

POSTAGE STAMPS OF KASTELLORIZO

by Michael Jack Mangos, Sydney

Postage stamps issued for a country or territory, and the images they portray, often provide a timeline view of critical events, significant people, and other geographical and cultural features. This is particularly evident to anyone who has ever collected stamps or flicked through a stamp catalogue and looked at the issues from just about anywhere.

Stamps featuring Kastellorizo are no exception, where the island's political turbulence and other notable events over the past century are reflected in the artwork of these small perforated squares of paper and ink. The stronghold of foreign occupations, the impact of two world wars, modern day tourism and other events have found their way into a fascinating storyboard of artwork and information.

Compiling a complete collection of stamps which feature Kastellorizo is a challenge, given there is no single comprehensive reference. If catalogued at all, the stamps are scattered across various listings under Greece and other occupying nations that chose to issue stamps for the island.

This article will focus on postage, revenue and other promotional stamps which were either issued for use by Kastellorizo or feature the island in some way - from the late 19th century to present.



STAMPS FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE



The earliest known stamps for use in Kastellorizo were issued from the first Turkish postal establishment, operating out of the town from around 1890. The stamps themselves were original Turkish prints with black ink handstamps over the top to identify the island - the earliest of these using Arabic characters.

Later issues were stamped in French "CASTELORIZO" and then in Greek "ΜΕΓΙΣΤΗΣ" or "ΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΟΡΙΖΟΥ". Some were also stamped "ΠΡΟΣΩΡΙΝΗ ΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΙΣ" (Provisional Administration).

With all of the Ottoman stamps, the central design consists of the tughra (the Turkish emblem of sovereignty).

The stamps illustrated here from around 1908-09 are sometimes referred to as the series of Mehmed V (the Ottoman Sultan until mid-1918).

There were two distinct usages types for these stamps:

- those with a Greek coat of arms in the centre, are postage stamps used in traditional mail as evidence of payment of postage;
- those with a "T" (for Tax) in the centre, were used as revenue stamps issued by the government for collection of tax and other duties.

Particularly interesting is the middle set where the effect of three governing bodies is visible: a French-issued, Ottoman postage stamp, with a Greek handstamp over the top. France was among

one of several European countries granted permission to maintain post offices in the empire until 1923, hence the wording "DIX PARAS TIMBRE" (TEN PARAS STAMP).

It is not certain exactly how many Ottoman stamps for Kastellorizo were issued or remain in existence today. Catalogues of the major stamp dealers do not tend to list, but they do appear occasionally in their auction listings, and when they do, can fetch a hefty price.

Greece issued overprints



During the period 1912-13 following the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Greece issued postage and revenue due (Tax) stamps for use by Kastellorizo (and many of the other islands). Kastellorizo of course had never printed its own stamps nor were there stamps designed specifically to identify the island.

The islands relied on the governing body to provide what was necessary for postage and other revenue collection, hand-stamping over the top where required.

Now, a range of Greek stamps was being used. Some of these were first overprinted with "Καστελλόριζου" then when used, hand-stamped with "ΠΡΟΣ. ΕΛΛ. ΔΙΟΙΚΗΤ. ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ" (To Greece Administrative Commission) and "ΜΕΓΙΣΤΗΣ" or "ΚΑΣΤΕΛΛΟΡΙΖΟΥ".

French Occupation: 1916



These stamps from France are not postage stamps (they have no face value or denomination) but are in fact poster stamps, sometimes referred to as Cinderellas. Poster stamps are created to advertise or commemorate a product or event. Many poster stamps issued during WWI were for political propaganda – the colourful three here promoting French occupation of Greek islands including Kastellorizo.

These are part of “The Delandre Vignettes” – a popular series of poster stamps amongst collectors. They were drawn by French ‘entrepreneur’ (and equally colourful character) Gaston Aime Camille Fontanille, also known as Delandre. Delandre drew an estimated 4,000 different patriotic stamps while conducting various schemes for which he was accused of forgery, corporate fraud and other dubious activities - eventually leading to his permanent incarceration in 1917.

French Occupation overprints: 1920+



The French issued a wide variety of stamps for Kastellorizo during the period of occupation from 1920. The stamps themselves from 1900-1920 were over-printed in a number of ways:

“O.F. CASTELLORIZO” (Occupation Française/French Occupation) hand-stamped in black or violet on French stamps from offices in Turkey;

“O.N.F. Castellorizo” (Occupation Navale Française/French Naval Occupation) overprinted in black or red on both French stamps from Turkey and on stamps from France. Many denominations were issued, some with the island name inverted (which are now rare and highly valued).

“B.N.F. CASTELLORIZO” (Base Navale Française/French Naval Base) overprinted on stamps from French Offices in Turkish Empire, some with the face value also printed in equivalent local currency of “PIASTRES” (1 franc = 4 piastres). As with O.N.F. there are many variations including those with inverted overprinting.

“CORPS D'OCCUPATION” (Body of Occupation) or “Occupation Française” (French Occupation)– Greek stamps hand-stamped in black or violet on envelope covers.

Italian Occupation series: 1922/1924



In 1922, the Italians issued nine definitive stamps with “CASTELROSSO” overprinted horizontally in black.

The stamps themselves are from 1906-1920 and feature King Victor Emmanuel III (King of Italy from 1900 until 1946).

In 1924, another set of stamps were issued, but on this second run the name of the island was overprinted diagonally across the face of the stamp. In addition to the nine values of the original set, a 1 Lira stamp was now included.

The King and Royal family famously visited the island as part of a tour of the Dodecanese in May 1929 - the event being captured on film.

Italian Occupation - Map and Flag series: 1923



On the 2nd Anniversary of Italian Occupation of Kastellorizo, the Italians were officially awarded the island in 1923.

A set of stamps was issued to commemorate the annexation showing a map of Kastellorizo and Italian flag the “Kingdom of Italy” which was in use by the Italians until 1946.

The first fiscal version of these stamps (top middle) with spelling “CASTELLORIZO” was intended for postal use, but both the quality of printing and paper was so poor that the authorities agreed to use them only for revenue (tax) purposes. It is not known exactly how many different values of this stamp were issued making these particularly rare.

In January 1923 a modified version with better printing on good paper was issued (although ink quality may have been poor as colours are pale). These are generally available and affordable.

Five denominations up to 1 Lira were issued. Note the change to Italian named “CASTELROSSO” in this 2nd run and the incorrect use of plural “LIRE” for the 1 Lira stamp.

Ferrucci Issue overprint series: 1930



In 1930, Italy issued two sets of five stamps of the Italian Ferrucci series with “CASTELROSSO” overprinted (one set in red and one in blue).

The stamps commemorated the 400th anniversary of the death of the Italian Military Commander, Francesco Ferrucci.

These are generally available although a full set of mint copies can be expensive.

Garibaldi Issue overprint series: 1932



Garibaldi series with “CASTELROSSO” overprinted in red and in blue.

The series commemorated the 50th anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807– 1882), the General and politician who played a large part of unifying the Italian states into a single kingdom.

These stamps are not commonly available and are expensive if used, even more so in mint condition.

Restoration of Dodecanese Islands to Greece: 1947-1950



A series of 23 stamps in all from 20d to 10000d showing images of significant landmarks and artefacts of some of the islands of the Dodecanese.

The series celebrates the return of the Dodecanese islands from Italian to Greek rule following the signing in 1947 of the "Treaty of Peace with Italy" which ended 740 years of foreign rule over the islands.

Two stamps feature Kastellorizo. Both depict the Castle of the Knights of St. John as drawn by French archaeologist, architect and landscape painter Albert-Gabriel Rigolot.

The original drawing "Le Château-Rouge au XVIIe Siècle" (The Red Castle in the 17th Century), one of Rigolot's less dramatic images of castle, was completed while he visited the island in 1916-1917 where he conducted excavations, drew detailed plans and drawings of the Castle, took photographs, and painted watercolours of the island's harbour.

Copies of the original issue of 20d in blue are commonly available whereas the later 1500d issue in orange/brown is quite rare and expensive, particularly in mint condition.

Greek "Personalities" issue: 1983



A series of 8 stamps issued by the governing Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in 1983 depicting various revolutionaries, statesmen, patriots, researchers and writers.

The 50d paying tribute to Despina Achladioti, the "Lady of Rho" (1890-1982).

No doubt selected for inclusion into this series for her well-known deed and legendary act of defiance, in raising a Greek flag over Kastellorizo's islet of Rho every day, regardless of the weather, from the time of her arrival to the island in 1927 to her death.

Distinguished Greek Personalities issue - 2013



The International Foundation for Greece honoured six distinguished living personalities of the Greek Diaspora at the Acropolis Museum on September 16, 2013 in the presence of the then Greek Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras.

A commemorative set of six stamps was issued, the 0.05€ stamp honouring the President, Chairman and CEO of the Dow Chemical Company, Andrew N. Liveris AO.

Andrew is originally from Darwin where his family had emigrated from Kastellorizo. He spent over 40 years with Dow, receiving numerous awards along the way and became a world-renowned thought leader and businessman

Tourism / Greek Islands: 2004



A colourful set of 10 landscape images promoting a mix of well-known and lesser known islands was issued in the year of the Summer Olympics in Athens to promote island tourism.

The €0.50 showing a familiar picture of Kastellorizo's limani.

Solar Eclipse Kastellorizo cover: 2006



On March 29 2006, Kastellorizo was one of the best vantage points in the world for a spectacular total solar eclipse which plunged the island and surrounds into total darkness for about 3 minutes.

Some great photos, including one featuring an image of the Sun's corona was obtained by the Williams College Eclipse Expedition and later posted onto NASA's website.

The "diamond ring" effect can be clearly seen and a commemorative postal cover was issued featuring that very image stamped with a graphical overprint.

Lighthouses series: 2009



A series of five stamps depicting significant lighthouses in Greece was issued in 2009.

The €4.20 showing an image of the Strongyli lighthouse which sits on the deserted islet of Strongyli Megistis, about 4kms south-east of Kastellorizo. French Company of Lighthouses built the lighthouse in 1870.

Strongyli Megistis, which is part of the Municipality of Megisti, is the easternmost Greek territory. Interestingly, this makes the lighthouse the easternmost building in all of Greece.

In Summary

This article has been written to provide background and examples of key stamp issues featuring the island in some way. The bulk of the images are scans from the author's personal collection but by no means is this compilation exhaustive. There are many variations to be found, particularly with early overprinting of stamps and on envelope covers.

If you wish to acquire any of these stamps, your best bet is online auction sites like eBay or Gumtree or sales from private collectors via the same or established stamp dealers. A word of caution however to check authentication and validity of the sites, especially stamps with overprinting, as these are easily forged with a large number suspiciously appearing for sale over the last few years. There are in fact dedicated online discussion groups which study dubious stamp findings and document known forgeries and their tell-tale signs - Kazzie overprints included... Happy collecting!



To become a member, to advertise or for general information contact Marilyn Tsolakis, FoK Co-ordinator + 61 423 776 896 coordinator@kastellorizo.com | www.kastellorizo.com PO Box 2118 Churchlands, Western Australia 6018.



November 1941, World War Two (WWII): The Italian military Garrison on Kastellorizo marches to the cemetery during a ceremony to honour those killed during Operation Abstention. Picture -Vecchi.Altervista.org- original photo The Late Gino Vecchi**

OPERATION ABSTENTION: THE BATTLE FOR KASTELLORIZO, 1941

Part 3: Aftermath and Legacy by Dr George Stabelos, Melbourne.

Operation Abstention, the code name for the British and allied assisted invasion of the then Italian held island of Kastellorizo from the 25th- 28th February 1941, during World War Two (WWII), was over almost as quickly as it began and was a major disappointment to the Kastellorizians and the British. This battle has gone down in history as a military blunder on behalf of the British. The Italian forces, after counter-attacking, won "a quick and clean victory over Britain at the very onset of the operation, in effect dashing the British's plans to take control of the Dodecanese islands and expand their Dodecanese campaign into something more illustrious" (1).

The British Leave

This "four day war" on Kastellorizo (1-3) resulted in 14 Italian soldiers killed and 12 Italians captured prisoner by the British (3-4), who had also reportedly shot down three Italian Air force planes. One of those planes has been recently located by divers on the sea bed half way between Kastellorizo and Kas and serves today as a legacy and living proof of the conflict (see image).

The British lamented 5 killed, 10 wounded, 20 captured (imprisoned) and 7 missing with 1 destroyer and 1 gunboat damaged. The missing British included several who attempted to save themselves by swimming to Turkey, however, they drowned (2-3).

One of the British commandos and a hero, who died and gave his life in order to free Kastellorizo, was Lieutenant M.A Smith of the Royal Sussex Regiment attached to 50 ME Commandos. His tragic story and fate were documented by his officers and men who were present during the action on Kastellorizo. During a bombing attack by the Italians,

"Lieutenant Smith, whilst making his way to a section lying on the beach (presumably at Mandraki) in a defensive position, was caught in the open. He lay down behind the position (a stone fence?) and a bomb burst close to him, although not appearing to have hit him, must have proved fatal, possibly owing to the (effects of the) blast. His servant and another man, went out to him afterwards and both stated that he was dead. The section were engaged in their position for most of the day, and to go back was unsafe until night time, when they could not find Lt Smith. The section and the rest of the company withdrew to our naval craft that night. It appears that Lt. Smith remained where he fell, his servant seemed positive of his death and brought back his automatic pistol, watch and other

valuables, which were handed to the orderly room. Lt M. A Smith was posted as missing, believed killed"(6).

Darker days follow for the Kastellorizians

For the local Greek Kastellorizians however, the worst was certainly not over and many dark days of the war and life on the island controlled by Fascist Italy, during WWII, were about to follow. In 1941, Kastellorizo had been under Italian governance for nearly twenty years. (8). With the Italian Royal Decree of December 15, 1925, the ethnically Greek islanders were considered Italian citizens with Dodecanesian nationality, however, they were not required to undertake military service. The fascist Italian control of Kastellorizo was often resented by Greek Kastellorizian locals. It is reported that the Fascists tried to "Italianise" the islands and their Greek populations, suppressed the Greek language and people and constrained the operations of the Orthodox Church. Teaching the Italian language became mandatory; Greek ceased. There were also attempts to send Italian populations to settle on the islands. To a great extent, those measures were aimed at forming and imposing an Italian Dodecanesian identity in juxtaposition to the Greek (8).

Kastellorizians who helped the British are arrested

It is understandable therefore, why the Greek Kastellorizians were welcoming of the British Special Forces commandoes and their attempt to free the island during this early part of WWII. However, following the forced departure of the British due to the successful Italian counter-attack, this collaboration by locals with the British commandos, had brutal consequences. With the British gone, the Italians quickly gathered a crowd of Kastellorizians at one of the squares on the island. Their intention was to determine who it was that collaborated with the British. The Italian soldiers were holding weapons and they fired their guns in the air, some say in an attempt to intimidate the Kastellorizian population.

In the next few days, it became apparent that whilst many islanders were pro-liberation and pro-British, with a view to union with Greece, there were others who felt that the island's, or their own personal future, lay more with Italy. "*Many Kastellorizoi who supported the liberation of their island with allied forces were betrayed by Greek associates of the Italian conqueror*", stated one Kastellorizian (7). The latter group was said to be a minority, however, it seems that information may have been passed to the



1941, WWII photo depicting an Italian military funeral on Kastellorizo at the cemetery following the British invasion of the island during Operation Abstention. Note the Italian soldiers to the right, Italian officers centre and left, an Italian sailor right, a Greek Orthodox priest in the centre and several Kastellorizian civilians centre and back, with the mountains of Kastellorizo in the background. Photo: <https://www.lavoce.delmarinaio.com>

Italians (some of whom hid in wells during the British assault) by some locals as Italian informants, both regarding the British military positions on the island leading up to the Italian military counterattack and also regarding which Kastellorizians assisted the British. The net result was that up to 40 Kastellorizians were immediately detained by the Italian military and police on Kastellorizo, with a view to potential charges of treason and collaboration with the enemy.

In the days and weeks that followed, there was much distress on the island, which no doubt, would have polarised this small community. Anecdote has it, that there were those who tried to put in a good word for some of the men being questioned in support of them having no involvement with the British and so several men were let free. In the end, by the 29th March, 1941 in one of the most darkest hours of Kastellorizian history, 29 mostly young Kastellorizian patriots, all men, were arrested during WWII, by the Fascist Italians under dictator Benito Mussolini and his associates, put in chains and sent to Italian held Rhodes on the Italian warship and torpedo boat Lupo to face a military court (9). This especially dark and tragic part of Kastellorizian history has been talked about, however seldom documented. Below is a list of names, located by the author, printed in the Australian- Greek publication, Neos Kosmos, some 30 years ago (9), of most of the 29 Kastellorizian heroes taken by the Italians, as political prisoners in 1941:

Ahladiotis, Theodoros, **Valsamis**, Ioannis, **Exikanas**, Giorgios, **Epifanis**, Anastasios, **Epifanis**, Ioannis, **Efstathiou**, Markos, **Zampaklis**, Stavros, **Zanailis**, Vlasios, **Zervos**, Kostas, **Theofilou**, Ilias, **Kondilios**, Nikolaos, **Kontozoglou**, Anastasios, **Koutsoukos**, Mihail, **Krasa**, Giorgios, **Konstandinidis**, E, **Konstandinidis**, S, **Epifanis**, Anastasios, **Pantazidis**, Konstantinos, **Pasaris**, Konstantinos, **Patiniotis**, Nikolaos, **Pispinis**, Georgios, **Roditis**, Georgios, **Sarinas**, Stavros, **Sarinas**, Simeon, **Hondros**, Vassilios, **Hondros**, Mihail

It is said that these men were initially held at the Koskinou prison in Rhodes under difficult conditions, allowed one meal per day, one blanket and forced to sleep in the cold on a bare concrete floor in the middle of winter, with temperatures dropping to zero degrees or lower at night. Their court case began six weeks later on 6th May on Rhodes and lasted 6 days. All 29 were kept handcuffed in the court and together in a steel cage, where 74 "witnesses" took part in the court case, which history seems to have recorded as a trial that was unlikely to ever be fair. As a measure of the unjustifiably harsh and brutal treatment under the Italian Fascist regime, the 29 were all sentenced to a total of 600 years in prison for collaborating with the British (9).

Imprisonment & Torture

The 29 Kastellorizians stayed in an Italian prison in Rhodes for four months until the 8th September 1941, where they were transported by the Italian Ship Kallino and after a six day voyage, arrived in Brindisi, then Naples and Rome. The Kastellorizians were distributed to various prisons in Italy, including Civitaveghia, San Gimignano, Siena and Castelfranco-Bologna- Emilia (9).

What was to follow was inhumane, with question marks as to whether treatment received in these prisons would constitute a contravention of the Geneva Convention or even war crimes. These Kastellorizian heroes and others, including Italian nationals who were anti- fascist, were imprisoned under conditions that are unimaginable today. As political prisoners, they were interrogated along a number of phases, tortured, suffered malnutrition and starvation; some survived, others died.

British, Italian POWs & Kastellorizian casualties

Approximately 27 British commandos were left behind as they had been surrounded by the Italian enemy and could not evacuate. This included others who had been cut off at the town and could not get back to Nifti point, from where the British departed and those killed. The survivors later became prisoners of war (POWs) in Rhodes. The British who were able to get away, evacuated to bases in Alexandria, Egypt and Cyprus, with 12 Italian prisoners on board the British navy vessels, an Australian Navy escort, HMAS Perth and one bag of Italian mail, seized from the Rhodes Italian postal Caique.



Portrait of Antonis Atherinos (Kalimeri) (1929-1947), my uncle, as a teenager. Antoni's life was lost at age 18, on Kastellorizo in 1947, after WWII. An item of WWII ordinance that he found on the sea bed in Megisti harbour, blew him apart, whilst he was trying to remove its propeller on the harbour promenade, the same location that today hosts picturesque seaside cafes and restaurants. The blast rocked and could be heard throughout the island. His mother, Zaphiro Atherinos, having heard an explosion, is reported to have headed up towards the hills, fearing this was yet another military attack. At one stage, she noticed no

others moving in that direction and turned around, seeing a gathering of people near the harbour promenade. She would soon discover that the explosion was not a military attack, however, one that had ended her 18 year old, only son's life. The tragic event was witnessed by his youngest sister Catina (later Catina Miriklis-dec) as a 6yo girl. The family and others gathered his still warm body parts, including limbs that were littered on the promenade and they were taken to the cemetery for immediate burial. His grave remains there today.



Eerie photo. SanGimignano prison in Northern Italy. 29 Kastellorizian patriots and heroes, or "palikaria", in 1941 during WWII on Kastellorizo, were deported and sentenced for "a total of 600 years" in Italian prisons as political prisoners, some tortured, for allegedly collaborating with the British on Kastellorizo during Operation Abstention, Feb 25-28 1941.

There are no reports of immediate deaths of Kastellorizians as a result of the four day conflict associated with Operation Abstention, however, even after the war, several Kastellorizians, especially children, lost their lives as a result of unexploded bombs and torpedos on the island. See portrait of Antonis Atherinos below. The fate of all the 29 Kastellorizians deported and imprisoned in Italy is unknown.

Military and geostrategic lessons & implications for the future

The failure of Operation Abstention came as a complete surprise to the British. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, stated in disbelief, "I am thoroughly mystified at this operation". The British attempt to free Kastellorizo in 1941, would later be described by others as "pure amateurism". The British Commando troops were not adequately equipped, nor did they have sufficient air or navy support to defeat the well organised Italians on the counter-attack, nor was there adequate communication between army and navy.

The planning and execution of this operation by the British violated the most basic of military principles. Namely, to "never underestimate the enemy" and that "victory loves preparation". That is, without adequate preparation, there is much less chance of victory. A British military enquiry later revealed that, "planning was considerably rushed owing to other operations in progress at the time".

The geostrategic location of Kastellorizo in the Mediterranean, has always been both its best asset and its greatest curse. Operation Abstention showed it is hard to defend an island that is so far away from both Europe, the Greek mainland, and anywhere else, apart from Turkey, especially with inadequate support from other powers. Churchill's far reaching strategic vision for the region was later dealt a further blow, when the Americans joined WWII as an active member of the Allies, as they showed practically no interest in Churchill's Aegean/Balkan agenda. The U.S, at the time, did not see the strategic importance of these islands, nor of Greece.

Gaining a foot hold in the Eastern Mediterranean was a potentially good strategy and now as important as ever for the security of Europe, the West and in the interests of keeping the seaways open in the Mediterranean (10). For various reasons, Kastellorizo, a geopolitical oddity (9), a tiny outpost of the West, together with the surrounding region, is indeed, a most important part of Greece, Europe and the Western World, as much as ever before. A unique location at the crossroads, where East meets West.

*Acknowledgements: We thank Sylvia Varsamis, Forence Livery (KAV Archivist), Connie Gregory, Marilyn Tsolakis and Nick Pappas AM, for information, support and helpful feedback.**These images also appear in the book [An Island in Time](#) by Nick Pappas & Nick Boyatzis.*

References on request.

Author's Note

The futility of war and the danger of extremism in any form such as fascism and extreme nationalism is apparent. Military conflicts usually result in death and destruction on both sides, with innocent loss of life. Nonetheless, the freedoms that are enjoyed by current generations in the west, should be respected and not taken for granted. They have been paid for by major sacrifices of others in the past, as described in these articles. We should never become too comfortable in our free Western and European homes. Liberty necessitates constant vigilance. We need to foresee or prepare and actively take steps to protect what we have. From a geopolitical perspective, "getting things right" in places like Kastellorizo, is a key to optimised relations of East and West and may assist in developing important links and promoting harmony, economic prosperity, regional and world peace.



The wreckage of a WWII Italian Airforce plane, today still lying on the seabed at a depth of about 60m, between Kastellorizo and Kas. It was shot down by British forces on Kastellorizo during operation Abstention, February 1941. As it was flying at a very low altitude, it was hit by fire, probably from the British gunboat HMS ladybird and was forced to ditch at sea, just 1 mile from Kastellorizo. The pilot was tenente Oscar Pegna from Livorno, Italy. All the crew was later rescued by a Cant Z506 sea plane after refusing help from a Turkish boat. For this mission, the pilot was awarded the Italian silver medal. Source: www.istitutonastroazzurro.org Photograph by Turkish scuba diver and underwater explorer Asim Karsçakar.