

Fabulous Firsts:

Crete (November 28, 1898)

By B. W. H. Poole (From *Mekeel's Weekly*, September 2, 1940, with images added)

In 1897 the Christian population of Crete decided to throw off the Turkish yoke once and for all and to join forces with Greece. The inevitable revolution was started and as a result Greece, who was quite willing to accept the island, became embroiled in war with Turkey. Several decisive engagements were fought on the plains of Thessaly, all ending greatly in favor of the Turkish troops and, but for the intervention of the Great Powers, Greece might have lost her independence or a number of her most fertile provinces. "To the victor belong the spoils" did not work out in this instance for, by the interference of the Powers, Turkey had to be content with a few small slices of territory on the frontier. To all intents and purposes she also lost the island of Crete for, although allowed to retain her suzerainty, Turkish control was purely nominal. A Christian governor was appointed and as he had the Great Powers behind him there was little Turkey could say about the manner in which the inhabitants were governed.

Turkish troops were withdrawn from the island and France, Great Britain, Italy and Russia, who were jointly concerned in the preservation of peace, landed their own soldiers for the purpose of protecting property and restoring order until proper arrangements could be made for the future government of the island. The British troops, under the command of Sir Herbert Chermide, took charge of the district or province of Candia.

Almost as soon as troops were landed Major W. E. Fairholme, as assistant Military Commissioner, was given the task of organizing a postal service between the chief town, Candia, and other settlements within the confines of the province. The postal arrangements included a tri-weekly service of mails and in organizing this on a workable basis Fairholme received considerable help from Chevalier Berinda, head of the Austrian post office, which was already well established at Candia. Berinda not only gave the British military authorities the benefit of his experience but also placed his post office and staff at their disposal. With the exception of this post office at Candia the postmasters at all the other offices in the province were Cretans, appointed on the recommendation of the British District Commissioners.

A somewhat lengthy official "Circular" was promulgated giving full details of the working of the office, dates of the receipt and despatch of mails, rates of postage, and penalties for various misdemeanors. To facilitate the prepayment of postage a supply of 10 and 20 parades stamps were ordered from an Athens printer through the office of Her Britannic Majesty stationed in that city. However, as it was not thought advisable to delay the service until these stamps could be procured, it was decided to make a few stamps locally for provisional use. The ubiquitous Chevalier Berinda designed a simple label for this purpose and the brass handstamp from which the stamps were made was manufactured by a Cretan workman under his direction. The design is simple



Crete Scott 1

in the extreme and merely consists of four lines of inscriptions, in Greek characters, which may be translated as "Provisional—Post Office—Eracleon—Parades 20". Eracleon, or Heraklion as it is also spelled, is the Greek name for Crete.

The stamps were struck one at a time in bright violet ink and, according to an official document, only 3,000 impressions were taken from this stamp after

which it was defaced with a file to prevent its further use. The stamp [Sc. 1] was placed in circulation November 28, 1898, and five days later it was discontinued on the arrival of the stamps [Sc. 2 and 3] which had been ordered from Athens. Whether this stamp (Sc. 1) was issued in any particular sized sheet or not we have never been able to ascertain. The late E. J. Nankivell says they were printed on paper which had previously been ruled by pencil into small rectangles and that he had personally seen a strip of six. Probably all sorts of odd pieces of paper were pressed into service and filled with just as many impressions as they would comfortably take.



Scott 2

This stamp was issued imperforate only and as rather clever forgeries exist it should always be purchased from reliable sources.



Scott 10

Addendum, from Geir Sør-Reime's *World of Stamps*, May 29, 2015:

"In the Russian zone, a Russian postal service operated from May 1 to July 29, 1899, issuing a number of different stamps. Scott lists 46 different stamps [37 in the District of Rethymnon]. The first issue of four were hand-stamped and imperforate stamps showing the Byzantine double-eagle emblem."

Scott 1-5 were issued in the British sphere. There is no Sc. 6-9. Sc. 10-46 are from Rethymnon. There is no Sc. 47-50.

The first stamps issued by the Cretan Government were released in March 1, 1900, Sc. 50-53.



Scott 50