

Capital Philately

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Treasure from the Mediterranean

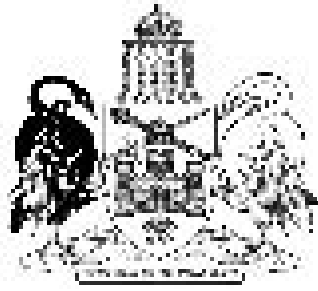
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25 years of
Capital Philately.



The Philatelic Society of Canberra Inc.

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THE IONIAN ISLANDS

Jenni Creagh

Once again I have successfully arranged abduction of philatelic material from one of our visiting speakers. Paul Storm was kind enough to allow an overnight conspiracy between Marilyn Gendek and me, which resulted in the scans of these beautiful stamps and the following contribution. Paul also provided some background material as a starting point, so join me as I discover the Ionian Islands.

Geography

I guess it is important to know where in the world you are, so we should examine the location first, to put everything else into perspective. The Ionian Islands are situated off the west coast of Greece, in the Ionian Sea. There are 7 major islands and a number of smaller islets, (although from the number of different names given to each you could be forgiven for thinking there were a lot more), from north to south they are:

Greek Name		English	Italian
Kerkyra	Κέρκυρα	Corfu	Corfu
Paxi	Παξοί	Paxos	
Lefkada	Λευκάδα	Lefkas	Santa Maura
Ithaki	Ιθάκη	Ithaca	Val di Consopare
Kefallonia	Κεφαλλονιά	Kefalonia Cephalonia Kefallinia	
Zakynthos	Ζάκυνθος	Zante	Zante
Kythira	Κύθηρα	Cerigo	Cerigo

The first six islands and their attendant islets are located within approximately 250km of each other along the edge of the somewhat earthquake prone Hellenic Trough, the island of Kythira (Cerigo) is located a further 250km distant, south of the Peloponnese Peninsula (the southern-most tip of the Greek mainland). Their climate is wetter than that of the Aegean islands, but the humidity can be uncomfortably high in summer. Ample winter rain ensures the islands, especially Corfu, are lush and fertile, making them an ideal prize (and staging area) for any country bent on expansion and conquest.

History

It is this strategic value that is responsible for the transitory rule of the Ionian Islands. Settlement of the islands is recorded as early as 900 BC, but may have commenced a century or so earlier. During Ancient Greek times the region was considered a rural backwater of no



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consequence to Greek politics, with one major exception – in 434 BC a disagreement between Kerkyra and her Mother City, Corinth, required intervention from Athens and ultimately caused the Peloponnesian War. {Ancient Greek literature also focuses on the Ionian Islands, with Ithaca being the home of Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey*, although the geography of Ithaki does not mesh entirely with the literary description, leading some to doubt the truth of this link.}

From then on the Ionian Islands became rather more integral to international affairs as first one country, then another invaded, fought over, claimed and ceded the various islands. Briefly the occupation runs as follows;

900 BC (approximately)	Settlement
734 BC	Eretrean settlers on Kerkyra displaced by Corinthians
400 BC?	Most of Southern Greece was absorbed into the Macedonian kingdom, and its successors
146 BC	Roman Occupation of Greek Peninsular & Ionian Islands
300 CE	Rule passes to Constantinople, and the Byzantine Empire.
1204 CE	Byzantine Empire falls due to Fourth Crusade – Ionian Islands split as follows: Venetian Rule – Kerkyra, Paxi and Kythera. Independent County Palatine of Cephalonia - Kefallonia and Zakynthos until 1357, then combined with Lefkada and Ithaki to become the Duchy of Leucadia under French and Italian dukes. Greece retained some control over various islands during this period, but it was gradually eroded by the Venetian advance.
1797 CE	Ionian Islands occupied by France
1798 CE	Russian – Ottoman Occupation
1800 CE	Septinsular Republic or State of the Seven United Islands (“Eptanesian State”); joint Russian-Ottoman protectorate
1807 CE	Ceded to France by Russia
1809 CE	British occupation of Islands begins
1815 CE	British Colony Ionian State (Seven Islands)
1864 CE	Incorporated into Greece
1923 CE	Kerkyra occupied by Italy from 31 Aug to 17 Sept
1941 CE	Italian Occupation During WWII to 8 Sept 1943
1943 CE	German Occupation until 12 Oct 1944.

During all this time I’d imagine the locals were becoming rather disgruntled at the presumptive attitude, and it reminds me of the attitude of the Gauls (and others) to the Romans and other invading forces in the Asterix stories.

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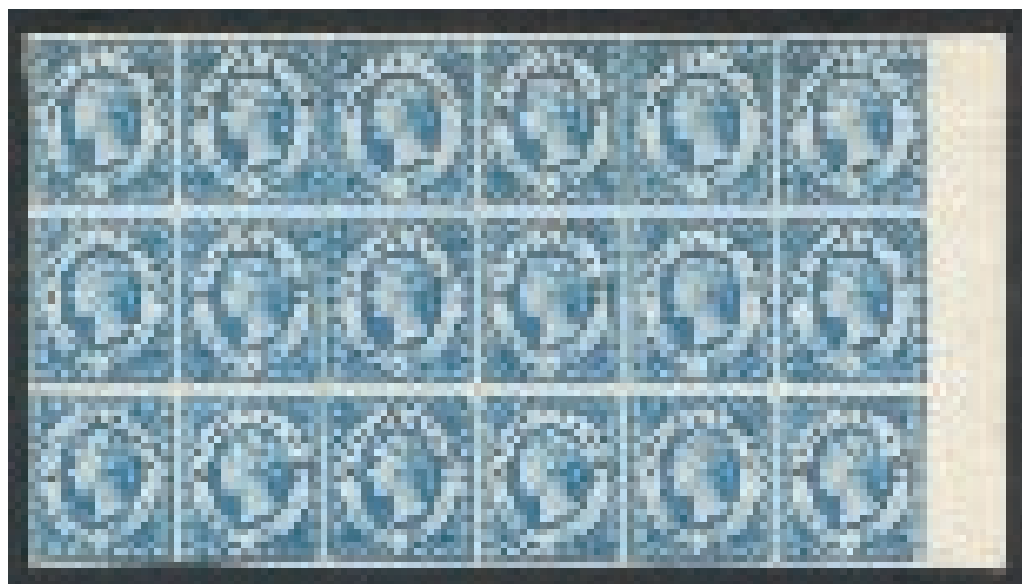
During the British Occupation the colony produced its first postage stamps, and these are the impetus behind and focus of this article, so perhaps we better examine them now.

In July 1857 the newly reorganised postal system (it was virtually non-existent prior to British rule) was regulated and a parliamentary decree necessitated the issue of postage stamps to mark the paid postage. The mail routes were well defined, and fell into three categories, suggesting there be three different denominations of stamps: One for local mail carried within a particular island, one for letters passing from one island to another, and the third for letters going to the mainland of Greece. No provisions were made for mail to travel further a field at a higher rate.

Due to parliamentary process, and the necessary discussions for organization, it was not until May 1st, 1859 that the stamps were placed on sale. For some reason they were referred to as one halfpenny, penny and twopence, even though the local currency was the obole (equivalent to one halfpenny) and they were sold for one, two and four oboli respectively throughout the islands – the Postal System was obviously British to the core.



Perkins, Bacon & Co., produced the stamps in London, as they did for many other British colonies at the time. A single plate was engraved without denomination, and so from a design point of view, all the stamps are identical except for the colour and paper, which differed for each value. The central portrait of Queen Victoria, based on a drawing by Henry Corbould, is bound by an upright oval garter inscribed with “IONIKON KPATOZ” (Ionian State) on an engine turned background. Henry Jeens, one of the most talented portrait artists employed by the company, did the engraving of the Queen, for which he was paid the sum of £5 5s.0d. The plate consisted of 120 impressions, 10 rows of 12, but appears more haphazard in arrangement than the majority of work produced by Perkins, Bacon & Co. Later this caused problems when the colony made inquiries about having the stamps perforated (which was common practice for GB stamps by this stage), and as a result they were all issued imperforate.



The paper used for the Ionian stamps was white and hand-made (deckle edges on all sides of the sheet), not specifically for this issue, as it was left over from one produced for New South Wales. The paper for the orange halfpenny issue was unwatermarked, while the other two denominations were marked with large double lined numbers: 1 for the red stamp, and 2 for the blue stamp. The watermarks have caused some confusion, as the stamps were sold as One Penny Blue (watermarked 2) and Twopence Carmine (watermarked 1), this is contrary to the convention used for other colonies and for Great Britain where it is the Penny Red and Twopence Blue, but explains the printer “error”.

From left to right:
Halfpenny Orange
(unwatermarked)
One Penny Blue
(watermarked 2) and
Twopence Carmine
(watermarked 1).
Watermarks enhanced.



The printing costs to the colony were quoted by Perkins, Bacon & Co. at £85- for the plate, and nine pence for printing and gumming each 1000 sheets of stamps. As remaindered paper was used this engendered no additional cost for set-up or watermarking. The first, and only order as it turned out, was for 50,000 stamps in each of the three denominations. The infrequency of ships calling at the islands caused delivery problems for the printers, and delayed the arrival until November for the One and Two Pence, with the Halfpenny following later in January. Later the Colony asked about the possibility of getting more of the Halfpenny stamps printed, but this time on watermarked paper – the printers responded that a special decal would need to be made as no other colony had requested stamps of this value - £5 5s.0d. would be the price for this service. It seems as if there was an understanding to proceed, for the mould was made, but not used, and the costs were eventually written off as a bad debt when the Ionian Islands were returned to Greece (together with the charges for printing the halfpenny stamps shipped in January, a total of £8 4s.5d.).

As these stamps were intended to be used only locally and inter-island or to the mainland, the quantity actually used in the period was relatively small, and so genuinely used examples are quite rare, and it would be almost impossible to assemble a complete representation of all the island postmarks. Forged postmarks are not uncommon, as so many of the mint stamps were left at the time of political transition, but good quality mint examples are still reasonably easy to obtain.

Greek stamps have been used since the British ceded the Ionian Islands in 1864, except for an additional 13 stamps overprinted during World War II by the occupying Italian forces (1941-43).

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IONIAN TREASURES

During my exploration of these Islands I came upon a magnificent map which just had to be included, not just for the perspective it supplies to the previous article, but as a magnificent piece in its own right and example of the wonders to be discovered on the internet. Alas we don't have the space to produce it at full size. Text accompanies the map on the website listed below - many other Mediterranean marvels are to be found there.

Nautical chart of the second part of the Mediterranean Sea, from Malta to Alexandretta and up to Constantinople, carefully drawn by Captain Nikolaos Kefalas, of Zakynthos Island.

Engraved map by Nikolaos Kefalas. 99 x 67.5 cm.

Engraved by Pierre Picquet. Paris: Alexander Risomos, 1818.

From the collection of the Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies, Athens, GT.311q.

This nautical chart is one of three charts of the Mediterranean, published by the sea captain Nikolaos Kefalas of Zakynthos. Although Greek pilots like Antonio da Millo and George Sideris 'Kalapodas' produced manuscript portolan charts from the late 16th century, this may be the first printed chart of the Mediterranean to be issued by a Greek; It is extremely rare and may be known only by the copy in the Gennadius Library.

Kefalas (1770-1850), from the island of Zakynthos, dedicated his charts to the newly founded Sept-Insular Republic of the Ionian Islands. At the same time as he published the maps, he also published a separate dedicatory letter to the government of the Ionian Islands, in fact a form of advertisement, in which he refers to these maps and states that the geographer and cartographer J. D. Barbie du Bocage, together with the Greek literateur Adamantios Koraes, helped him publish them. The price of the three maps bound together was 10 'grossia'.

According to this pamphlet he also published a chart of the Black Sea in 1817 in Vienna, together with a book on nautical law. Kefalas was clearly an adventurer. He is an ambiguous figure in the history of Greek marine activity: not only did he sail to India in 1824, but he made a voyage to America in 1820 on a brigantine he had built in Russia; he may have been the first Greek to sail to America. He also represented Ali Mirza of Persia on several diplomatic missions.

However, Kefalas's self advertisement has to be taken with a large grain of salt. Although he claimed to produce his maps and nautical works for the good of his native land, he was unscrupulous in his use of others' works. (He published as his own a translation of the work of the Indian philosopher Chanakya, which had been entrusted to him for publication by the Greek philosopher and indologist Demetrios Galanos.)

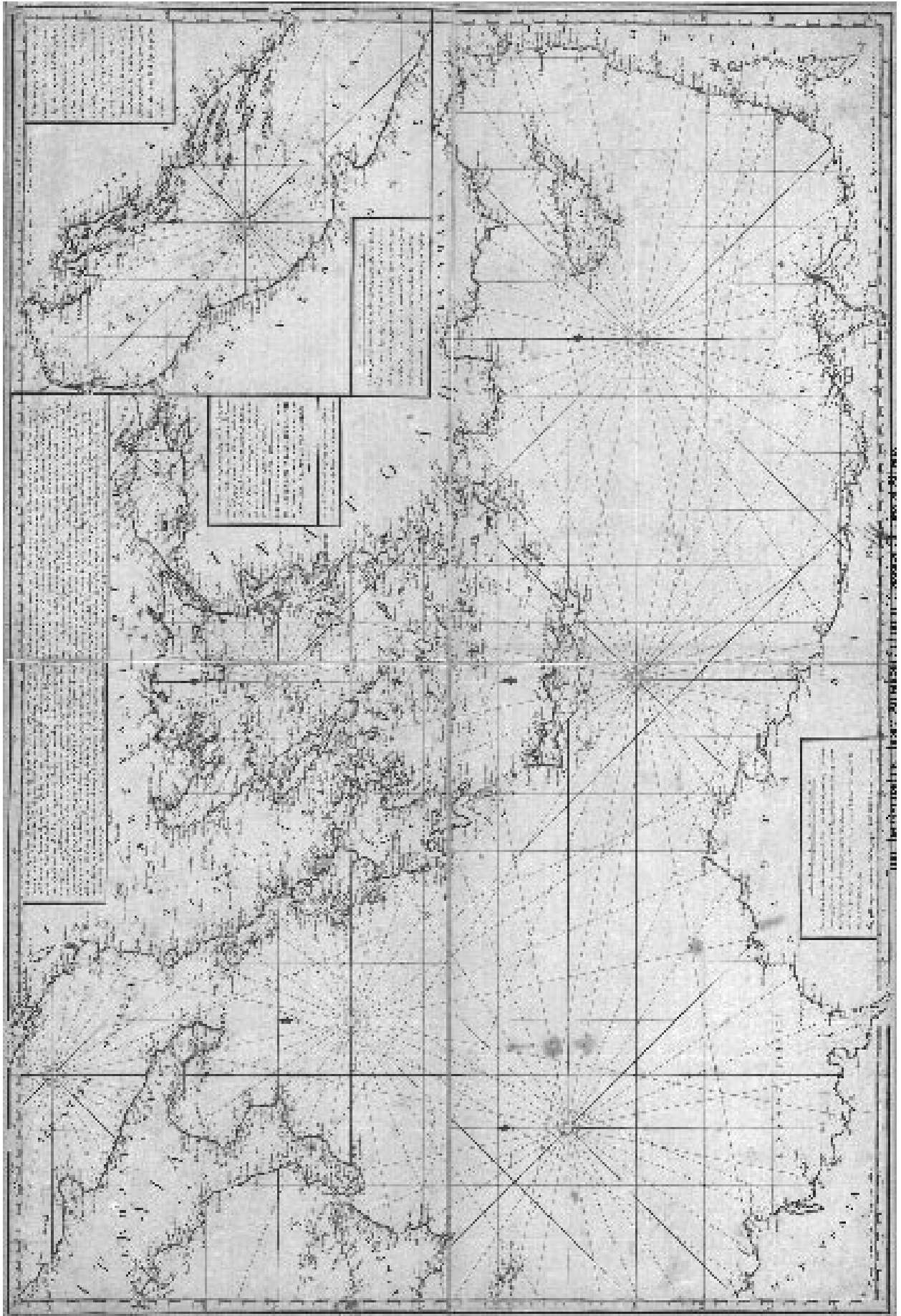
The cartography of the chart produced by Kefalas is peculiar. The shape of Greece is very curious for this period. Notice the extremely narrow shape of the mainland, and the way in which Cape Chiarenza on the mainland of the Peloponnesus is related to the island of Zakynthos. Kefalas was not a cartographer, although as a ship's captain he must have had a working knowledge of cartography. But it is clear that the time frame in which these maps were produced would not have allowed for independent surveying. All the maps which Kefalas produced, including a map of the Indian subcontinent published in 1826, he claimed as his own work. This is extremely unlikely. The sources used by Kefalas for his map of the eastern Mediterranean may in fact be drawn from the works of both J. B. B. d'Anville and J. D. Barbie du Bocage. In fact, Kefalas does claim the help of Barbie du Bocage in his pamphlet.

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