

A Brief History of the Stamps of Albania

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During the first Balkan War, Albania declared its independence of Turkey and this was recognised by the Treaty of London on 30 May 1913. The first stamps of the new state appeared on 16 June and consisted of contemporary Turkish stamps overprinted 'Shqipëria' (Albania) and the double-headed eagle, emblem of the medieval Albanian kingdom. The first distinctive stamps of Albania were released in October 1913. These stamps were struck in an ingenious manner. Two hand stamps were struck to show the circular frame and the eagle, and then the value was inserted by type writing. Occasionally, the eagle appeared upside down and numerous typing errors have been identified.

The provisional government offered the crown of Albania to Prince William of Wied on 21 February 1914. Stamps issued in December 1913 and portraying the fifteenth century hero, Kastrioti Skanderberg, were overprinted on 7 March to celebrate the arrival of the prince at Valona. The stamps were valued in the new currency. Following the outbreak of World War I, Prince William returned to Austria. Albania was a battlefield of opposing forces in WW I.

It was officially reunited in February 1920 and became a regency pending the decision on the restoration of Prince William. Ironically the first stamps issued under the regency were a series portraying Prince William. Because of his precipitate flight in 1914, the stamps were never issued for postal service. In 1920, they were released but overprinted with the Albanian eagle to blot out the prince's features. Examples without the overprint come from stocks looted in the civil disturbances.

Albania's first airmail service was inaugurated in May 1925, though a military service had operated between Brindisi and the Italian garrison during WW I. The series of seven airmail stamps showed a monoplane over the mountains in the neighbourhood of Tirana.

The Constitutional Assembly declared Albania a people's republic on 11 January 1946 – the country's twelfth change of status in thirty-five years.

The late 1950s saw Albanian stamps portraying both Josef Stalin and Mao Tse-tung but since the early 1960s, there is little indication of Albania's political alignment in postage stamps. The propaganda issues have given way to thematic sets covering every conceivable aspect of Albanian life – flora and fauna, space exploration, sporting events and more recently, Albanian art. The first series of stamps devoted to Albanian art appeared in October 1967.

After issuing several sets devoted to modern Albanian paintings, Albania turned to classical mosaics for inspiration. The first of these sets appeared in 1969 and reproduced geometric patterns, animal and bird motifs and human portraits from the Roman ruins at Apolloni. A second series, issued in 1970, concentrated on animal and bird mosaics, no doubt hoping to catch the thematic market in both art and zoological stamps.