

NOTOS 2021- European Philatelic Exhibition

19-22 November 2021, Athens



Bill Hedley writes:

We had almost forgotten the pleasure of live exhibitions – the opportunity to meet friends and share news and ideas, the chance to see a plethora of outstanding philatelic material that reminded us just how diverse and absorbing philately can be, the excitement of visiting a new venue and seeing some of its treasures, the pleasure of searching for new material to add to our collections. Just in time the NOTOS team has brought to life an exhibition that reminded us of all these delights and encouraged us to look forward to life after Covid.

NOTOS, held at the Zappeion Building in Athens, brought together an amazing range of exhibits in one of the best-lit exhibition venues we have ever seen. There was a steady stream of visitors from many countries and the central location made it easy to visit the exhibition and to explore the many attractions close by. The organisation was excellent, even managing to take in its stride a 24-hour delay in the arrival of the frames due to political demonstrations outside, and we even managed to cope with Personal Locator Forms and the other paraphernalia of Covid. NOTOS will certainly be long remembered as a wonderful experience.

In many ways NOTOS broke new ground in international exhibition organisation so we asked **Costas Chazapis, Head of NOTOS 2021 Organising Committee**, to give us an insight into how they had gone about it and what happened in the end. Here are his comments.



Our second NOTOS project started in November 2017, looking four years ahead. The basic model to be followed was set out in 2015: a major international exhibition with a downsized budget, low participation fees, simplicity in procedures, and a number of reasonable and practical suggestions. The target this time was to invite all the European Federations, not just those in Southern Europe as was the case in 2015.

Because of the support of our friends, donors, sponsors, philatelic and non-philatelic partners, the great work of our National Commissioners and perhaps out of a mixture of luck and determination, NOTOS 2021 managed to survive through the Covid-19 turbulence and eventually came to fruition.

During the days of the exhibition, we had the pleasure to meet our visitors and talk to each other like we used to under normal circumstances in normal times! These were moments of joy and happiness, since for most of them this particular trip to Athens was their first trip abroad during the two years of the pandemic.

The exhibition was organised by the Hellenic Philatelic Society (HPS), the oldest surviving philatelic club in Greece (est. 1925), which in turn appointed the NOTOS 2021 OC. The OC's initial concerns were to prepare the budget, start the financial campaign, place NOTOS 2021 into the philatelic calendars, and achieve these as early as possible in order to build the project to its best advantage.

The main target was to keep the participation fees as low as possible, considering that the gradual explosion of fees following Portugal 2010 (30 euros per frame) is not consistent with global inflation during the same period. In order to accomplish that, we had to sacrifice two of what we considered "luxuries" of the past: medals and *per diem* remuneration for commissioners and jurors. Together they amounted to roughly 15% of our budget. Lots of exhibitors cannot afford today's high participation fees and perhaps prefer to pay lower fees and not receive a medal. Similarly, there are a lot of qualified commissioners and jurors that are willing to take the job and are indifferent to their per-diem remuneration.

To safeguard our budget, we moved and travelled at our own expense. Secretarial work, IT work, translations etc. all were done in-house. On the other hand, we accepted costs that seemed likely to generate additional funds. A major example was the choice of the Zappeion over several hotel alternatives, which we considered would be less interesting for our sponsors, when in February 2021 the government decided to transform the original planned venue (the Peristeri Exhibition Centre) into a Vaccination Centre.

We were very well aware that no funding would be available from the State Post or from any other establishment of the public sector. We were also aware of additional important parameters. For example, venues are becoming increasingly expensive to hire, or to equip and run if space is provided free of charge. In our part of Europe foreign dealers are also reluctant to participate because of lower visitor attendance compared to events in Central or Western Europe. In the event the pandemic made things even worse in this regard since no one was willing to sign a contract or send a down-payment because of the ongoing uncertainty.

We started our financial campaign in mid-2018, first among the members and friends of the HPS, next targeting private companies. The results were very satisfactory. We ran two more campaigns in mid-2019 and in mid-2020, the latter via Zoom. Except for donations in cash, we asked for promissory notes spread out to as many as six instalments and for contributions of philatelic items to be sold at auction on behalf of the OC. We managed to make an agreement with A. Karamitsos International Auctions to be our Major Sponsor and with our Key Partner the Hellenic Post to refurbish at least 800 double-sided frames, prepare them for the exhibition, and transport them to and from the Zappeion at their expense.

To insert NOTOS into philatelic and cultural calendars as soon as possible, as well as to promote the exhibition, a multi-lingual website was set up in May 2018 (<https://www.hps.gr/notos2021>) and a Twitter account in July 2019. In

the meantime, NOTOS 2021 OC had received patronage from FEPA, AIJP and AEP by October 2018, as well as recognition from the FIP. The exhibition was further upgraded when in May 2020 it received the patronage of H.E. the President of the Hellenic Republic. The OC then sent out fourteen newsletters to its mailing list and uploaded a good number of important breaking news items, two bulletins, the exhibition catalogue and the Palmares booklet. In addition, the OC met the Commissioners twice via Zoom. With or without a pandemic it confirmed the benefit for an OC to get to know its Commissioners in advance and have the chance to chat with them.

Looking back, I must admit that the Zappeion made a lot of difference. Our visitors admired the architecture, the surrounding area, the symbolism and the grandeur of the place. All but one of the halls on the ground floor were taken up by

the exhibition - seven halls for the exhibits, one for the stands of A. Karamitsos and the Hellenic Post, one for various meetings and presentations and one which was converted from Bin Room to Jury Room and back again to Bin Room. A single hall of 250 sq.m. was dedicated to the Court of Honour. Here visitors had the opportunity to see for the first time ever:

- From the Philatelic and Postal Museum in Athens, the seven printing plates of the 1861 Large Hermes Heads, masterpieces of Désiré-Albert Barre, chief engraver of the Paris Mint. One of the plates, dismantled in the past, was reassembled in 2020 for display at NOTOS 2021.
- Items from various exhibitors including 11 of the 13 Solferinos known to date. An 1871 40 lepta colour error, it is the most elusive Greek stamp. The display include the unique cover, the unique fragment and the unique pair.
- From Louis Fanchini, the original die of the medallion of the Large Hermes Head engraved by Albert Barre himself, along with its unique matrix of the medallion, predecessor of the final die.

The Court of Honour also included:

- An exhibit by the General State Archives, with documents related to the genesis of the Hellenic Post (1823-1828).
- A multi-faceted exhibit by the Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece.
- Outstanding exhibits of Jean Voruz (*Geneva 1839-62*), Chris King (*Lübeck before 1868*) and Wolfgang Bauer (*Mail to and from Greece to 1875*) as well as a selection of Stavros Andreadis' exhibit (*Large Hermes Heads*).

The Literature area contained 10 open bookcases for exhibits and a reading area for visitors. A laptop placed on the table in the reading area provided shortcuts to each of the digital works. NOTOS 2021 also supported two major proposals brought forward by Wolfgang Maassen and the AIJP in recent years: the first that exhibitors need only send



National Commissioners at NOTOS



A visitor admiring the Barre printing plates

in one instead of two copies of literature, and secondly that the OC should be willing to return a literature exhibit if the exhibitor so wishes.

During the exhibition the following presentations or meetings took place at the premises: a live auction by A. Karamitsos, the HPS Medal awards 2016-2021, two book presentations by Heinrich Köhler Stamp Auctions, a new issues presentation by the Hellenic Post, a book presentation by Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, a Museum of Philately presentation by David Feldman SA; an RPSL reception, the 2021 AEP Annual General Meeting and the 2021 FEPA Congress. A Balkanfila Meeting took place at the nearby Hermes Hotel.

The 30-member Jury was headed by Honorary President and FEPA President Bill Hedley, President George Thomareis, Vice-President Per Mortensen and Secretary Bernard Jimenez. Jean François Brun led the Expert Team. Of the two Senior Consultants, FIP President Bernie Beston was sadly unable to come due to Australian travelling restrictions. FEPA gained four new jurors who passed successfully as apprentices plus one cross-accreditation in Literature. Out of 285 exhibits judged, 17 Large Gold and 49 Gold medals were awarded.

The Palmarès dinner took place at the Radisson Blue Park Hotel Athens on 22nd November. There were three Grand Prix awards:

Grand Prix de la Classe des Champions

Winner: Dr Vittorio Morani (Italy), *Tuscany 1836 to GPU (up to 30 June 1875) "Letter mail in, from and to Tuscany: routes, rates and charges"*.

Runner up: Tom Komnæs (Norway), *Norwegian Skilling Covers – domestic and abroad*.

Grand Prix International

Winner: Joseph Hackmey (Turkey), *Tughra Stamps of the Ottoman Empire 1862-1864*.

Runners up: Dmytro Frenkel (Ukraine), *RSFSR & USSR foreign exchange control stamps 1922-1941* Johannes Bornmann (Germany), *Nepal, Pre-Philately and Classic*.

Grand Prix National

Winner: Anestis Karagianidis (Canada), *Greece: The 1896 Olympic Issue*.



The NOTOS Jury



Vittorio Morani receives the trophy in the Classe des Champions

Exactly one year ago, on these very pages (FN38, p. 51), Rainer Fuchs' article on 2 and 3-frame exhibits motivated us to adopt this innovation in a major international. To their credit both Bernard Jimenez (the FIP Liaison Officer) and Ari Muhonen (FEPA Consultant) supported it and received the green light from the FIP and FEPA Boards respectively. Another innovation we put forward was the online submission of application forms, travel details etc. We had more in mind to offer in terms of technology, but the uncertainty caused by the pandemic did not allow us to proceed.

Finally, on behalf of the OC members I would like to express my gratitude to the exhibitors, the national Commissioners, the jurors, the visitors, our volunteers, our sponsors, our donors, our partners, our friends and supporters. Thank you all.