

# A History of Hungary and Hungarian Philately

Formerly titled "*An Introduction to Hungarian Philately*".

## Early History

Magyar tribes migrated from Asia and settled in the Carpathian Basin in 896AD. The Kingdom of Hungary, founded by King St. Stephen in 1000AD, had a turbulent history defending itself against foreign incursions, the most significant of which was the Mongol invasion of 1241AD. Nevertheless, it became a Central European power under the 300-year rule of the native Árpád Dynasty and subsequent dynasties

In 1526 as a result of the Ottoman conquest, the kingdom disintegrated into three parts: Western Hungary ruled by the Austrian House of Habsburg, Transylvania governed by Hungarian princes, and central Hungary under Turkish yoke. The Turkish occupation lasted until the waning years of the 17th Century, when the Habsburgs drove out the Turks and claimed all of Hungary. The 150 years of constant wars decimated the native population and the voids were filled by foreign nationalities, creating the polyglot characteristic of Hungary.

The reoccupation of Hungary by Austria also gave rise to wars for independence, first under Prince Rákóczi (1703-1711) and Lajos Kossuth (1848-1849), the leading statesman in the movement to defeat the Habsburgs. Austrian Empress Maria Theresa established a regular postal service in Hungary and a military field-post service operated during both wars of independence.

## First Stamp Issues

Following the 'stampless' era, Austria joined the stamp-issuing nations of the world in 1850. Austrian issues used in Hungary are much sought after by Hungarian philatelists. In 1867 a compromise was reached with Austria, creating the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy under Emperor Franz Josef. The Hungarian half of the Monarchy organized an independent postal system, which issued its first stamps in 1867. Since then, its stamp issues have reflected the country's current and past history. Many Hungarian stamps depict two national symbols – the crown of St. Stephen and the mythical Turul bird. During the First World War, Hungary fought alongside Austria against Russia and Italy. Austrian military-post stamps, as well as the stamps of Bosnia-Herzegovina (occupied in 1878 and annexed by the Monarchy in 1908) provide an interesting connection to Hungarian philately.

## Post World War I Turbulence

Following the military defeat of Austria in November 1918, the Armistice was signed on 13 November 1918 and a Republic was proclaimed in Hungary severing all links with the Monarchy. Existing stamps were overprinted 'Köztársaság' to mark the new government. As part of the peace settlement, Hungary had to give up land to Romania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Serbia, Poland, and Italy. During the turbulent transition period of 1918-1921, overprinted stamps were used in various parts of these occupied areas.

The Republican government was overthrown in March 1919 and replaced by a short-lived Communist regime, which also overprinted stamps 'Tanácsköztársaság' to mark its victory, followed by stamp issues of original design. At the same time, a nationalist government headed

by Admiral Horthy was formed in the city of Szeged. Once again, stamps were overprinted 'Magyar Nemzeti Kormány' in Szeged. An additional philatelic complication occurred when the French army temporarily occupied the region of Arad and overprinted local stamps for that area. Arad became part of Romania in 1920. Having occupied Transylvania, Romania invaded Hungary to remove the Communist regime. The capital city of Budapest was occupied until the Peace Commission forced the Romanians to withdraw and allow Admiral Horthy's National Army to take over the city. Overprinted stamps 'Nemzeti hadsereg bevonulása' were issued to mark the event. Admiral Horthy was elected regent of the Kingdom of Hungary, which signed the Peace of Trianon in 1920 ending the state of war. Former King Karl made two unsuccessful attempts to regain his throne in 1921. In the same year, Hungarian insurgents established the Banate of Lajtabánság in parts of Western Hungary assigned to Austria by the Trianon Treaty. The insurgency was suppressed, but a plebiscite returned the town of Sopron and environs to Hungary.

## **World War II and After**

As clouds of war heralding World War Two gathered, Hungary looked to the Nazi government in Germany for rectification of the country's borders, which were deemed unjust because large groups of ethnic Hungarians were transferred to the Successor States by the Trianon Treaty. Following the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1938, Hungary recovered the southern part of Slovakia by the First Vienna Arbitral award. In return for their continued assistance, the Germans awarded Hungary the northern part of Transylvania by the Second Vienna Arbitral Award in 1940. In 1941, Hungary participated in the military invasion of Yugoslavia and annexed the Bácska region. Special 'Hazatérés' stamps and cancellations from major towns marked the return of these regions to Hungary. In the last six months of the war, the Russians overran and occupied Hungary. The Horthy government was replaced, at first by a democratic coalition government in 1945 (the Second Republic was declared in February 2, 1946), and then by a Soviet puppet state in 1949 (People's Republic, declared on August 20th).

The war devastated Hungary, resulting in a rapid deterioration of its currency. Between May 1, 1945 and July 31, 1946, 27 postal rate changes occurred in what is known as the world's greatest hyperinflation.

The Hungarian people revolted against Soviet domination in the brief Hungarian Uprising of October-November 1956. The students of Sopron commemorated the event with an overprinted stamp issue. The revolt was brutally crushed and Hungary continued to be solid member of the Warsaw Pact until the disintegration of the Soviet Union's European Empire in 1989. Today, Hungary is a republic again, a free and independent country, whose stamp issues continue to highlight its rich cultural, historical, and natural heritage.

Hungarian philately includes not only stamps, but also pre-stamp envelopes, and postal stationery entireties. Hungary has issued air mail and semi-postal stamps in addition to the regular issues. Like many other countries, Hungary has issued stamps for special delivery, postage due, official use and newspapers. In addition, a rich parallel facet of Hungarian philately is the revenue stamps issuing area. Hungarian philatelic materials are available from dealers, clubs, and direct from the Hungarian post office.