



PHILATELIC BULLETIN

Sarasota Philatelic Club

Foreign Intervention in Crete

By Vincent Centonze

2025

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The island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea has a fascinating history dating back to ancient time. Because of its strategic location, it has been fought over and conquered by various factions for millennia. Its philatelic history is no less fascinating. We'll start our look at Crete from the mid-17th century when the Ottomans conquered and ruled it continuously until the end of the nineteenth century, although their rule became increasingly tenuous due to Cretan agitation for union with Greece. After the last Ottoman troops departed on November 6, 1898, Crete obtained a measure of autonomy, although it remained under nominal Ottoman suzerainty until 1913. However, the Ottoman control existed mostly on paper. The island became a hotbed of rebellion, especially between Christians who wanted to join Greece and Muslims who wanted to remain part of the Ottoman Empire. Because of the volatile situation on Crete, the European Great Powers of the time, including Great Britain, France, Italy, Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary, sent their navies and troops to restore order. The joint multinational expedition was known as the *International Squadron* and operated cooperatively. However, Germany and Austria-Hungary ended their military participation fairly soon after it started because they were more sympathetic toward the Ottoman Empire and felt that the other European participants were favoring Greece. Nevertheless, both countries still maintained a diplomatic presence via their consulates in the Cretan capital, Chania, (also written as *Hania* or *Xania*) on the northwestern coast.

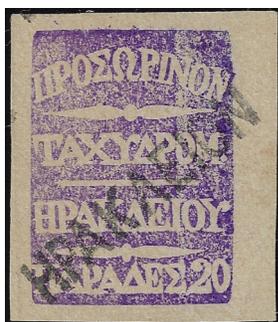


Figure 1. First British Crete provisional.

Until the departure of Ottoman troops, the postal system was under the control of Turkey and used Turkish stamps. Of the European powers, Austria had a diplomatic presence on Crete, with Austrian post offices, since the mid-19th century. Stamps of Lombardy-Venetia or Austrian Offices in the Turkish Empire were used. During the period of the foreign intervention in 1898 and 1899, prior to establishment of an independent Cretan government, the end of effective Ottoman control meant that there was no organized postal system. Therefore, military personnel based on the island from the countries in the International Squadron relied on Austrian postage stamps or their own country's stamps

to frank international and even some domestic mail. Additionally, two International Squadron member countries, Great Britain and Russia, produced provisional stamps for use in Crete.

The foreign powers divided the island into areas of control, mostly along the northern coast: Russia was responsible for the western central part of the island, Britain for the eastern central part, France for the far northeastern coast, and Italy for the southeastern coast. Most of the southern coast and far western part of the island was patrolled jointly. British peacekeeping forces were based in Heraklion (also written as *Herakleion* or *Iraklion*). *Candia* was an older name for Heraklion. Figure 1 shows a 20 para violet stamp issued by the British on November 25, 1898 (Crete – Scott 1; British Administration of Crete – Hellas 1). The stamp is inscribed ΠΡΟΣΩΡΙΝΟΝ (PROSORINON) which means "temporary," indicating that it was a provisional stamp. The stamp was created by local hand stamping on medium white wove paper without watermark and is imperforate. It is used with a straight-line ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟΝ (HERAKLEION) town postmark.

Stamp Quiz



Unfortunately, no one guessed last month's stamp quiz. The stamp is Austria Scott 961 (Michel 1440). It is the 2 Schilling gray black (frame) and dark blue (vignette) showing the Inn

Bridge at Alt Finstermunz. The stamp was issued on July 12th, 1974. Stay tuned for next month's Stamp Quiz!



Continued on next page



The Prez Sez ...

Your Holiday Party invitation was sent separately.

** Important news **

We have just been informed by the Fruitville Library that our meetings from January through at least July have been cancelled because of renovation to the space we were using. After getting over being ticked off that we weren't given more notice, member Phil Leber got to work. We have reserved a meeting room at the Gulf Gate library on the FIRST MONDAY of the month from January through July 2026 at the same time: 5:30 to 7:30PM. After that our room at Fruitville Library on the FIRST TUESDAY should be again available. I've got my fingers crossed on that one! A big thank you to Phil for jumping on this, as we aren't the only group looking for meeting space.

The Gulf Gate Library is located at: 7112 Curtiss Ave, Sarasota, FL 34231. The location won't be as convenient for those of us living in Manatee or north Sarasota, but if all goes well it will be just a few months.

The meeting in January at the Gulf Gate location will be a talk by Frank Blum concerning some aspect of Florida Revenues.

Foreign Intervention in Crete (cont.)

Figure 2 shows a stamp from the second British provisional issue. It is a 20 para green issued by the British on December 3, 1899 (Crete – Scott Crete 3; British Administration of Crete – Hellas 3). The second issue was printed by lithography and perforated 11½. Because nearly all mail from the British forces bears Austrian stamps, there is little evidence that the provisional stamps were valid or that there was even a British postal service in Crete at this early stage. Only a very few are known on cover. Stamps are also known with other town postmarks, although they are scarce. Collectors need to beware of the many counterfeits of these stamps. The lithographed issue stamps are inexpensive, so counterfeits were made for the packet trade and greatly outnumber the genuine stamps.

Russian forces were based in Rethymnon (also written as *Rethymno* or *Rettimo*), on the northern coast, west of the central part of the island. Many provisional stamps were issued by the Russian military authorities, largely for philatelists but also to raise money for Cretan charities. To complicate the postal situation further, the face value of the British provisionals was expressed in *para*, whereas the Russian provisionals were expressed in *metallik* and *grossi*. Figure 3 shows a 1 metallik, green, stamp on piece issued by the Russians on May 1, 1899 (Crete – Scott 10; Russian Administration of Crete – Hellas 4). The stamp was hand struck on thick wove paper and imperforate. There was often a control mark handstamped in violet or blue; there was usually one control mark in the center of each block of four. The stamp shown here is without the control mark. It is canceled with the usual straight-line PEΘYMNON (RETHYMON) town postmark. Following this crudely hand struck stamped issue, the Russian administration printed two lithographic issues: the first on 27 May 1899 and the second on 8 June 1899. Figure 4 shows an unused 1 grossi lilac stamp from the second lithographic issue (Crete – Scott 46; Russian Administration of Crete – Hellas 53). It is a was perforated 11½ and bears a control mark in violet-blue with the Russian two-headed eagle in a circle.



After the International Squadron forced the Ottoman troops to depart, they declared an autonomous, independent Crete. The foreign powers even designed a new Cretan flag, and they invited Prince George, the second son of the Greek King, to administer the Cretan state as its High Commissioner. He arrived in December of 1899, and Crete finally had an independent country. Unfortunately, that didn't appease Cretans who still clamored for union with Greece. After 1900 the Cretan Government began to issue its own stamps, denominated in the Greek currencies, L lepta and drachma. All the independent Crete issues were printed by the British printing firm Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co., London.

(Above Left) Figure 2. Second British Crete provisional. Printed by lithography and issued on 12/3/99. There are many counterfeits of the these issues.

(Above Center) Figure 3. Russian provisional stamp on piece issued by the Russians on 5/1/99. The stamp was hand struck on thick wove paper.

(Above Right) Figure 4. Russian provisional stamp from the second lithographic issue released on 6/8/99.

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Foreign Intervention in Crete (cont.)

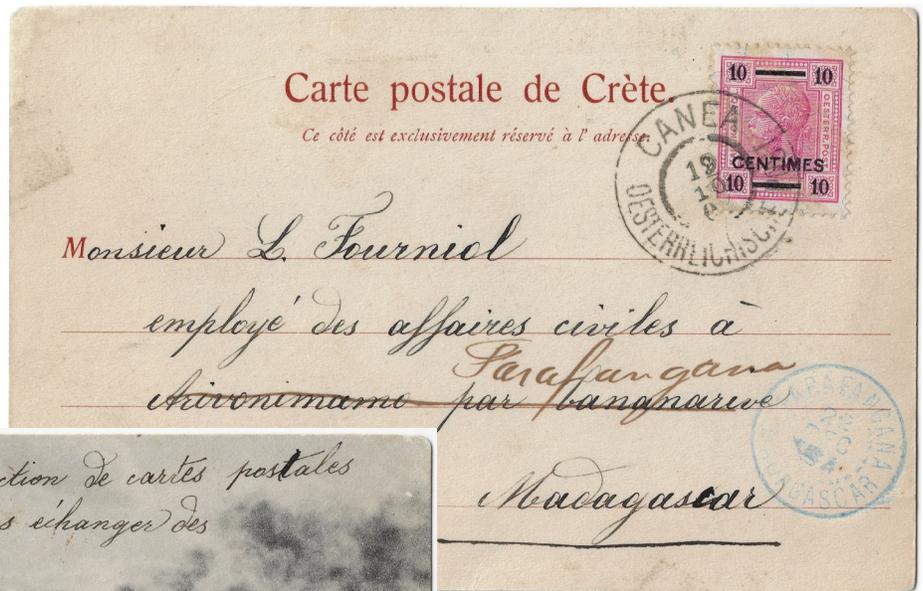


Figure 5. Prince George of Greece is pictured on the 10 lepta stamp of the first independent Crete issue.

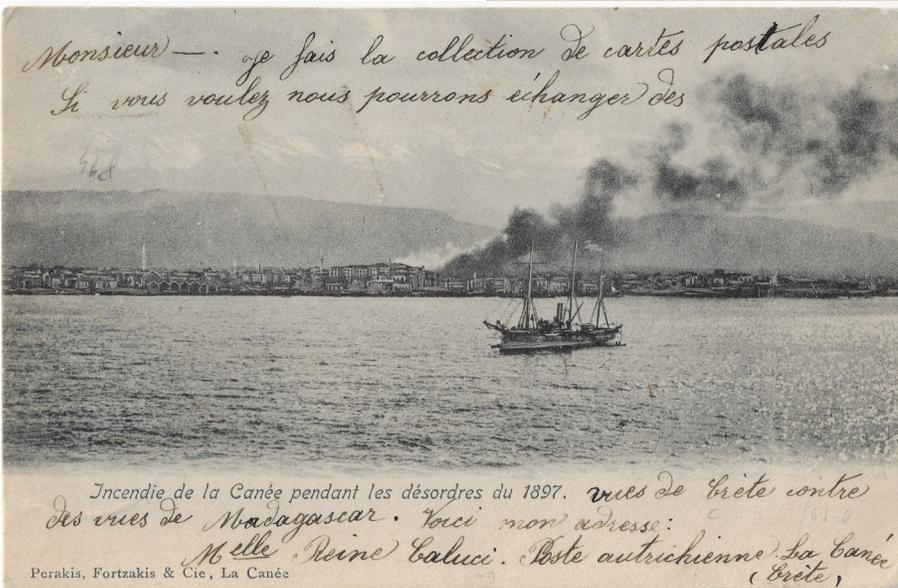
Figure 5 shows a Crete 10 lepta red stamp of the first Crete issue (Crete – Scott 52; Crete – Hellas 53). The stamp, showing a portrait of Prince George, was issued on March 1, 1900; it was engraved and perforated 14.

Shortly thereafter, Austria, France, and Italy printed stamps specifically for use from their offices in Crete, or overprinted their countries' own stamps for use in Crete – or did both. Figure 6 shows the address side of a post card sent from Chania to the unusual destination of Madagascar. It bears an Austria 1899 Franz Josef definitive surcharged 10 centimes for use in Austrian Offices in Crete (Austria Offices in Crete – Scott 2; Austrian Post Issues – Hellas 2). The stamp is postmarked with a Chania Austrian Post double-circle cancel dated 10/19/04. The 10 centimes franking correctly paid the Universal Postal Union (U.P.U.) foreign postcard rate of 10 centimes. Figure 7 shows the picture side, with a photograph captioned, *Incendie de al Canée pendant les desordres du 1897* (Fire in Chania during the unrest of 1897). This alludes to the International Squadron's bombardment of insurgent forces in the area around Chania. Many post cards produced in Crete at this time illustrated rebels, foreign soldiers, or activities related to the international intervention in Crete.

Even after France and Italy issued stamps for use in their offices in Crete, their own countries' stamps were still occasionally used to frank mail. For example, Figure 8 shows the picture side of a post card from Chania to St. Etienne, France. The card is franked with a France 5 centimes green Sower definitive Issue of 1906-37 (France – Scott 159; Maury 1371 (type I)). The 5 centimes pays the international printed matter rate, which is correct for this postcard because there is



(Above) Figure 6. Address side of post card sent from Chania to Madagascar. Franked with Austria 1899 Franz Josef definitive surcharged 10 centimes for use in Austrian Offices in Crete.



(Left) Figure 7. Picture side showing a photograph of the International Squadron bombardment of insurgent forces around Chania in 1897.

no substantial written message on either the address or picture side. The stamp is canceled with a French Chania (La Canée) postmark. The picture shows

French soldiers marching in the Cretan city of Hierapetra on the southeastern coast. Another example is Figure 9, which shows the address side of a post card from Chania to Chieti, Italy, franked with an Italy 5 centesimi blue green Savoy eagle definitive from the Victor Emmanuel III issue of 1901 – 26 (Italy – Scott 78; Sassone 70). The stamp is canceled with a 3/7/06 Italian Post postmark from Chania (La Canea). The picture side in Figure 10 shows a revolutionary council of 1905 which agitated against the Cretan administration for union with Greece.

The British forces encampment in Heraklion was on the Venetian walls, a massive bastion which surrounded Candia. It was built in the 15th century by the Kingdom of Venice. Figure 11 shows a post card from Heraklion to Belfast, Ireland, probably sent by a member of the British military. It is franked with five 2 lepta Mycenaean Seal definitives of the second Crete issue of 1904. The date of the Heraklion circular cancels is indistinguishable, but the year is 1907. The 10 lepta

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Foreign Intervention in Crete (cont.)

franking correct paid the U.P.U. foreign post card rate. In this case the card contained no substantial printed message and could have been sent as printed matter for 5 lepta. More interesting is the picture side in Figure 12 which shows a photograph of the British encampment on which the sender has annotated the positions of the mess hall, hospital, and post office. Therefore, we know that by 1907 there was a British Post Office serving the needs of the troops.



(Left) Figure 8. Post card from Chania to St. Etienne, France. The card is franked with a France 5 centimes green Sower definitive issue of 1906-37. The 5 centimes paid the international printed matter rate, which was correct for this postcard because there is no substantial written message on either the address or picture side.



(Left) Figure 9. The address side of a post card from Chania to Chieti, Italy, franked with an Italy 5 centesimi blue green Savoy eagle definitive from the Victor Emmanuel III issue. The stamp is canceled with a 3/7/06 Italian Post postmark from Chania (La Canea). Like the post card in Figure 8, the 5 centesimi paid the international printed matter rate.



(Left) Figure 10. The picture side of the post-card in Figure 9, which shows a revolutionary council of 1905. During the revolution of 1905, Christians rebels agitated against the Cretan administration for union with Greece. Even though Crete was nominally independent, the majority of the population demanded nothing less than full union with Greece. The revolutionaries created their own provisional stamps, which will be the subject of a future article.

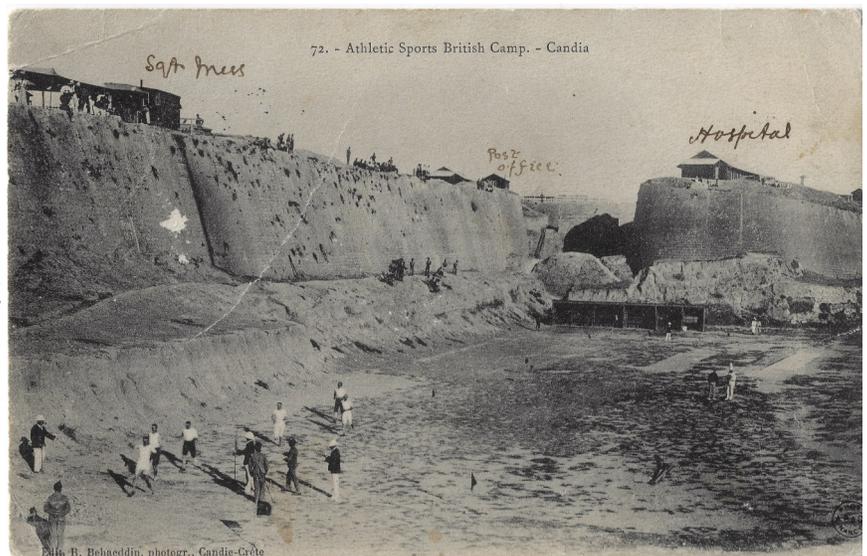
Foreign Intervention in Crete (cont.)

The advent of a short-lived independent Crete left a rich philatelic legacy in itself. The stamps and postal stationery of Crete are replete with surcharged and overprinted issues containing many varieties and usages. In addition, there was the aforementioned revolution in 1905, known as the Therisson revolution. It occurred when a leading figure in the Cretan government, Eleftherios Venizelos, broke with the island's administration to demand immediate union with Greece. The revolutionaries issued their own provisional issues. But these are stamps and stories for another article.



(Above) Figure 11. Post card from Heraklion to Belfast, Ireland, franked with five 2 lepta Mycenaean Seal definitives of the second Crete issue of 1904. The date of the Heraklion circular cancels is indistinguishable, but the year is 1907.

(Right) Figure 12. Photograph on the picture side of the card above shows the British encampment on the Venetian Walls in Heraklion. The sender annotated the position of the mess hall, hospital, and post office. Therefore, it is apparent from this card that by at least 1907 there was a British Post Office serving the needs of the troops.



(Left) Figure 13. The "last" independent stamp issue of Crete. It is technically a Greece issue on November 15, 1913, to commemorate the occasion of the union of Greece with Crete but was only issued in Crete and only for one year. The stamp shows the Greek flag being raised at Suda Bay, Crete.



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