

World of Stamps: Distinctive Stamps, Finally, for Monastic Republic

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The autonomous monastic republic on Mount Athos in Greece, with autonomy dating back to AD 963, finally has its own distinctive stamps.

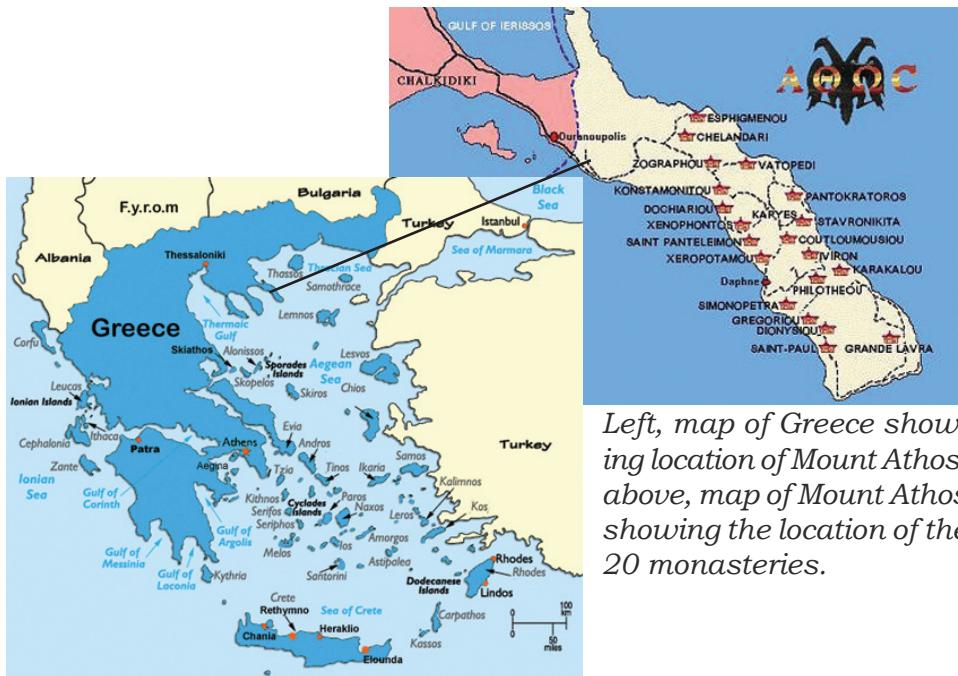
The Greek post office in 2008 started issuing special stamps for use only at the two post offices within the autonomous republic.



2008 1st issue
cancelled at P.O.
at Mount Athos

2008 1st and 2nd issue (from VACCARI
website)

These stamps are inscribed "AGION OROS ATHOS" and "HELLAS". (H)Agion Oros means "Holy Mountain" and is the official title of the republic. It consists of 20 autonomous monasteries, and has an area of 129.5 square miles. Since 1988, Mount Athos has been a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Left, map of Greece showing location of Mount Athos; above, map of Mount Athos showing the location of the 20 monasteries.

I wrote about Mount Athos and its previous philatelic history in *Mekeel's & Stamps Magazine*, July 22, 2005. It is a pleasure now to be able to provide this new coverage in *Stamp News Online*.

The monastic republic was under the protection of the Byzantine Empire, and was allowed to continue under Ottoman rule. After the First World War, the area came under Greek sovereignty, and the Treaty of Lausanne granted Mount Athos internal self-government. The Greek state is represented by a Governor on Mount Athos.

Only monks are allowed to live on Mount Athos, and there are now around 2,200 living in the 20 monasteries there. Women have never been allowed to enter the republic.

The first philatelic issues directly relating to Mount Athos are eight Turkish stamps overprinted with a triangle and inscribed with the initials of the Holy Mountain (ΣΧΠ). These are listed in the German Michel catalog. These were issued in 1880, and were intended for local mail.



1880 triangle overprints on Turkish stamps (local stamps for Mount Athos)



Russian P.O. 1909-1910
"Mont-Athos" 5 para on 1
kopeck surcharge gutter
block.

A Russian post office operated on Mount Athos from around 1860 until 1917, and from 1909 onwards, stamps of the Russian post offices in the Levant were overprinted "Mount Athos" (in French or Cyrillic) for use at the Russian consular post office.

In 1915-16, Allied plans to occupy Mount Athos to forestall any German influence in the area were discussed, and these plans also involved the issuance of distinct stamps for the monastic republic.

There were also plans to operate a British consular post office to compete with the Russian P.O. British stamps overprinted "Levant" were prepared in anticipation of the occupation. Later, these stamps were put into use instead at the British field post office in Salonica in 1919.

Souvenir covers and mint stamps for the prepared, but not issued stamps for the monastic republic exist.



British stamp
overprinted Levant
for intended use at Mount Athos



Souvenir cover with 1916 essays and a single



1916 unissued overprint "Holy Community of Mount Athos" in Greek on 5L Postage Due rouletted stamp of Greece.



Also in 1916, the Greek authorities planned to issue special stamps for Mount Athos, and Greek stamps were overprinted "Holy Community of Agion Oros", but for unclear reasons, were never issued in the republic.

Greek stamps have been used at the post offices on Mount Athos, up till now, and the Greek post office plans to issue three annual sets of stamps for Mount Athos in the future. Through the end of 2010, 65 stamps in 12 sets have been issued.

A number of Greek stamps also have featured scenery of Mount Athos. In 1963, eight stamps were issued to commemorate the millennium of the founding of the monastic community on Mount Athos (Scott 770-77). The stamps featured monasteries and holy objects from the monasteries.



Above, 1963, Vatopethion Monastery (Greece Sc. 770); right, the Katholicon, or main temple, in the Vatopethion Monastery



A monastery of Mount Athos (St. Paul's) was included with six others in a 1972 set of stamps featuring monasteries and churches (Scott 1037), an 11th century manuscript illumination from Mount Athos 1972 showing St. Paul's Monastery (Sc. 1037)





1963 Great Lavra Church (Sc. 777), and a photo of the Great Lavra Monastery



Photo source, <http://www.ouranoupoli.com/athos/athos.html>, a wonderful site devoted to Mount Athos, its history and monasteries

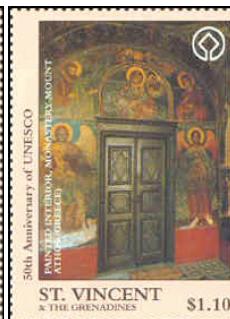
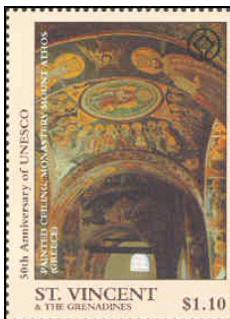
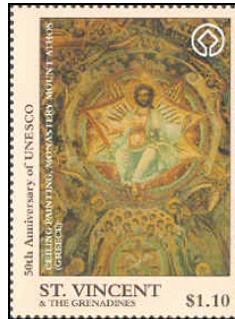
was depicted on one of the 1994 Easter stamps (Scott 1783), and a 1998 single commemorated the millennium of the Xenon monastery (Scott 1900).



Left, 1994 Resurrection (Sc. 1783); right, 1998 single for millennium of Xenon monastery (Sc. 1900)



As a World Heritage site, Mount Athos has also been featured on stamps of other countries, including 1997 stamps from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.



St. Vincent 1997 for 50th anniversary of UNESCO showing painted ceiling in Mount Athos and three other churches, from Sc. 2392.



From "The Byzantine Empire: Rome of the East," December 1983, National Geographic magazine:

"At Simonopetra [Monastery] monks pile the bones of brothers in a charnel house. The remains of a former abbot rest in a special box held by Father Macarius. To the monks who pray here, these orderly rows of skulls evoke the monastery's long history and the devotion of the men who kept alive its spirit."