# Stampanorama

by Marek Błuś

**PostEurop, the association of European public postal operators, carries out an annual project that sees its members publish a joint stamp issue guided by a chosen theme. Such stamps bear the official EUROPA logo, a registered trademark, and are meant not only to promote philately but also point to Europe's culture, history, and the roots we all share in common.**




Photo: Hellenic Post




Photo: Åland Post







Photo: Gibraltar Post

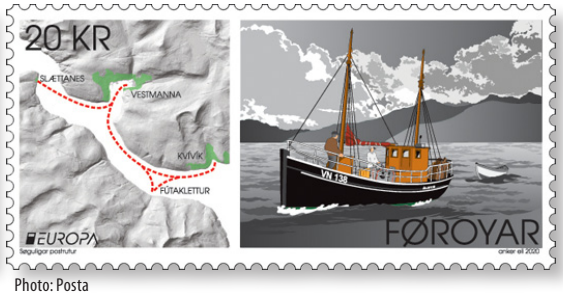



Photo: Posta

The 2020 theme was 'Ancient Postal Routes,' a more than obvious connection (pun intended) to transport, especially if we consider sea postal links (here, too), with packet (mail) ships that, along with passengers and cargo, also carried postbags. It's also quite obvious that postal offices of maritime nations selected ships and boats as the motif for their stamps. As such, the Åland Post pictured the contemporary Postal Boat Race across the Sea of Åland, while Posta, the postal service of the Faroe Islands, reminded the post boat *Ólavur* which served localities around the strait of Vestmanna from 1930 to 1965 (no worries, she's still in good shape!). Two other postal administrations, from Greece and Gibraltar, showed pairs of steam sidewheelers, which in the first half of the 19th century made postal services more reliable and less weather-dependent.

Nevertheless, we will focus on the releases of the two independent post offices of Guernsey and Jersey. The two created a common picture of their joint link with the United Kingdom around a set of four EUROPA stamps (two per post/year are allowed only). To this, each post added four stamps, creating a gallery of 12 packet ships that had served postal service to and fro the UK since 1794, when it was established, till 1975, when all mail hoped onto aeroplanes. Such an approach increases the educational value of the theme. If one or two stamps can inform about a narrow segment of the matter at hand or put a single case in the spotlight, an entire series makes it possible to paint a wider panorama and tell a fuller story. To this, one can also add souvenir sheets and presentation pack covers. A genuine piñata for collectors! Yet, we won't repeat here the stories of particular ships; those can be found in the **Islands' encyclopaedia**. Rather, this wealth of stamps requires a comment or two, plus some reflections.

Both series start with pioneering sister ships, the sailing cutters *Earl of Chesterfield* and *Rover*, built around 1790, and conclude with another pair of siblings, the turbine steamers *Cesarea* and *Sarnia*, constructed in 1960 and designed to carry up to 1,400 passengers across about 100 bunks in private cabins. But wait a minute?! Are these really 'ancient?' Maybe Guernsey and Jersey should end with the last paddle ships that plied the Channel till the very end of the 19th century? It, like many things in life, depends. The first three generations of PlayStation are, from today gamers' perspective, real dinosaurs; the same can be told about, say, VW Golfs I-III, first LCD screens and smartphones, or the front covers of the early editions of the *Baltic Transport Journal*. In sea shipping, too, what was modern till the 1970s is seen nowadays as a bit moss-grown. That decade, full of economic and social changes, was indeed a turning point in shipping technology, just to recall the oil crisis that killed oil-consuming steam drives off. The *Sarnia-Cesarea* duo were the last pure passenger ships in ferry traffic built according to the transoceanic liner pattern, with two small holds fore and aft only. They were also the swan song of steam and steam turbines in Europe (in the US, the twilight lasted for another decade). Such vessels were suddenly ousted from the market by internal combustion engine ships with ro-ro holds and ramps (in the 1980s, *Sarnia* had been carrying pilgrims in the Red Sea). The Island Wiki lists 110 mail ships, out of which 12 were sailing vessels, 41 paddle steamers (18 with wooden hulls), and 57 screw steamers (39 multi-screw). The time-lapse shows progress in technology and comfort, but transshipment was what really united them all – passengers boarded by gangways, while cargo, including cars in the 20th century, was handled in the lo-lo mode only. So, yes, ancient by all means.

Each of these beautiful series is supplemented by souvenir sheets (available also in presentation packs). In the Jersey




Photo: Guernsey Post




Photo: Jersey Post




Photo: Turkish Post

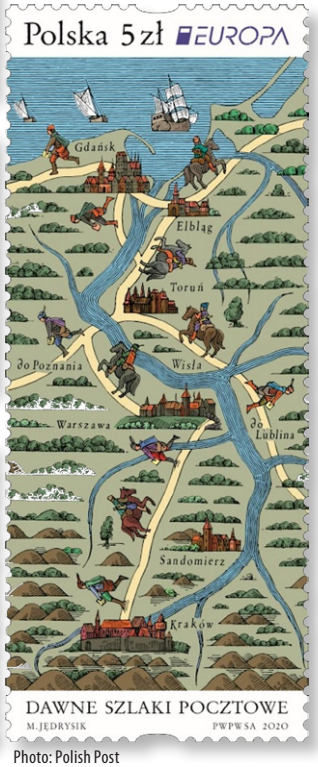



Photo: Polish Post

Post case, their covers depict two additional vessels – the sidewheeler *Dispach* and the steamer *Roebuck* (sadly, whoever edited it forgot to include captions). All Jersey artwork is the making of the famous Martin Morck's stylus. Andrew Robinson contributed to the Guernsey Post series, making wonderful use of old pictures and postcards (especially in the ten stamp sheets). Both posts are in the fantastic habit of publishing postcard sets that feature the magnified images used on the stamps. Adding sweetener to sugar, Guernsey offers them in the form of maxicards, too.

Sadly, the EUROPA stamps issued by the Channel Islands weren't appreciated in the competitions organised by PostEurop. The Internet pool was won by a colourful Turkish stamp depicting a chart of the Turkish Straits and the Sea of Marmara (with figurines of runners and riders). A jury of philatelic experts, in turn, selected a Polish stamp showing the stylised chart of the Vistula River (with figurines of runners and riders…). Suspiciously, the Turkish Post had come atop the online vote six times since 2011. Perhaps it doesn't sound like a Cambridge Analytica scandal; yet, it seems that an organised team might be 'pumping' the voting process. Just saying. The professional choice is a mystery, too, because the Vistula was never a postal route, contrary to the description found in the PostEurop catalogue… That said, one thing is clear: if you try to show everything on a single stamp, with maps, figurines, etc., you'll probably end up showing nothing. ■