

The Mediterranean Games

by Giuseppe Sabelli Fioretti

The Mediterranean Games were first held at Alexandria, in Egypt, from 5th to 20th October 1951. The man who founded this great event, H. E. Mohammed Taher Pacha (Egypt), member of the IOC from 1934 until his tragic death in exile in 1968, was a great apostle of Olympism. He had to fight long and hard to realise his dream, hampered by obstacles both economic and political.

The year 1951 was a happy one for this type of regional competition, organised with the patronage of the IOC, and both the Asian and the Panamerican Games were established during this period.

To mark the inauguration of the Mediterranean Games, the Egyptian postal service issued three stamps (10 m. brown, 22 m. green and 30 m. blue and green) and a booklet containing the three stamps ; 300,000 sets and 30,000 booklets were printed. There were also three special cancellations. The first, in September, is a banner headline on two rows, the text in



French ; the two others, in October, are substantially one, differing only by a letter of the alphabet included in the lower semi-circle - « A », the initial of the word « Arrivée » (first day of the Games) and « D », signifying « depart » (the last day). These two cancellations are round and contain a serious spelling mistake in the French text underneath - “Jeux Méditerranées”, instead of “Jeux Méditerranéens”. In the upper semi-circle the text is in Arabic.

Before the Games at Alexandria, it had been decided that these Regional games would, like





the Olympic Games, be held quadrennially, but celebrated the year before the Olympic Games.

The second Mediterranean Games were held, therefore, in 1955, at Barcelona, Spain. Alas, the Spanish postal authorities did not see fit to issue a philatelic souvenir of the event, apart from two special cancellations, one affixed at Ampurias on 16th July, the other at Barcelona from 16th to 25th July. However, the Spanish Olympic Committee distributed a pretty vignette.

Beruit, in the Lebanon, was host to the third Mediterranean Games in 1959 and the Lebanese postal service marked the occasion by issuing three airmail stamps, of which 100,000 each were printed. The subjects are : a discus thrower for the 15 pi. (pale green) ; a weight-lifter for the 30 pi. (sepia) and a torch for the 40 pi. ultramarine.

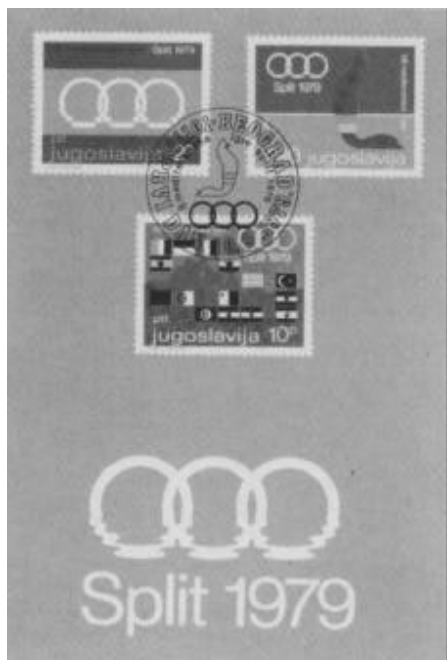
The fourth Mediterranean Games took place in 1963 at Naples, Italy. From a philatelic point of view, this event was more fruitful, for not only did the Italian postal service issue two new stamps (15 L. blue and green, showing a swimming pool with Vesuvius in the background ; 70 L. showing an antique Greek vase decorated with a javelin thrower; about five million of these stamps were sold) but the event was also commemorated in the Lebanon, where six stamps were issued, three for surface mail (2 pi. lilac-rose and brown-red, cycling ; 5 pi. blue and light brown, basketball ; 10 pi. lilac and brown, running) and three airmail stamps (15 pi. green and brown, tennis ; 17 pi. 50, blue and brown, swimming ; 30 pi. turquoise, grey and brown, skiing) ; 100,000 sets were printed. Only the three, imperforate, airmail stamps were re-produced in a booklet. Of which only 20,000 copies were printed. An illustrated card was printed and circulated by the Naples Tourist Board, in several languages. This was not an official publication.

These Games at Naples had, besides, a wide range of special cancellations, twelve in all. Four were affixed on 21st September: a)

Poste Napoli-Fuorigrotta ; Sp. A. Mostra n. 1 ; b) Uff. P. T. Mobile n. 5 ; Napoli P. zza Plebiscito ; c) Poste Napoli-Fuorigrotta ; Sp. Av. Stadio San Paolo ; d) Uff. P. T. Mobile n. 1 ; Napoli Palazzo Sport. Three on 22nd September ; e) Poste Napoli Vomero ; Sp. Av. Stadio ; f) Poste Torre del Greco: Sp. Av. Stadio: g) Uff. P. T. Mobile n. 5 ; Napoli P. le A. Diaz. One on 23rd September ; h) Uff. P. T. Mobile no. 1 ; Napoli Piscina Scandone. Two on 24th September : i) Uff. P. T. Mobile n. 5 ; Napoli Parco Castello; j) Uff. P. T. Mobile n. 5 ; Napoli Stadio Militare. One on 26th September : k) Uff. P. T. Mobile n. 1 ; Poligono Domitiana and the last on 28th September : l) Uff. P.T. Mobile n. 1 ; Napoli Lago Patria.

In 1967, Tunis having been chosen to host the fifth edition of the Games, the Tunisian postal authorities issued two stamps in advance (20 m. brown, sepia, blue and red; 30 m. grey, black and blue), quantity 400,000, the theme of which was an extremely stylised representation of the sprint races in athletics. Then at the beginning of the Games, five other stamps were issued (5 m. dark green and brown-red, showing the tennis club ; 10 m. multicoloured, showing the welcoming of the athletes ; 15 m. showing the swimming pool; 35 m. brown-violet and green-grey, showing the sports palace; 75 m. carmine, violet and emerald, showing the stadium at Tunis). In addition, two other countries, the Maghred and Libya, issued stamps in line with those of the host country. Algeria put one stamp into circulation (30 c. black and red, mixture of sports), Morocco issued two (25 and 40 c. multicoloured) and Libya issued five (5 m. orange, black and blue, running ; 10 m. brown-violet, black and blue, javelin thrower ; 15 m. violet, black and blue, cycling ; 45 m. rose, black and blue, football ; 75 m. green, black and blue, boxing).

Izmir, (the ancient city of Smyrna) in Turkey, organised the sixth Mediterranean Games in 1971 and the Turkish postal service celebrated the event with two stamps (100 k. lilac, violet and black, football ; 200 k. multicoloured, athletics; quantity 400,000) and a booklet containing one imperforate stamp (250 k. black, ochre and dark green, a stylised shot putter, quantity 200,000). I know of a round vignette, multicoloured, with the inscription "Rendez-vous a Izmir », but I do not know by whom it was issued - probably by some tourist organisation and consequently not an official issue. Three stamps were issued in Algeria, the country which had been selected to hold the next Games. These were the subjects : athletics (hurdles) for the 20 c. pale blue and green-black, gymnastics (horse vault for the



40 c. pale-olive and green-black, basketball for the 75 c. pale brown-rose and green-black.

In 1975, the organisation of the seventh edition of the Games having been assigned to Algiers, the Algerian postal authorities issued two propaganda stamps first of all, reproducing the emblem of the Games (50 c. lilac-red, green and ochre ; 1 d. ochre, brown-lilac and blue-green) and next a commemorative series, made up of five stamps and a booklet. The stamps had the following subjects : 25 c. swimming ; 50 c. wrestling ; 70 c. football ; 1 d. running ; 1 d. 20 long jump. The sheet contains the entire series and was printed perforated and imperforated.

The "First Day" cancellations of the two series are thematic. Tunisia joined in with the issue of two stamps (25 and 50 m. multicoloured) as did Morocco with a 40 c. stamp in gold, chocolate and bistre.

The eighth Mediterranean Games, and the latest to date, were held at Split, on the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia and in eight other Dalmatian towns. From a philatelic point of view, these Games were rather irritating because of the difficulties encountered in obtaining the necessary information. Some

points are still not clear. First of all there was a one dinar stamp (ultramarine and violet-blue) the proceeds from which went to the organisation of the Games. Its use as a supplementary stamp was obligatory for the franking of correspondence. The design showed the emblem of the Games and its mascot, the seal Adrienne. Soon afterwards, another supplementary stamp was issued, identical to the first, but in different colours (blue-grey and blue-green). Finally, a commemorative series of three stamps was issued : 2 dinars (green, blue and deep blue) with the emblem ; 4 d. 90 (olive green, blue-green, violet and yellow) with the same design as the supplementary stamps ; 10 d (multicoloured with the emblem and the flags of the fifteen countries taking part in the Games). The designs are by Andre Milenkovic, one of the best stamp designers in the world.

There is still much confusion over postmarks. At first there was talk of only two cancellations - a "First Day" cancellation affixed at Belgrade on 10th September for the issue of the commemorative series, (although the series which I possess, cancelled at Split, is not thematic) : the other, used at Split, had a fixed date of 15th September which was used up until 10th October. This obliteration was made in black ink at the central post offices and in violet ink at the special offices set up in the hotels. In addition, when the Games were almost over, the existence became known of other cancellations in use in other towns hosting the competitions. I know of the one from Sibenik for volleyball (17.9) and football (21.9) and one from Zaton for rowing (16.9) and canoeing (21.9) but I believe it possible that others may exist.

In the absence of any response to the letter which I sent some time ago to the Yugoslav postal authorities, may I ask if the NOC would be kind enough to send us an exact list of these cancellations ? I would be very grateful.

I would also like to add, for those interested, that there are many illustrated cards dedicated to the Mediterranean Games at Split, but as these were issued by the "Dalmacijaturist", they are not recognised as postal or Olympic material within the confines of our specialised philatelic interests.

G. S. F.

