



COVID-19 Stamps - A New Collecting Theme Vs Philatelic Promotion of Care for Affected Community and Environment (I)

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author BVC designed the study, wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors BVC and ALP managed the philatelic research. Authors ALP and MC analyses of the entire study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The Coronavirus has reached its claws into every aspect of human activity, and philately is no exception. This is reflected both by decisions to cancel some philatelic issues, originally scheduled in the Editorial Plan of the Postal Administrations, in shifting the dates of appearance of other issues or editing new issues with the theme of the new Coronavirus. Starting from the attempts to investigate the philatelic appearances that have as concern the Coronavirus infection (COVID-19), the paper aim was to identify, index and describe them based on open-source databases, postal

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administration sites, respectively philatelic trade platforms. In this context, the focus was to familiarise the reader with the diversity of philatelic issues related to COVID-19 emitted by different postal administration all over the world. As a result of searches in databases with open-source access to philatelic materials, an interesting series of pieces were identified, issued by the postal administrations of Iran, Vietnam, Switzerland, Isle of Man, Kingdom of Morocco and United Arab Emirates. Each philatelic piece was analyzed and described separately, in order to show what the international concerns about Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection really are.

Keywords: Advertising materials; community health; COVID-19 stamps; thematic philately.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study started from our current concerns regarding the collection of various types of postage stamps, including those related to Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection. This is how we could not stand aside, and we set out to follow closely what is happening internationally on this subject, from the perspective of philately and passionate collectors.

We were not a little surprised when we saw that the subject has a passage to the philatelic public and even to the non-philatelic community. At the same time we discovered, as was probably natural, that Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection tends to have two valences, clearly defined, namely: it produces effects on philatelic events aside, respectively it promotes care for semenis and for a clean environment, on the other hand.

The impact of this issue is to raise awareness of the seriousness of the situation that this new COVID-19 brings, knowing that the postage stamp is a messenger of the community. By

applying the postage stamp on mail sent worldwide, both the staff involved in handling the mail and the recipient get in touch with the message sent through the stamp.

Some issuing postal administrations taking advantage of the talent of the layout designers made a series of shows with special graphics, the impact among the viewer being a significant one. For philatelists, the various forms of layout and adjacent philatelic material (blocks, colites, FDCs) bring the possibility of a new field of collection, which, as far as we can see, is growing.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

An extremely important notion, for the following approaches, which subscribes to the modern philately area, is the notion of stamp. As it was natural, the stamp appeared and developed over time as a result of highlighting common features and behaviors for a number of processes and phenomena in different areas of activity.

Stamp catalog : Stamp > National Heroes : The Coronavirus Fighters

Country:	 Iran
Catalog codes:	Colnect codes IR 2020-01
Themes:	Diseases Heroes
Issued on:	2020-03-17
Colors:	Multicolor
Format:	Stamp
Emission:	Commemorative
Printing:	Offset lithography
Face value:	18,000 JL ₉ - Iranian rial

2020 COVID-19 Charity Stamp
6. April WM: None Sheetsize: 10 Design: Alexandra Steiner



No.	Type	D	Color	Description
2641	CXQ	100+500 C	red	

Fig. 1. Searching for “COVID-19” stamps via colnect and stamp world platform

From the multitude of platforms with philatelic content, we identified over 10 platforms, but for the present study, we limited ourselves to processing the information provided by 6 of them. For the present study the documentation part involved consulting platforms such as Colnect, Delcampe, wopa-plus and Stamp World (see Fig. 1), specialized catalogs, as well as other mainly philatelic trade sites, like eBay and PicClick. To all these platforms are added the groups of philatelist communities from various social networks through which the dissemination of new information is much faster, much more efficient. Also, another source of information is to browse the content of blogs/sites belonging to passionate philatelists.

The selection criterion of the platforms was the free provision of information, and then its easy structuring and easy indexing. Also, no ethical or other approval was required for the present study, the information processed being public, and platforms with free movement, in the open-source regime.

We tried as much as possible to index all the postage stamps that appeared up to the date of writing this study. There is a high possibility that lately there will be other new postal issues on this topic or there are other issues that were not indexed by our sources until the date of delivery of the material. We will discuss the possible existence of other philatelic effects with COVID-19 in the future, as a continuation of the topic. We are convinced that such philatelic pieces will continue to appear in the future.

Based on the identified pieces, technical observations were made, mainly related to the characteristics of the postal-philatelic issue. The characteristics in question refer to the date of issue, the size and format of the parts, the way they are arranged for printing, the number of parts (where the information could be found), respectively other data that underlie the description of issue.

From the point of view of the analysis and description of the pieces, the main sites of the postal administrations were used, but not only, the information discovered being of a real use in understanding the whole approach that was in issuing the pieces in question. Thus, in the vast majority of cases, the concerns for issuing the philatelic pieces started from the national situation of the respective states, the number of deaths, as well as the number of Coronavirus (COVID-19) infections being a decisive factor in

this regard. But there are also states that, although they have gone through a very serious situation, have not yet sketched any demands in the sense of issuing postage stamps to support at least the cause of those who fight for the good of the community and the integrity of the environment.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Impacts on Modern Philately

Nowadays, at the time of this study, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has reached its claws into every aspect of human activity, and philately is no exception [1]. In March-May 2020 period, we have seen nearly every philatelic exhibition in the world either cancelled or postponed, and most countries not issuing new material for the foreseeable future.

In terms of modern philately, for example, we have seen the suspension of all international mail services by Romanian and Moldovan Post Administration, and this in the conditions in which the 2020 Philatelic Plan, in case of Moldovan Post Administration, suffer already from a moratorium imposed by the leadership of Posta Moldovei since the end of January [2]. In other words, we are up to date with almost all of the international exhibitions that are either cancelled or postponed, including LONDON, OSTROPA (Berlin) and LUBRAPEX (Portugal), and so on, as shown in Fig. 3 [3]. At the same time, the exhibitions in North America are also cancelled, as well as all club-level exhibitions in Europe.

One interesting piece of news just received from the Organizing Committee of LONDON 2020 is that they have a plan to separate the literature class from the other classes and to hold a separate "exhibition" for literature just before the end of 2020. It's certainly an interesting idea, but we wonder what kind of "exhibition" could be organized just for philatelic literature. The original plan was to have a special reading room for literature, complete with internet access for digital exhibits and websites. In the very near future, these kinds of virtual exhibitions will become more important than ever.

We also notice that Moldovan dealers on Delcampe are still adding lots to their listings, even though it's not clear how they intend to ship the materials to international buyers since Posta Moldovei has suspended international mail



Fig. 2. Examples of messages related to COVID-19 impact on philatelic events

services for a while. Focus now moves to 2021 and most especially the NOTOS 2021 exhibition in Athens. As the NOTOS organizers just announced, they open a “window of optimism” and from April 1, they started taking participation applications using online forms.

3.2 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Stamps - A New Collecting Theme

Just in the last few weeks, we have seen the emergence of a new stamp collecting theme for COVID-19. It's very interesting, but this is one theme we would like to be consigned to the history books as soon as possible [4]. Whilst Moldova, for example, has stopped releasing stamps until further notice, for other postal administrations it's business as usual. Just looking at a new Facebook group dedicated to COVID-19 stamps, we can see new releases from Iran, Vietnam, Switzerland, Isle of Man, Kingdom of Morocco, United Arab Emirates, China People's Republic, Uruguay and so on [5]. No doubt there will be many more soon.

3.2.1 “COVID-19” stamps from Iran

Facing allegations of downplaying the severity of the country's coronavirus outbreak, Iran's State Post Company unveiled, on March 17, what's believed to be the world's first COVID-19 commemorative postage stamp [6-9]. Celebrating the role of the country's healthcare (corona virus medical) workers in combatting the crisis [10,11], the commemorative stamp entitled “National Heroes: The Coronavirus Fighters”, or “Medical Workers - Frontline Fighters of the

Coronavirus”, according to other sources - as shown in Fig. 3 [12,13] - was unveiled by President H. Rouhani during a ceremony broadcast by Iranian state news.



Fig. 3. “COVID-19” stamp, Iran

The postage stamp bearing graphic designer Alireza Zakeri's drawing “National Heroes” to salute doctors and medical staff fighting COVID-19 shows four people and includes symbolic images based on electron micrographs of the corona virus. Three of the four people depicted on the stamp appear to be medical professionals wearing face masks. The fourth person, just to the right of the English inscription, appears to be a soldier wearing a gas mask [6-9]. It can be bought for a price of 18,000 rial iranian.

3.2.2 “COVID-19” stamps from Vietnam

The Vietnam collection under the theme “Joining hands to prevent and combat COVID-19” - as shown in Fig. 4 [14,15] - which includes two very interesting stamps measuring 31x46 mm, was designed by artist Pham Trung Ha, with a hope

to convey messages of solidarity [16]. The two sets of stamps were issued by the Ministries of Information, Communications and Health, and Vietnam Post Corporation, in a bid to send a supportive message to front-line fighters, and raise citizens' knowledge, responsibility, determination amidst the straining COVID-19 combat [16,17].



Fig. 4. “COVID-19” stamps, Vietnam

The first stamp which features pandemic fighting forces, namely health workers, soldiers and policemen in addition to normal citizens pushing the pandemic back, can be bought for 4,000

Vietnamese đồngs (US\$0.16), while the second stamp which features research personnel, namely scientists, physicians and doctors, can be bought for a price of 15,000 Vietnamese đồngs (US\$0.63) [16]. The collection - with technical characteristics shown in Table 2 - was available at 63 postal offices nationwide, and is expected to be officially used in the Universal Postal Union's 192 countries from March 31 to December 31. Vietnam post administration also provides other supplies such as postcards and envelopes with the same theme, also available in other parts of the world.

During the online searches on different philatelic trade sites, and not only, complementary pieces to the stamps were identified, such as the first day cover (FDC), emitted on March 31, from Fig. 5 [18], the postal cover from Fig. 6 [19], and the postcard from Fig. 7 [20].

3.2.3 “COVID-19” stamps from Switzerland

The Swiss stamp - as shown in Fig. 8 [21,22] - is especially interesting and seems to be the only one, so far, that is a semi-postal stamp with a charity element. The stamp can only be bought in a sheet of 10 and for a price of 50 Swiss Francs.

Table 1. Technical characteristics for the “COVID-19” stamp, Iran

Particulars	Value
Date of issue	17.03.2020
Number of values	1
Stamp / Block / Minisheet size	31 × 46 mm / - / -
Page composition*	in minisheet of 8 stamps + 8 labels; block of 4 stamps with illustrated border
Printing system	offset lithography, multicolor
Perforation	14
Run printing	N/A
Designer	Alireza Zakeri
Listing (Colnect catalog codes)	IR #2020-01

Table 2. Technical characteristics for the “COVID-19” stamps, Vietnam

Particulars	Value
Date of issue	31.03.2020
Number of values	2
Stamp / Block / Minisheet size	31 × 46 mm / - / -
Page composition*	in minisheet of 8 stamps + 8 labels; block of 4 stamps with illustrated border
Printing system	offset lithography, multicolor
Perforation	13
Run printing	N/A
Designer	Pham Trung Ha
Listing (Colnect catalog codes)	VN #2020 - 03A & 03B



Fig. 5. "COVID-19" first day cover, Vietnam

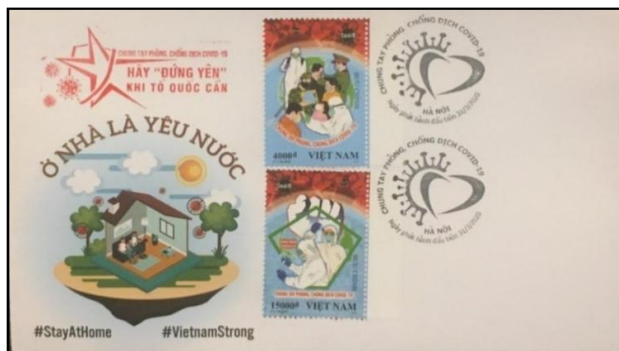


Fig. 6. "COVID-19" postal cover, Vietnam



Fig. 7. "COVID-19" postcard, Vietnam



Fig. 8. "COVID-19" stamp, Switzerland

The "COVID-19 Solidarity" stamp reflects Swiss Post's commitment to the society cohesion. Proceeds will go to Swiss Solidarity and the Swiss Red Cross [23]. It is a way for you to support those in urgent need of help.

The stamps can be used to send letters, the tariff being 1 Franc and the Swiss Post absorbs this cost, donating the remaining 5 Francs to the Red Cross. This is a good incentive for people to make donations to the fight against COVID-19

and could be an excellent model for other postal administrations. With technical characteristics indexed in Table 3, the Swiss stamp has the page composition in the form of 2 rows of 5 stamps with illustrated border, as shown in Fig. 9 [23].

Also, the postage stamp can be associated in combination with other postage stamps, in order to complete the tariff of a circulation. An example

in this sense (Fig. 10) [24] was discovered in a blog, and shows us that the stamp already enjoys circulations around the world, where it promotes the theme it depicts in design.

After Iran, Vietnam and Switzerland unveiled their COVID-19 stamps to the world, more and more coronavirus issues have been released by Isle of Man, Kingdom of Morocco, United Arab Emirates and so on [25].



Fig. 9. “COVID-19” booklet of 10 semi-postal stamps, Switzerland



Fig. 10. “COVID-19” circulated issue, Switzerland-France, 14 April 2020

Table 3. Technical characteristics for the “COVID-19” stamp, Switzerland

Particulars	Value
Date of issue	06.04.2020
Number of values	1
Stamp / Block / Minisheet size	33 × 28 mm / - / 192 × 95 mm
Page composition*	in minisheet of 10 stamps + 10 labels; 2 rows of 5 stamps with illustrated border
Printing system	offset lithography, red-white combination
Perforation	13¼ × 14¼
Run printing	N/A
Designer	Alexandra STEINER
Listing (Colnect catalog codes)	CH #2020-10

3.2.4 “COVID-19” stamps from Isle of Man

On April 26, the Isle of Man Post Office unveiled an eight-stamp set entitled “Carry Us Through,” which it says, “reflects the unique response of an Island population to the challenges brought by coronavirus” [25]. To send a positive message into every home in the Isle of Man, in order to appreciate the people who are working tirelessly for us all, the stamps highlight messages of “love, faith, care, compassion, work, community, words and science,” the postal service adds in a statement on its website.

The Isle of Man stamps - as shown in Fig. 11 [26] - are especially interesting by the fact that they express the “COVID-19 #Carry Us Through Campaign”, referring to the elements with significant impact on hard-to-try community environment, respectively: love (a), faith (b), care (c), compassion (d), work (e), community (f), words (g) and, finally, science (h) [27-29].



Fig. 11. “COVID-19” stamps, Isle of Man

Table 4. Technical characteristics for the “COVID-19” stamp, Isle of Man

Particulars	Value
Date of issue	04.05.2020
Number of values	8
Stamp / Block / Minisheet size	33 × 28 mm / - / -
Page composition*	in minisheet of 8 stamps + 8 labels; block of 4 stamps with illustrated border
Printing system	offset lithography, multicolor
Perforation	13¼ × 14¼
Run printing	N/A
Designer	N/A
Listing (Colnect catalog codes)	IM #2020 - 06A...06H

The technical characteristics for the 8 philatelic pieces are indexed in Table 4. Also, there are presented, in addition to the stamps, 2 first day covers (FDCs), in Fig. 12 [30,31].

3.2.5 “COVID-19” stamps from kingdom of Morocco

The Kingdom of Morocco semi-postal stamp with face value of 3.75+5 Moroccan dirhams - as shown in Fig. 13 [32-34] - express the “Unified against COVID-19 campaign” theme, presenting all those responsible for the fight against the epidemic, those in the front line, such as doctors, researchers, law enforcement, etc [35-37].

3.2.6 “COVID-19” stamps from United Arab Emirates

Another interesting postal stamp is the one emitted on 10.05.2020 by United Arab Emirates (UAE) postal administration. The stamp in sheet -

as in Fig. 14 [38,39], or included on FDC as in Fig. 15 [40] - does not have postal value - only the full sheet (19 UAE dirhams) [41].

The subject being a topical one, the purpose of our research was to find out which countries of the world have issued postage stamps with the theme Coronavirus (COVID-19). The deep

disappointment remains that even at this time the Romanian postal administration (Romfilatelia) has not yet issued any postage stamp on this subject. Until now, we do not know that this topic will be addressed by other researchers in the field of philately. The way we chose to structure the information we consider to offer originality to the work and reflect our way of expression.



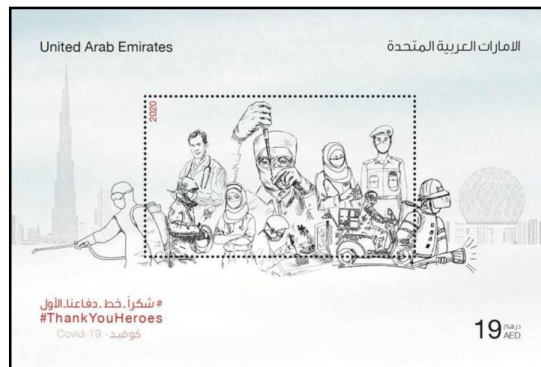
Fig. 12. “COVID-19” first day cover, Isle of Man



Fig. 13. “COVID-19” stamp, Kingdom of Morocco

Table 5. Technical characteristics for the “COVID-19” stamp, Kingdom of Morocco

Particulars	Value
Date of issue	xx.05.2020
Number of values	1
Stamp / Block / Minisheet size	33 × 28 mm / - / -
Page composition*	in minisheet of 8 stamps + 8 labels; block of 4 stamps with illustrated border
Printing system	offset lithography, multicolor
Perforation	13¾ × 14¼
Run printing	N/A
Designer	N/A
Listing (Colnect catalog codes)	MA #2020-02

**Fig. 14. “COVID-19” stamp in souvenir sheet, United Arab Emirates****Fig. 15. “COVID-19” first day cover with souvenir sheet, United Arab Emirates****Table 6. Technical characteristics for the “COVID-19” stamp, United Arab Emirates**

Particulars	Value
Date of issue	10.05.2020
Number of values	1
Stamp / Block / Minisheet size	33 × 28 mm / - / -
Page composition*	in minisheet of 8 stamps + 8 labels; block of 4 stamps with illustrated border
Printing system	offset lithography, multicolor
Perforation	13¾ × 14¼
Run printing	N/A
Designer	N/A
Listing (Colnect catalog codes)	AE #2020-02

4. CONCLUSION

As it was natural, the phenomenon of Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection appeared even in the modern philately, as a result of the concerns of some affected states for the health of the community and the integrity of the living environment. As it was observed during the paper, Coronavirus (COVID-19) infection has left a significant and irreversible mark on many philatelic events, as well as on the support through philatelic promotion and the related circulations of the cause of the fight against the pandemic.

What is remarkable to note is that all postage stamps issued are based on the national situation in those states, supporting the promotion of the fight against the pandemic, as well as in support of those in the front line, who are brought thanks to the entire effort.

As a result of consulting the platforms, we found that not everywhere and not all indexed shows are presented complete technical information. Many times in order to describe a philatelic issue we had to go through several bibliographic resources, even so, some aspects remained uncovered (see circulation, dimensions, layout forms, etc). A gratifying aspect of obtaining the results we were pursuing was the fact that we met postage stamps actually circulated in the postal circuit. This proves once again that the purpose of the postage stamp is to prove the payment of a postal service and to carry the correspondence from the sender to the recipient. This fact can only make us especially happy.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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