. Eastbound letters left Saint Joseph at 6:30 a.m. on April 3, 1860, and arrived in Sacramento on April 13, then continued by boat to San Francisco, arriving to great celebration on April 14 at 1:38 p.m. [Figure 4].

The first westbound trip was even faster: mail left San Francisco by steamboat on April 3 at 1 a.m., picked up in Sacramento by Pony Express riders, and delivered to Saint Joseph on April 13—just 10 days later.



Figure 3. Alexander Majors (1814–1900), an American businessman, who along with William Hepburn Russell and William B. Waddell founded the Pony Express, based in St. Joseph, Missouri.

Figure 4. The first day of the Pony Express (Westbound). Prepaid 10¢ envelope from the U.S. Post, with cancellation from the St. Joseph office of the Central Overland California (COC) & Pike's Peak Express Company (PPEC).



Figure 5. May 1, 1860, from San Francisco to Ohio with the COC & PPEC postmark, The Pony Express Saint Joseph arrival stamp dated April 30. Washington 10¢ green stamp, postmark canceled by US Mail Saint Joseph, Missouri.

According to a U.S. Post Office Department decision on September 20, 1852, all mail transported by private carriers had to use pre-stamped envelopes at federal rates. Between June 30, 1855, and July 1, 1863, the rates were 3¢ for distances up to 3,000 miles and 10¢ for longer distances. Washington-type envelopes (red or green) were issued, or adhesive stamps were used [Figure 5].

Private operators added their own charges. During the initial period, Pony Express owners charged \$5 per half-ounce for their rapid service—understandable given that stagecoach transport took 25 days!

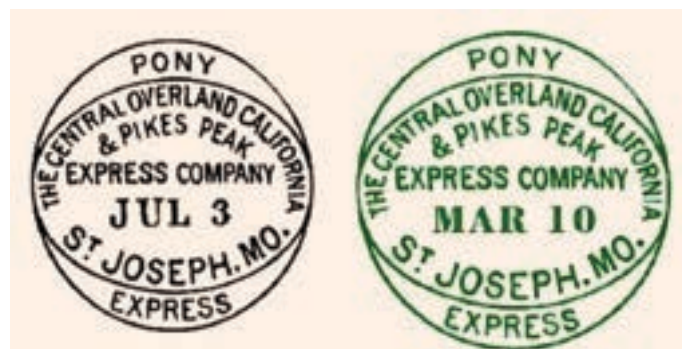


Figure 6. Illustrated date stamp, black print available in blue, red, and green.



Figure 7. Mail in transit from Sacramento, California to Madison, Indiana (Eastbound) on January 7. Prepaid USPO envelope 3¢ with overprint “PAID Central Overland Pony Express Company,” oval Pony Express cancellation, the Saint Joseph Post Office circular postmark.

Despite expectations, the Pony Express never received financial support from the U.S. Post. Subsidies were instead granted to the rival Overland Mail Stage Company, which operated a slower southern route.

Various types of date and cancellation stamps were used [Figure 6]. Express fees were marked in pencil or ink, but sometimes also with printed “PAID C.O.P.E.C.” markings [Figure 7].

The Second Rate Period: August 15, 1860 – April 14, 1861

After four months, lacking federal support, the operators changed their pricing. The express surcharge was lowered to \$2.50 per ounce. Operations continued despite financial strain and a lack of support from the U.S. Postmaster General (who favored the competition). During this time, new postal markings appeared, replacing handwritten notes. Multiple types of stamps coexisted,



Figure 8. Letter dated November 8, 1860, announcing Lincoln's election, transported to Denver, Colorado via Pony Express and then by stagecoach.

3. The End of the Transcontinental Pony Express

The Fourth Rate Period:

July 1, 1861 – October 26, 1861

By July 1861, the Pony Express became an official U.S. postal service and was subsidized accordingly. Overland Mail Stage Co. became the sole operator, obligated to run twice-weekly rides between Saint Joseph and Placerville (over 3,000 km in under 10 days). Wells Fargo played a dual role: distributing pre-stamped envelopes and collecting express mail, and also operating the San Francisco–Placerville segment via stagecoach, train, and boat.

Wells Fargo printed new stamps in red (\$1), green (\$2), and black (\$4) used for eastbound mail [Figures 12–13].



Figure 12. New stamps with changed values in red (\$1), green (\$2), and black (\$4).



Figure 13. Pony Express letter from St. Joseph to Virginia City, Nevada.

For westbound mail from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific, a separate \$1 “garter stamp” was issued by Nesbitt & Co. of New York, used to pay extra weight above a half-ounce [Figures 14–15].



Figure 14. Three stamps of the “garter” type, also referred to as “garter/jarretelle”.

Figure 14. The Wells Fargo “garter”-type surcharge Pony Express stamp on a letter from New York to San Francisco. Franked with U.S. Postage 10¢ Washington 1861 stamp on a Wells Fargo postal stationery.



The End of the Pony Express

The Pony Express ended in October 1861. Under the terms of the contract with the Post Office Department, operations had to cease once the eastern and western sections of the transcontinental telegraph were connected—which happened on October 27, 1861. U.S. newspapers briefly noted this “scheduled death.”

In total, according to company records verified by U.S. postal historians, 296 rides took place in both directions, and 39,500 letters were carried during the 18 months of operation between San Francisco, California, and Saint Joseph, Missouri.

4. The Virginia City Pony Express (1862–1865)

After the transcontinental Pony Express ended, local courier services continued.

Pony Express stamps issued by Wells Fargo were reused, but with new overprints and text. Used mainly for heavy letters (short messages went via telegraph), the Nevada–California regional Pony Express issued three gummed stamps (10¢ brown, 25¢ blue, 25¢ pink-red) [Figure 15]. These served the same purpose: covering the “express” surcharge on top of the U.S. Post’s 3¢ envelope rate.

Rates were lower than in 1861 due to shorter distances [Figure 16]. ■



Figure 15. Pony Express stamps used by Virginia City Pony Express: 10¢ brown, 25¢ blue, 25¢ pink-red.



Figure 16. Letter sent to San Francisco from Carson City in the same type of prepaid envelope with 25¢ additional franking and overprint.

Source

The Pony Express – The Postal History, by Richard C. Frajola, George J. Kramer, and Steven C. Walske, The Philatelic Foundation, 2005. www.rfra-jola.com/pony/PonyBook.pdf

The Symbols of the Olympian Gods and Lesser Deities

The story of a thematic collection takes on new depth when it tells about the beliefs and traditions related to the subject. The gods and goddesses of Greek mythology, along with their associated symbols, can be explored through many different topics, depending on what they represent.

TEXT AND IMAGES BY JARI MAJANDER, AIJP

Greek mythology is the rich collection of myths and legends that the ancient Greeks used to explain the world around them. These stories explore the origins of the universe, the nature of the gods, the adventures of heroes, and the values of Greek society. Blending imagination, religion, and history, Greek myths were passed down through oral tradition and later written by poets such as Homer and Hesiod.

Greek mythology features gods, demigods, heroes, and countless mythical creatures. The myths associated with them are popular themes in Greek art, drama, literature, coins, and philately [Figure 1], and have had a lasting influence on Western culture as



Figure 1. Head of *Athena*, goddess of wisdom, and an owl; two sides of an ancient Greek coin (5th century BC).



Figure 2. *The Assembly of the Gods* (Concilio degli dei), with the twelve Olympian gods. A painting by the Italian Renaissance master Raphael and his students in the Loggia di Psyche (1518–19) in the Villa Farnesina, Rome. The gods can be easily identified by the symbols they carry.

Figure 3. Part of an ancient (100 BC–100 AD) relief depicting the twelve Olympian gods carrying their attributes in procession. From left to right: **Hestia** (scepter), **Hermes** (winged cap and staff), **Aphrodite** (veil), **Ares** (helmet and spear), **Demeter** (scepter and wheat), **Hephaestus** (staff), **Hera** (scepter), **Poseidon** (trident), **Athena** (owl and helmet), **Zeus** (thunderbolt and staff), **Artemis** (bow and quiver), and **Apollo** (lyre). The relief is on display at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, USA.



a whole. Myths were used to explain various phenomena, events, and customs that had no natural explanation. Mythological accounts are often contradictory, and the same myth could be associated with several mythological characters.

Greek mythological characters are often depicted with their symbols, which makes them easier to identify [Figures 2–3]. The word *symbol* is derived from the Greek word *symbolon*, which means to join together. The symbols associated with Greek gods and goddesses hold deep meanings—they reflect each deity’s power, personality, domain, and mythological stories. Symbols connect Greek mythological characters and the things they represent.

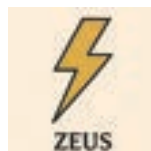
The twelve Olympians – the principal deities

The Twelve Olympians are the principal deities in ancient Greek religion. They resided atop Mount Olympus, the mythical home of the gods.

The hierarchy of the twelve Olympians mirrors Greek society’s values: order over chaos, reason over impulse, and structure over randomness. They represent a structured pantheon, each ruling over a specific domain of life and nature. Together, they create balance in the cosmos.

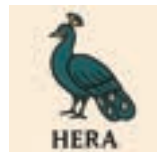
The identities, major symbols and sacred animals of the Twelve Olympians vary slightly depending on the source and traditions. Some versions include Hestia as one of the 12, while others replace her with Dionysus. In myth, Hestia is said to have given up her seat on Olympus to Dionysus to keep peace among the gods.

- **Zeus** – *King of the Gods, God of the Sky and Thunder* – rules the sky and law, ensuring justice. The Olympic Games were held in honour



of him. The most important symbols of Zeus are:

- **thunderbolt** representing power, divine authority, sudden change.
- **eagle** for sovereignty, the sky, vision, dominance.
- **oak tree** for strength, endurance, sacredness.
- **Hera** – *Queen of the Gods, Goddess of Marriage and Family* – governs marriage—fundamental social structures. Symbols include:
 - **peacock** representing pride, immortality, beauty, vigilance (its “eyes” represent watchfulness).
 - **cow** representing nurturing, motherhood, fertility.



- **Poseidon** – *God of the Sea, Earthquakes and Horses* – rules the sea, reflecting nature’s unpredictability. The major symbols associated with Poseidon are:



- **trident** for control over the sea, earthquakes, storms.
- **dolphin** for harmony with the sea, divine guidance.
- **horse** is Poseidon’s creation representing strength and wilderness.

- **Demeter** – *Goddess of Agriculture and Fertility* – governs agriculture, ensuring survival. Symbols:



- **sheaf of wheat** for fertility, nourishment, the harvest cycle.
- **cornucopia** (horn of plenty) provides abundance and prosperity.
- **torch** to search for her daughter Persephone (symbol of mourning and hope).

- **Artemis** – *Goddess of the Hunt, Moon and Wilderness* – governs the nature, wilderness, wild animals, and vegetation. Symbols:



- **bow and arrow** for precision, independence, protection.
- **crescent moon** for femininity, purity, cycles.
- **deer (stag)** for innocence, freedom, grace.
- **Athena** – *Goddess of Wisdom and War* – represents strategic warfare and wisdom—balancing conflict and intellect. Symbols:
 - **owl** for wisdom, intelligence, watchfulness.
 - **aegis (shield)** for protection, divine strength.
 - **olive tree** for peace, prosperity, her gift to Athens.
- **Ares** – *God of War* – known for his association with violence, brutality, and the chaotic aspects of battle (in contrast to his sister Athena). Symbols are:
 - **spear and helmet** for aggression, raw combat.
 - **dog and vulture** for death, battlefields, destruction.
- **Apollo** – *God of the Sun, Music, and Prophecy* – covers arts. Symbols are
 - **lyre** for harmony, creativity, arts.
 - **sun** for light, truth, clarity.
 - **laurel wreath** for victory, poetic inspiration, honour.
- **Aphrodite** – *Goddess of Love and Beauty* – is featured prominently in ancient Greek literature. Symbols include:
 - **scallop shell** symbolising birth from the sea, sensuality.
 - **dove** for love, peace and beauty.
 - **rose** for romantic passion and desire.
- **Hephaestus** – *God of Fire and Blacksmithing* – is known for his skills in crafting weapons and armor for the gods and heroes. Major symbols are:

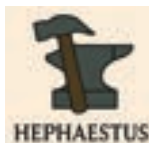
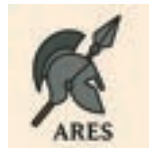


Figure 4. An essay for the Greek stamp issued for the 1906 Intercalated Games. **Apollo** is often depicted as a handsome youth, known for his athletic prowess. According to a myth, while practicing discus throwing, Hyacinthus, a lover of Apollo, was accidentally struck and killed by a discus thrown by Apollo.



Figure 5. When **Poseidon** and his brothers Zeus and Hades threw dice over the universe, the dominion of the seas fell to Poseidon. His symbol is the trident. Posidonia is an international maritime exhibition, the most prestigious in the world in its field.

- **hammer and anvil** for craftsmanship, creation, transformation.
- **fire** for innovation, desctructive and constructive power.
- **Hermes** – *Messenger of the Gods* – is associated with commerce, travelers, thieves, and merchants. Symbols are:
 - **winged sandals** for speed, travel, movement.
 - **winged helmet** for agility, divine mesaging, stealth.
 - **caduceus** (staff with snakes) for communication, commerce, healing.
- **Dionysus** – *God of Wine, Theater and Ecstasy* – represents joy, festivities, ecstasy and fertility. Symbols are:
 - **grapevine** for celebration, fertility, abundance.
 - **wine cup** for pleasure, release, intoxication.
 - **ivy or thyrsus** (staff with pine cone and vines) for wilderness, nature, ritual frency.
- **Hestia** – *Goddess of the Hearth and Home* – is associated with domestic and civic hearth, the home, sacred and sacrificial fire, family, and the state. Symbols are:
 - **hearth and its fire** symbolizes domesticity, unity, warmth, and the sacred bond of family..
 - **domestic animals** (pig) for fertility, domesticity, and sacrificial purity.



Lesser gods and goddesses

Lesser gods and goddesses were important in daily life, myth, and ritual, though not part of the core Olympian council. They are powerful, but unlike the Olympians, they don't rule or make divine decisions.

Lesser gods and goddesses oversee narrower or more abstract realms, like **Eros** (Love), **Hebe** (Youth), **Nike** (Victory), **Thanatos** (Death) and **Hypnos** (Sleep). Some of them are children or companions of Olympians, for example Eros is a son of Aphrodite, and Hebe is a daughter of Zeus and Hera.

Scholars categorize lesser gods and goddesses into dozens or even hundreds, depending on how broadly or narrowly “lesser deities” are defined. The following list contains major categories of lesser gods and goddesses with some examples of each:

- **Primordial deities** – first beings, before the Olympians – around 10–20 major named figures, including Chaos, Gaia (Earth), Nyx (night), Uranus (sky), Eros (love), Chronos (time).
- **Chthonic deities** – underworld spirits and gods – estimated 10–15 notable ones, including Hades, Persephone, Thanatos (death), Hecate (witchcraft), Melinoë.
- **Personified concepts**: 50–100 named deities if counting all concepts, examples Nike (victory) [Figure 7], Tyche (fortune), Nemesis (retribution), Hypnos (sleep), Morpheus (dreams), Phobos (fear), Harmonia (harmony).
- **Nature spirits (nymphs) and elemental beings**: hundreds to thousands, many named in poetry. Examples of nymphs: Dryads (trees), Naiads (rivers), Oreads (mountains). Sea deities include Nereids and Oceanids (over 3.000 in some accounts). Winds are Boreas (north), Zephyrus (west),
- **Companions and children of Olympians** include dozens of them, some examples: Hebe (youth), Eros (love), Pan (wild), Iris (rainbow), the Muses (9), the Graces (3).
- **Star and sky deities**: 10–20 depending on the sources, some examples: Helios (Sun), Selene (Moon), Astraeus (stars), Aether (upper air).

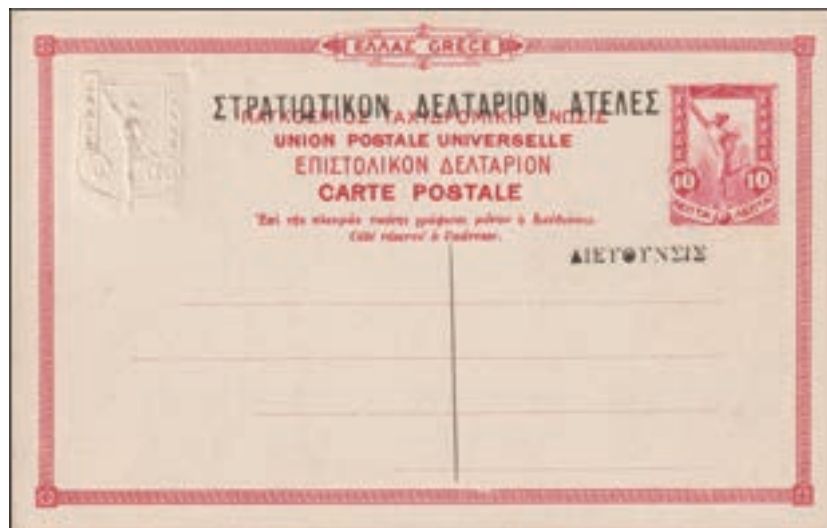


Figure 6. This Greek postal stationery card, originally issued in 1902, has two imprinted stamps depicting **Hermes**, messenger of the gods: a colourless embossed stamp (upper left corner) indicates the price of the postcard (10 lepta), and a flat stamp (upper right corner) indicates the postage fee (also 10 lepta). The original total selling price was therefore 20 lepta. However, this particular card has also an overprint “ΣΤΡΑΤΙΩΤΙΚΟΝ ΔΕΛΤΑΡΙΟΝ ΑΤΕΛΕΣ”: the remaining unsold stock of the cards was planned to be used as postage-free field post stationeries in 1918.



Figure 7. Nike, the lesser goddess who personified victory. Pictorial postal stationery card no. 100 issued in Greece in 1901, intended for domestic use.

Categories of symbols

The symbols of the Olympian gods, lesser gods and goddesses represent their powers, domains, and personalities. The following list consists of the major categories of symbols of both Olympian and lesser gods and goddesses. The list is comprehensive, but not exhaustive.

Birds

- bird (in general): Aphrodite
- eagle: Zeus, Hebe, Helios
- griffin (mythical): Leto
- vulture: Ares
- owl: Athena
- stork: Hermes
- swan: Zeus, Apollo, Aphrote
- cuckoo: Hera
- dove: Aphrodite
- sparrow: Aphrodite
- quail: Hephaestus
- rooster: Hermes, Leto, Selene
- peacock: Hera

Insects

- bee: Aphrodite
- butterfly: Thanatos

Domestic animals

- cow: Hera, Hestia
- horse: Poseidon, Helios
- bull: Zeus, Poseidon, Selene
- pig: Hestia, Demeter
- goat: Dionysus
- donkey: Hephaestus, Hestia
- dog: Ares, Hecate, Selene
- hound: Artemis

Wild animals

- lion: Hera
- Nemean lion: Heracles
- tiger: Dionysus
- leopard: Dionysus
- panther: Hera, Dionysus
- wolf: Leto
- fox: Apollo
- she-bear: Artemis
- stag: Artemis
- cerberus: Hades
- bear: Ares
- boar: Ares
- goat: Artemis, Persephone
- mouse: Apollo
- hiller: Hecate
- weasel: Leto
- tortoise shell: Hermes
- snake: Athena, Artemis, Ares, Hecate
- python: Apollo

Sea creatures

- fish: Poseidon
- dolphin: Poseidon, Aphrodite, Dionysus
- medusa head: Perseus



Figure 8. Hermes is also the protector of travelers, so he is often depicted wearing a traveling hat. The Greek commemorative postmark also features another symbol of Hermes – a rooster.



Figure 9. The joint issue of 1963 was on the subject of the eradication of hunger. The theme was the UN and FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) pilot program to improve food production and supply in developing countries. Greece issued two stamps, one featuring **Demeter**, the goddess of the harvest, grain, and all living plants, and another featuring his main symbol: a sheaf of wheat. The first-day cancellation illustrates another symbol of Demeter, the cornucopia (horn of plenty).

- scallop shell: Aphrodite

Plants and trees

- flowers: Persephone
- rose: Aphrodite
- lily: Hera
- lotus flower: Hera
- sunflower: Helios
- heliotrope: Helios
- narcissus: Hades
- poppy: Demeter, Hypnos, Thanatos
- sheaf of wheat: Demeter

- myrtle: Aphrodite
- grape/vine: Dionysus
- ivy: Dionysus, Hebe
- golden apple: Aphrodite
- pomegranate: Hera, Persephone
- grain seeds: Persephone
- oak tree: Zeus
- date: Leto
- palm: Leto
- olive tree: Athena
- cypress: Artemis, Hades
- pine cone: Dionysus

Nature forces

- sun: Apollo
- moon: Artemis
- crescent moon: Artemis, Selene
- fire: Hephaestus, Hestia
- clouds: Zeus
- lightning bolt: Zeus
- rainbow: Iris
- sea: Poseidon
- volcano: Hephaestus

Power symbols

- scepter: Zeus, Hera, Hermes, Hades
- throne: Hera
- scales: Zeus



Figure 10. Stamp of the Russian administrative region in the province of Rethymnon in Crete, issued in 1899. The central figure features **Poseidon's** trident. While not an official symbol of Rethymnon, as a coastal Cretan city with a long seafaring tradition, a trident is used informally to represent its connection to the sea.

Weapons

- aegis: Athena
- trident: Poseidon [Figure 10]
- spear: Athena, Ares
- bow and arrow: Apollo, Artemis, Heracles
- shield: Ares, Thanatos
- chariot: Ares, Helios
- fire torch: Ares
- mace: Heracles
- daggers: Hecate

Tools

- hammer and anvil: Hephaestus
- axe: Hephaestus
- pliers: Hephaestus

Clothes

- armor: Athena, Ares
- helmet: Athena, Ares
- belt: Aphrodite
- quiver: Artemis
- winged sandals: Hermes, Nike
- winged/travel hat: Hermes [Figure 8]
- diadem/crown: Hera
- veil: Leto
- wings: Eros, Nike, Hebe
- laurel wreath: Apollo, Nike
- cloak: Selene

Other symbols

- bread: Demeter
- torch: Demeter, Persephone, Selene, Thanatos
- two torches: Hecate
- mirror: Aphrodite
- gorgoneion: Athena
- lyre: Apollo [Figures 4, 16], Hermes
- thyrsus: Dionysus
- caduceus (two intertwined snakes): Hermes
- rod of Asclepius (rod wrapped around a snake): Asclepius
- hearth/stove: Hestia
- wine cup: Dionysus
- cornucopia: Hades, Demeter [Figure 9]
- arrows of Cupid: Eros
- candles: Eros
- kisses: Eros
- wine glass: Hebe
- fountain of youth: Hebe
- scepter: Eris
- incense stick: Helios

Naming after Greek gods, goddesses and deities

Greek mythology covers a wide and fascinating range of stories and ideas. Greek gods and goddesses have inspired the names of celestial bodies, space missions, cities and regions, ships, medical terms and scientific concepts, as well as companies and brands. Their symbolic power continues to resonate across culture, science, and business—making them one of the most enduring naming sources in human history.

Planets in the Solar System have been named by Roman equivalents of Greek gods, including *Mercury* (**Hermes**), *Venus* (**Aphrodite**), *Mars* (**Ares**), *Jupiter* (**Zeus**), *Saturn* (**Cronus**), *Uranus* (**Uranus**) and *Neptune* (**Poseidon**). Moons of planets likewise: **Europa**, **Io**, **Ganymede** and **Callisto**, moons of Jupiter, were lovers or companions of Zeus. **Titan**, a moon of Saturn, was named after the pre-Olympian gods. **Triton**, a moon of Neptune, is also

a Greek god of the sea, the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite. Thousands of asteroids and dwarf planets are named after Greek gods and heroes, such as *Pluto*, named after **Hades**, the god of the dead and the king of the underworld, **Athena**, **Eros**, **Pallas**, **Psyche** and **Ariadne**.

Many cities and towns – both ancient and modern – have been named after Greek gods and goddesses. This naming practice reflects the cultural, religious, and symbolic importance of these deities in both ancient Greek civilization and later societies influenced by Greek mythology. The most famous example is obviously *Athens*, arguably named after **Athena**—or Athena took her name from the city. Myth says Athena and Poseidon competed to be the city's patron. Athena gifted the olive tree and she won. Athens became a center of wisdom, philosophy, and art, reflecting Athena's qualities.

Dion, located at the foot of Mount Olympus in Greece, has been named after **Zeus** (Dios meaning “of Zeus” in Greek). It is a sacred city where Zeus was worshipped with major festivals, such as the Olympian Games. Speaking of the Olympics, it is named after Mount Olympus, home of the Greek Olympian gods.



Posidonia in Italy was renamed *Paestum* by the Romans, originally named after the sea god **Poseidon**. It is an ancient Greek city in *Magna Graecia*, the Greek-speaking areas of southern Italy extensively settled by Greeks beginning in the 8th century BC.

The Sicilian city of *Syracuse*, the birthplace and home of the preeminent mathematician and engineer Archimedes, was an important Greek colony; associated with various deities, including **Demeter** and **Persephone**.

Afrodiasias in Turkey was named after **Aphrodite**, this ancient city was a major center for the worship of the goddess of love, famous for its grand Temple of Aphrodite. There is a town in Illyria (Albania) called *Apollonia*, an Ancient Greek trade colony, reflecting **Apollo**'s influence as a god of colonization, arts and prophecy. Also the modern Sozopol in Bulgaria was the site of a prosperous Greek colony named *Antheia* and later known as *Apollonia*, during antiquity. It is a seaside resort known for the annual Apollonia art and film festival.

Many North American cities and towns have been named after Greek gods or goddesses, for example there are several towns named *Athens* in the United States, for example *Athens*, GA [Figure 12]. Such towns often sought to embody the ideals of democracy, philosophy, and education that ancient Athens represented. Some of them are using the Roman equivalent of the Greek name. Some examples in the United States are *Neptune*, NJ, named after **Poseidon**; *Venus*, TX uses the Roman equivalent of **Aphrodite**'s name; *Minerva*, OH uses the Roman equivalent of **Athena**; *Ceres*, CA is named after **Demeter**;

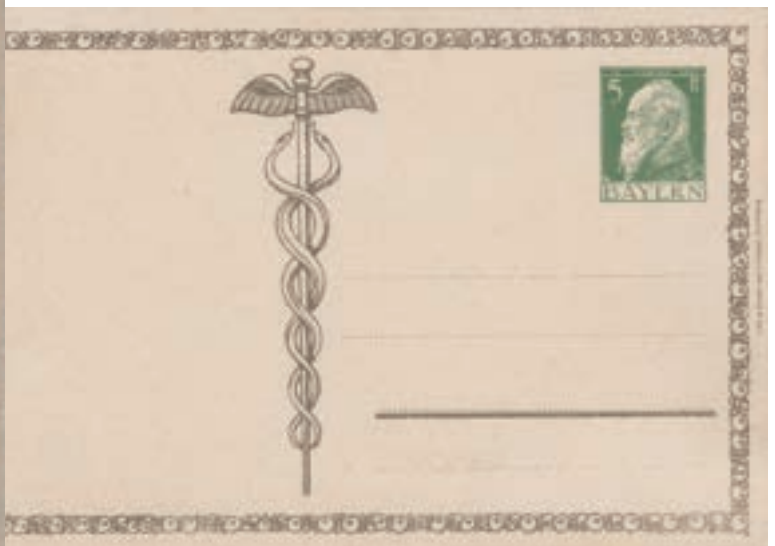


Figure 11. Postal stationery card printed to private order, Bavaria 1911. The picture side of the card depicts head of **Hermes** or its Roman equivalent Mercury, representing *Merkur*, a commercial association in Nuremberg at the time. The value side illustrates caduceus (a staff entwined by two snakes), the symbol of Hermes. Caduceus represents opposing forces in harmony—a metaphor for successful trade, which requires balance and fair exchange.



Figure 12. 1861 Athens Postmaster Provisional 5c purple, on cover with 'ATHENS JAN 14 PAID' circular date stamp. Athens in Georgia, the United States, was named after Athens, Greece. In classical antiquity it was debated whether Athens took its name from its patron goddess **Athena**. However, modern scholars now generally agree that the goddess takes her name from the city of Athens.

and *Pluto*, MS is named after the Roman counterpart of **Hades**. *Vulcan* in Alberta (Canada) has been named after the Roman version of **Hephaestus**, god of fire and forge.

Ships throughout history – both military and civilian – have been named after the Olympian gods, lesser gods or goddesses. Ancient mariners prayed to gods and goddesses for safety. This tradition draws on the symbolic power of these mythological figures to convey strength, protection, speed, or divine favor. Given that many of these ships were traveling long distances, crossing seas, and connecting various parts of the world, the connection to a powerful Greek god, like **Poseidon**, seemed fitting.

Likewise, there are some companies and brand names that have been named after Greek gods and goddesses and have therefore timeless appeal and global recognition. During the late 1800s and early-to-mid 1900s, many brands and companies began adopting names from Greek mythology—especially as industrialization, advertising, and global trade expanded. These names were often chosen to convey power, elegance, trust, intelligence, or speed, all qualities associated with the gods.

The most well-known of the modern companies is **Nike**, Inc., that produces sportswear and equipment. **Hermès** is a French luxury brand that is named after founder, but evokes speed and elegance. Many companies and organizations across the world have taken names from Mercury or Merkur, the Roman equivalent of **Hermes**, due to his associations with speed, communication, trade, and travel—qualities highly valued in business [Figure 11]. Wine brands and vineyards have been named **Dionysus**, Roman **Bacchus**, etc.

In science, the project *Apollo* – NASA's moon mission program – was directly named after **Apollo**, replacing the earlier Mercury space program, and reflecting his quali-

ties and abilities, such as light, knowledge, and exploration. In biology, *hermaphrodite* is used to describe organisms with both male and female reproductive organs. The term hermaphrodite is derived from **Hermes + Aphrodite**. In medicine, morphine has been named after **Morpheus**, god of dreams. *Thanatology* – the study of death – comes from **Thanatos**, personification of death.

How to use Greek gods and their symbols in thematic exhibits

The Olympian gods, lesser gods and goddesses can be explored in almost any thematic exhibit, covering anything from power and wisdom to nature, love, and fate. Many topics can be made more engaging by referencing the myths associated with them. Myths can bring many subjects to life, adding depth and intrigue to the thematic stories.

The Olympian gods helped the ancient Greeks make sense of their world—explaining natural events, social customs, and human psychology through rich mythology. For example, **Poseidon**'s wrath was believed to cause earthquakes [Figure 13]. Social norms like marriage were reflected in myths about **Hera**. Human emotions and behavior were explored through deities like **Aphrodite** and **Ares**, who embodied love and aggression.

Greek gods, along with their names and symbols, appear as primary or secondary subjects on many postage stamps, postal stationeries, telegrams, meter marks, postmarks, manuscript cancellations and fancy cancels, around the world.



Figure 13. According to Greek mythology, **Poseidon** received a trident from the Cyclopes as a gift, with which he could cause earthquakes. He created the Paxoi archipelago in the Ionian Sea by striking Corfu with his trident so that he and his wife Amfitrite could live there in peace. Poseidon's trident is still the symbol of Paxos today.



Figure 13. Large **Hermes** head, 20 lepta blue, Paris edition 1861.

In traditional philately, the most popular divine figure is of course **Hermes**, the messenger of the gods, who is also the symbol of the modern Greek postal service. Greece's first stamps, the large **Hermes** heads, were issued in 1861 [Figure 13]. The **Hermes** heads were used in definitive stamps of Greece until 1926 and in some commemorative stamps [Figure 14].

The Greek **Hermes** heads are very similar to the first French stamps, the **Ceres** heads issued in 1849 [Figure 15]. **Ceres** was the goddess of grain and vegetation in Roman mythology, who was identified with **Demeter** in Greek mythology from an early age. **Ceres** was one of the allegorical representations of the First and Second French Republics in the 19th century.



Figure 15. 40 centimes orange, French **Ceres** head from 1849.

The large and small **Hermes** heads of Greece and the **Ceres** heads of France have both philatelic and thematic importance. There exists numerous printings and varieties as well as unusual mailed items [Figure 15], some of which are important pieces in traditional philately. Therefore, a concise and balanced philatelic study is commendable. According to the SREV¹ in order to safeguard the balance of the exhibit, the aim of such a philatelic study should not be completeness,

¹ The Special Regulations for the Evaluation of Thematic Exhibits (SREV) and Guidelines for Judging Thematic Philately Exhibits.

Figure 15. A scarce five colour franking of large **Hermes** heads, the first Athens print (1861–62) on a 1 1/2 times single rate letter from Paris to Athens by a French steamer, charged 188 Letpa on arrival. Sold by David Feldman Auctions in December, 2020.



Figure 14. Unadopted original artist drawing by Paul-Joseph Blanc of the value of 10 drachmas with the effigy of **Hermes** for the 1986 Olympic Games commemorative issue of Greece. Unique piece, ex-Manfred Bergman.



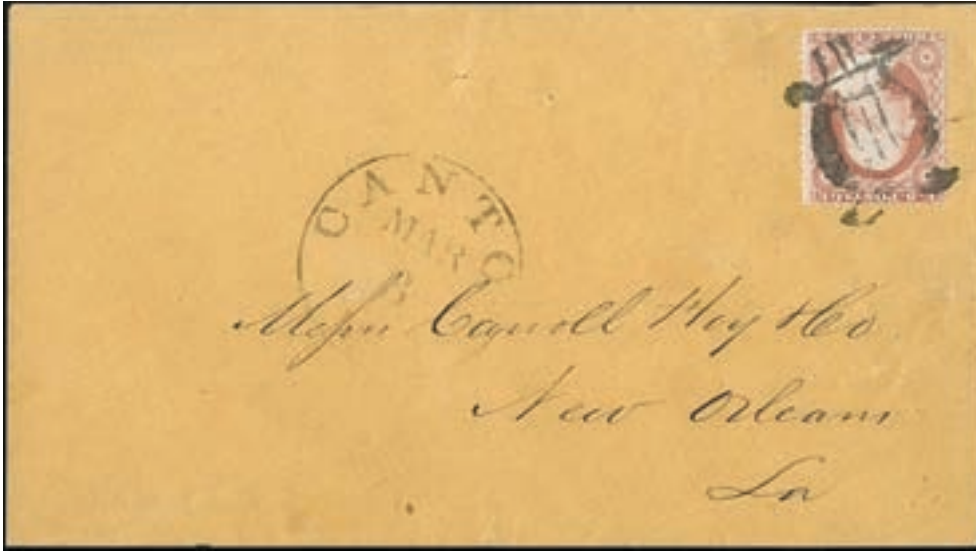


Figure 16. As an attribute of **Apollo**, the god of prophecy and music, the lyre to the ancient Greeks symbolized wisdom and moderation. Lyre fancy cancel with “Canton Miss. Mar. 3” circular date-stamp on cover to New Orleans. This particular fancy cancel, prepared by the Canton postmaster, was in use between 1851–60. Sold by Robert A. Siegel Auction, Sale 127.

but the presence of some significant philatelic peculiarities. The challenge is not to sacrifice thematic development, but the thematic text has to continue in parallel with the study, so that there is no disturbing interruption.

Hermes and Ceres appears also in imprinted values of many postal stationery cards of Greece and France. In general, postal stationeries are an important source of material for thematic exhibits, and for example, pictorial postal stationery cards of Greece issued in 1901–1903, provide a rich source of items directly related to the Greek gods, goddesses and deities [Figure 6]. Both sides of the stationery cards can reveal something useful for telling a story [Figures 6 and 11].

Generic postmarks of cities and towns – from either the pre-philatelic or philatelic period – can be used in thematic exhibits when the place name holds a specific meaning or when the origin of the place name is relevant to the story. Cities and towns named after Greek gods and goddesses are appropriate examples of this. The challenge lies in finding older and rarer items bearing such generic postmarks, because the modern ones may be too easy to obtain.

Generic postmarks, city or town names can appear also in other items used in the postal operations, such as registration labels, postal route labels, markings, supplementary labels and markings of forwarding agents. Where applicable, these items should be shown on a relevant document.

In addition to the place name, commemorative postmarks may contain other thematically relevant information, for example, an illustration or advertising text. Such illustrations and texts can obviously also be exploited in thematic exhibits [Figures 8–9].

Symbols that can be associated with Greek gods and goddesses also appear in fancy cancels. For example, a lyre, the main symbol of **Apollo**, the god of music, appears in a fancy cancel in Canton, MS, one of the first U.S. post offices using a pictorial killer cancellation [Figure 16]. However, the common lyre of the ancient Greeks, known as *chelys*, had a convex back of tortoiseshell or of wood shaped like the shell. *Chelys* is said to have been invented by **Hermes**. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, he came across a tortoise near the threshold of his mother’s home and decided to hollow out the shell to make the soundbox of an instrument with seven strings.

Meter marks of the 1900s often contain names or symbols of companies or brands that can be related to the Greek gods or heroes. For example, during the Roman period Apollo is shown nude with his lyre, but often such an image is associated with healing hot springs. Even today we have a famous mineral water brand containing the name of Apollo. However, one must be cautious, as interpreting names and symbols in isolation—without considering their context and origin—can lead to multiple interpretations, where gods and myths appear to compete for dominance [Figure 17].



Figure 17. **Apollo**, **Artemis**, **Heracles** and other gods and heroes are often depicted with bow and arrow. This meter mark was registered for use in 1933 by Ruys Handelsvereniging and was used by *Algemeen Handelsblad*, a Dutch daily newspaper.

The practice of naming ships after Greek gods was prevalent among passenger and cargo lines in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It wasn’t unusual for these vessels to carry letters and parcels, as the mail system often relied on maritime shipping for long-distance communication.

Originators of letters often wrote the name of the ship which they intended to carry their letters on the letter front either in the upper or lower left side. This was, in a sense, a routing instruction for delivering a letter overseas. Advertised sailing dates could be found in newspapers of the port cities.

Explaining rates, routes and markings is essential when describing postal historic items in thematic philately in general, therefore the name of the ship is essential information to describe the route of maritime mail. This makes it possible also to benefit from the name of the ship in a thematic story, for example, when using mail carried by **Nemesis**, a steamship of the Cunard Line.

Sometimes symbols have also become confused. In 1938 France started issuing definitive stamps depicting Mercury, the Roman equivalent of **Hermes**. The *caduceus* – the rod of the messenger Hermes, a symbol of trade and business – appears without wings on top [Figure 17]. The caduceus symbol typically has wings on top, but not always—especially in older or stylized versions.



Figure 17. French definitive stamp depicting **Mercury** with caduceus, issued in 1938–1942.



On the other hand, the *rod of Asclepius* is a well known symbol of doctors and medicine. It has only one snake and never wings on top of the rod. This symbol is correctly depicted in the stamp issued in Italy in 1949 for the 2nd World Health Congress [Figure 18].

Figure 18. Stamp issued in Italy in 1949 with a correct illustration of the rod of Asclepius, a medical symbol.

The Rod of Asclepius has appeared on numerous stamps, sometimes correctly, and other times inaccurately. For example, a 1958 Tunisian stamp issued for the World's Fair in Brussels features a medical symbol consisting of a cup and two intertwined snakes [Figure 19]. A similar mistake appears on a 1952 stamp commemorating the 2nd Congress of Industrial Medicine in Brazil. Likewise, a 1955 Indian stamp issued to promote the fight against malaria also shows two snakes, but without the cup.



Figure 19. Stamp issued in Tunisia in 1958 for the World's Fair in Brussels. There are two snakes and a cup in this symbol. The person at left is Andreas Vesalius, an anatomist and physician, often referred to as the founder of modern human anatomy.

The caduceus has been mistakenly used as a medical symbol in a number of countries due to historical misunderstandings and the association of Hermes with healing and medicine. The U.S. Army Medical Corps even adopted the caduceus as its symbol in 1902. A stamp issued in Bolivia in 1977 depicts a caduceus as a symbol of a medical meeting [Figure 20].



Figure 20. A commemorative stamp issued in 1977 in Bolivia for the national medical seminar on Chagas disease, a tropical parasitic disease caused by the protist *Trypanosoma cruzi*. More than 7 million people worldwide are estimated to be infected, leading to more than 10 000 deaths every year.

In the present day, the Greek gods and deities, as well as their symbols, have become universal icons representing key aspects of human life, culture, and psychology. These symbols are deeply embedded in art, literature, branding, sciences, and societal ideals. They can be used in thematic exhibits for illustrating many key concepts and ideas. ■

“Mi Oficina” Philatelic Society and Thematic Philately

TEXT BY LUIS FERNANDO DÍAZ (COSTA RICA) AND JORGE MOSCATELLI (ARGENTINA)

“Mi Oficina” Philatelic Society is a worldwide group of philatelists (mainly from South and Central America) who held daily meetings via ZOOM during the COVID lockdown. Throughout these meetings, a series of talks and seminars were presented aimed at perpetuating and sharing our collective knowledge on the many topics of philately in the Americas.

From April 15, 2020, to February 2021, daily meetings were held and from that date, until now, 8 to 10 sessions per month on average are scheduled. Once the COVID lockdown was over, the daily talk model was replaced by one that included two talks per week, usually on Mondays and Thursdays.

In October 2023, we reached 600 presentations and on September 16, 2024, we attained the first 700 evenings with talks, all recorded in videos available on our YouTube channel. Reaching 700 evening meetings mean, in practice, many more talks, since the events named Show and Tell are made up of an average of 3 talks, which adds to the total around 70 more talks. In four and a half years, at “Mi Oficina”, we have easily addressed more than 800 different contents.

Devised by Alfonso Molina in 2014, “Mi Oficina” is “an international group of friends who gather at major philatelic events around the world. A looking forward get-together that complements stamp shows attendance with the enjoyment of magnificent philately, the human touch of friendship around conversations, some drinks, and lots of laughs. There was just one rule, no talking about philately was allowed; after all “Mi Oficina” was the daily decompress occasion after an always fructiferous day at the main show” (Henry Márquez).

After the lockdown we resumed in-person meetings at different International Philatelic Exhibitions, such as Lucerne, Essen, Mexico City and Oaxaca, Toronto and Bucharest, among others. However, the evening talks continue and one of the aspired objectives is to reach a thousand presentations.

The beginning and the challenge

Since its beginning in 2014, during the celebration of the Copa Cuba in Varadero, “Mi Oficina” consist-

ed of a daily meeting convened by Alfonso Molina with the aim of sharing experiences and strengthening ties between the participants of the exhibitions, especially from Latin America. These meetings also provided a space for rest and relax once the tasks and commitments of the juries and commissioners were concluded. Therefore, sharing meals, snacks and selected drinks became a central part of the activities.

In March 2020, due to the pandemic, all scheduled philatelic activities, congresses, seminars and exhibitions were postponed. Facing this, Henry Márquez and Alfonso Molina conceived the preparation of daily virtual meetings, with the help of new communication technologies and, very soon, in the Zoom space also called “Mi Oficina”, daily meetings whose main content was colloquia or talks of various kinds and content about the philately of our countries were organized.

Many philatelists who had never had the opportunity to express themselves before such a heterogeneous and numerous audience, faced the opportunity and the challenge of preparing informative talks about their areas of specialty. As a result, a comprehensive learning process took place, since one of the advantages of exposing our knowledge is that it allows us to reaffirm or modify it through research and discussion. In addition, given the composition of the group and the diversity of the topics addressed, the participation of all members, both new and experienced, was generated.

Other important results were:

- Confirming the need for philately –like other disciplines– to constantly contrast truth and axioms with studies, documents and research.
- Demystifying the fact that only “great philatelists” can give master lectures.
- Encouraging the expansion of study groups in various fields, breaking taboos and promoting mutual enrichment between elite philately and the popular bases of collecting.
- Attracting new audiences and stimulating interest and commitment in young and new collectors to expand their knowledge and share their experiences. Also encouraging them to reproduce their achievements in their own fields.

- Take advantage of Zoom meetings and YouTube streams as a means to build a vast virtual library of Latin American philately.
- Promote synergy with other mechanisms for disseminating philatelic knowledge and hobby, such as blogs or websites, among which Actualidad Filatélica stands out (<https://actualidadfilatelica.blogspot.com/>).

The future

The challenge for the future is to define how to maintain this project successfully. First, it is necessary to prepare a rich and flexible programme, appropriate to the new social, economic and health conditions that will arise soon. It is necessary to increase the efforts of moderators and participants to obtain the contribution of more colleagues, collectors and experts who have not yet shared their collections, their studies and their findings.

It is worth proposing lists of topics, some chosen by the interested parties to be discussed. A suggestive opportunity is that the events known as “Show and Tell” are organized by specialty or by theme and not by country, in order to generate greater integration. The meetings and the YouTube channel could be used to determine which topics are most sought after by collectors (for full talks as well as for short informative segments).

It would be worth using the help of young learned colleagues who can collaborate in the analysis and in the construction of platforms for different topics. The ambitious plan to transform philately in Latin American countries must be measured and cautious. While we must expand to other regions and continents, we must invite philatelists from other cultures to speak about Latin American philately or on topics related to it or its history. To do so, we must be creative in using our own resources and the new ones that are accessible through communication technologies so that the talks are subtitled into Spanish or translated simultaneously by one of our members with a broad command of English or other languages, as needed.

Practical courses could be given to enrich the concept of criticism for those interested in exhibiting or simply improving specific aspects of their collections; they can be offered by juries chosen for their conceptual clarity and, in doing so, concrete examples of collections must be shown.

Another aim, in this sense, is to convince the FIP authorities of the advantages offered by open, experience-focused programmes and courses, such as those of “Mi Oficina”, willing to universally transmit regulations and guidelines, avoiding falling into the redundant vacuum of repeating the rules without any criticism.

In parallel, a programme may be required to strengthen the skills of the lecturers, as well as the methods and resources used for the presentations. It is important that the provenance of the philatelic materials used, as well as other sources used, is always indicated. The analytical nature of the presentations should be emphasized, particularly the methodology and research techniques, even from descriptive ones, so that the presentations are not limited to repeating the sample that can be seen, without further construction, in the different exhibitions. The convenience of learning about the use and utility of rarity indicators, beyond prices and other cataloguing observations, can be studied.

It is important to set limits on the time and timing of presentations and questions, so as to maintain the interest of the audience and its propensity to grow through discussion and exchange. The project has already reached a maturity where it is important to have a kind of operating protocol. We must all help and strengthen the management tasks, so that discipline and mutual respect continue to be the central guiding values.

Once the rules for participation and time use have been disseminated, they must be adhered to, while the presenters must be fair, although strict in their application. The main aim in this regard would be to avoid redundancy and repetition and their consequences: boredom and fatigue; the different time zones in the regions from which the members come justify greater control over the productive use of time. Strategies such as this will help exhibitors to focus their attention on the most important materials and findings and not on secondary or accessory aspects.

We hope that the proposed objectives and the plan required to achieve them over time coincide with the interests of the majority, as well as with the original aspirations that led the project managers to build, with great effort and sacrifice, this platform that is a source of pride for Latin American philately.

The creators of this forum have shown an uncommon ability and humility to learn from criticism, to solicit it, and to adapt it as part of the process of continuous improvement. Hopefully all members will emulate this effort and commit to continuing forward with this vocation.

This proposal was suitable and persuasive at the end of the COVID lockdown. Most of it remains still valid. ■

“Mi Oficina”

Talks and Seminars

TEXT BY LUIS FERNANDO DÍAZ

It is obvious that the greatest interest expressed by the participants in the series of talks and seminars supported by “Mi Oficina” focuses on the most popular specialties in philatelic collecting; that is, Traditional Philately and Postal History. However, extensive work is also being done on Postal Stationery, Fiscal Philately and others, including alternative means of postage such as self-adhesive labels and meter marks, postal services (in relation to Postal History) and, of course, debates about the guidelines for the evaluation of collections pursuing awards at exhibitions.

Thematic Philately remains a kind of unknown and threatening field. It requires a lot of work, a lot of knowledge and significant skills. Sometimes, in “Mi Oficina” activities, one appreciates true respect and even admiration for the work and dedication that thematic collecting involves.

For all this, it is not misleading, nor is it surprising that, within the volume of more than 800 presentations held in the “Mi Oficina” space over almost five years, 62 talks were offered aimed especially at collectors interested in thematics, with valuable content for this specialty.

In addition, another four talks, without being expressly directed with that interest, conveyed knowledge of crucial value for thematic collecting. Plus, seven conferences by the Honduran colleague Yuri Montes, on aspects related to Sephardic culture and history that could illustrate and enrich some topics both from the point of view of content, as well as regarding approach and treatment.

A total of 73 lectures in connection with Thematic Philately and the same number of Power Point presentations in the same YouTube link.

As part of these 73 talks, collections have been presented, rules have been discussed, and controversy has been raised over contentious issues, such as the points awarded for innovation, the correct uses of materials with limited postal value, and the use of misleading resources, such as toponymy.

We have all been able to express our wishes and intentions. We have all learned. ■

“Mi Oficina” Philatelic Society Overview

- Founded in 2014 by Alfonso Molina, it connects philatelists globally, especially from South and Central America.
- In-person meetings transitioned to bi-weekly talks post-COVID, with 600 presentations by October 2023.
- Aims to reach 1,000 presentations, with over 800 unique topics covered.

Virtual Meetings and Learning

- Initiated in March 2020 due to the pandemic, utilizing Zoom for virtual meetings.
- Encouraged participation from diverse philatelists, fostering a comprehensive learning environment.
- Resulted in the demystification of expert-only lectures and promoted mutual enrichment among collectors.

Future Challenges and Goals

- Need for a flexible program to adapt to new social and economic conditions.
- Plans to involve more experts and expand topics beyond country-specific themes.
- Emphasis on collaboration with younger philatelists for innovative approaches and translations.

Thematic Philately Focus

- 73 presentations specifically targeted thematic philately, highlighting its complexity and skill requirements.
- Discussions included rules, controversies, and innovative practices in thematic collecting.
- Notable contributions from experts, including 7 talks on Sephardic culture by Yuri Montes.

YouTube channel with all the presentations:
youtube.com/@MiOficinaPhilatelicSociety

Schedule of future talks:
tinyurl.com/MiOficina-Calendario

Concerning the Future of Thematic Philately

TEXT BY GILANG ANEH

Having earned the worldwide recognition with many exhibits winning large gold medals in past few decades, thematic philately once again proved its worth after Damian Lage claimed the title as World Philatelic Champion in HUN-FILEX 2022. We all hope that his peak achievement would not become the peak of thematic philately in general as peaks are often followed by declines. Many exhibitors may find it inspiring, but let us narrow down the population and ask how many emerging thematic exhibitors are inspired? What possibly lies ahead of us?

The journey of thematic philately to reach the top level was through a steep road. The so-called 4th generation of thematic exhibits have successfully climbed up with the help of the term coined by Jonas Hallstrom as the three pillars: traditional, postal history, and postal stationery. This has transformed old-generation exhibits haunted by the topical ghost into something fresher and more promising. Another good news was the publication of the most updated guidelines in TCNews 2022, thanks to the tedious work of our ex-chairman Peter Suhadolc who stressed on the importance of balancing every aspect in judging criteria at exhibit, frame, and page levels.

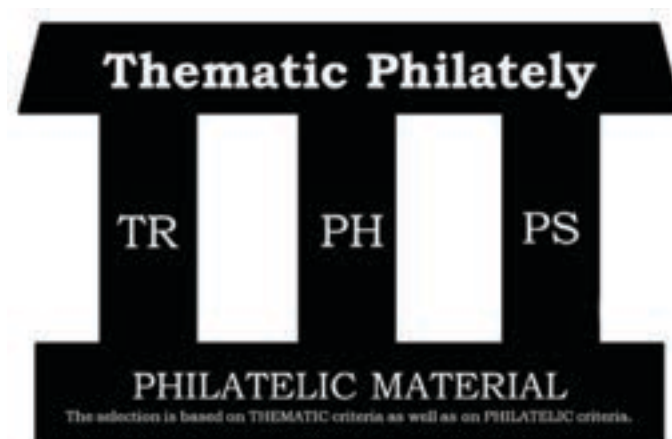
The guidelines of the SREV for judging philatelic knowledge state that the basic requirements are:

- full compliance with the rules of postal philately,
- appropriateness of postal documents,
- appropriateness and correctness of the philatelic text when needed, and
- presence of good range of postal-philatelic material throughout the exhibit and on single pages.

If an exhibit is to make achievements, then we talk about:

- presence of widest possible range of postal-philatelic material and its balanced use,
- presence of material which has not yet been researched for that theme or where there has been very little research,
- presence of philatelic studies and skilful use of important philatelic material.

In practice, not many exhibits were built faithfully following these guidelines, even up to these days.



The three pillars of Thematic Philately. © Jonas Hällström

This phenomenon reminds me of Giancarlo Morrolli's disagreement toward the approach of Asian exhibits which relied heavily on the use of archive material, like sketches, artworks, and proofs replicated on most exhibit pages as if they were cornerstones of thematic philately. I fully agree with this notion as such practice disrupts the overall balance of an exhibit. However, we may actually encounter similar practices in other parts of the world that thematic exhibits are dominated by postal history items and classic postal stationeries, marginalising the presence of stamps and other modern material.

I suspect that this phenomenon is driven by the dragon sickness, yes, the greed for gold. A senior exhibitor, Erika Zehnder, told me that at high level, exhibitors tend to abandon the thematic essence. Philatelically less significant items are removed to make room for top rarities despite their lack of ability to aesthetically support thematic development in a reader friendly way. Those items may allow us to write bulky chunks of philatelic text to showcase 'philatelic knowledge' but we must never forget that philatelic knowledge is measured rather differently in thematic class.

Then why more and more exhibitors ruin the beauty of thematic development by favouring items which often do not support development in the best possible way? We might have to take a closer look at several ghosts named:

- importance,
- rarity, and
- pure philately.

It is true that the first one does not appear on judging sheets, but Andrew Cheung believes that it exists even in the minds of thematic jurors. Meanwhile, the quest for rarity is not what thematic philately is all about. In its humble beginning, theme-oriented collecting was intended to be the counter-balance of its rarity-oriented predecessors like TR, PH, and PS. After being viewed as second class philately due to the lack of similarities to pure philately, 4th generation exhibits have thrived and been admitted as pure philately. As time passes by, allow me to remind us all that the crave for such validation should proceed no further since we have earned it.

We are not supposed to take it to the circumstance where we might be disoriented. Thematic philately is an amalgamation of its three pillars, if not an entirely new entity. It must never be built or seen as a mere conglomeration of traditional, postal history, and postal stationery. I am not a fan of such avant-garde

thematic exhibits because they look like postal history or traditional exhibits in disguise. I fear that in the future, thematic exhibits are going to be made of the leftovers materials scavenged from the sales of top exhibits from the other three classes. If that happens, thematic philately might have to come back to its previous stigma as second class philately, but this time because of the lack of identity.

My final words would be much in line with Jin Hur's idea published in TCNews in 2013. One day, dealers will no longer be able to satisfy the 'niche' demand of medal hunters. Before that day comes, we must switch our focus from glorifying exhibition-oriented pragmatism and medal-mongering thematic collecting to creating a more welcoming and comforting space for newbies at grassroots level. By doing so, we hope that there will be more new thematic philatelists, especially young ones. ■

Instructions for submitting articles to TCNews

TCNews accepts submissions from all authors who are willing to contribute to the development of thematic philately. Note that submitted articles are made publicly available, so there must not be any restrictions regarding their distribution.

TCNews is published **in digital format, only**. Body texts of articles should be submitted in one of the following formats (listed in the order of preference):

- plain text (without any formatting or layout)
- Microsoft Word or Open (Libre) Office Write format
- Wordpad format
- PDF

Do not embed images or figures in the body text, but always submit images as separate files. Image files can be in a number of common formats. These include:

- JPEG (ideal for photographic images)
- GIF or PNG (best for non-photographic images, bitmaps)

Image resolution should be at least 200 dpi, preferably 300 dpi (dots or pixels per inch). Images should be actual size or larger, never smaller than actual size. If images are too small or poor quality, they will look bad when viewed or printed. Do not download images from the internet, as their quality is often poor and variable, and there may be copyright issues.

Remember to submit also appropriate **image captions**, unless they can be easily extracted from the body text. Image captions can be submitted separately or they can be included in the text body.

You can submit text and images using **e-mail** or a **file sharing service**. E-mail is suitable for sending text and images with sizes up to approx. 1 MB. If your images are larger, please consider using a file sharing service, such as WeTransfer, Google Drive or Microsoft OneDrive.



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