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100 years of literature on postage stamps
[100 Jahre Briefmarken-Literatur]
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100 YEARS OF LITERATURE ON POSTAGE STAMPS

Fortunately, nobody knows who the first stamp collector was, or what he looked like - with beard or without...? Hence, we have been spared a flood of special stamps commemorating the 100th anniversary of stamp collecting. Since by 1855 most countries had issued their first postage stamps, it cannot have been very long before the “rage” for collecting them swept over national boundaries in their wake. We do know that the first books for collectors (thus the first stamp albums) appeared in the year 1862 simultaneously in Germany, England and France!

As early as 1861 a man called Franz Oscar Berger-Levrault of Strasbourg, Alsace, put out a twelve-sided lithographed list of all the stamps that had appeared, and ten editions of this had been published by 1864. Tramburgs inventory in Hamburg towards the end of 1862 included a list that can be looked on as the first German stamp catalogue.

In 1863 the publishing firm of Dürr of Leipzig put out a *Handbuch der Briefmarken-Sammler* [*Handbook for postage stamp collectors*]. It contained advice on the best way of setting up a stamp collection, and its 18 pages of text and 38 of catalogue gave the first information in Germany on the history of the prepayment stamp, the stamp as an article of commerce, etc. It thus became the first serviceable textbook.

The heartfelt longing of collectors to know more about their favourites and get to hear of new issues and forgeries to be avoided was picked up by the firm of Zschiesche and Köder in Leipzig, and from 1 May 1863 they published the first German specialist journal, **Magazin für Briefmarken Sammler**. The Spiro brothers of Hamburg, amongst others, tried to give them some competition with **Der deutsche Briefmarken-Sammler**, which began in November 1864 but met with little success.

Instead of giving a long-winded account of the earliest philatelic publications from the years 1862/63 (they are careful listed on the 750 pages of Victor Suppantchitsch's 1892 Bibliography of the entire philatelic literature), we shall confine ourselves to three short extracts from the Dürr handbook:

It says on p.15:

“...the loosened stamp should then be allowed to dry again, its edges trimmed off level with a pair of scissors to give it a regular shape, the reverse side should be coated with a solution of gum arabic, and it is then neatly stuck down at the appropriate place in the album.”

And again on p.18 we read:

“Thus, for example, in Paris (about 1860) a formal market grew up where sellers and collectors could get together every week in the Tuileries and Luxembourg gardens. Speculators were not lacking from these places, and often managed to drive the prices up to the heights after they had got possession of items that were already in demand”.

“No-one should be surprised that in this field too the less scrupulous have attempted to impose on eager collectors by counterfeiting postage stamps!”

In other words: even 100 years ago the mice were at the cheese...! It remains obvious that without guidance, without catalogues and magazines, i.e. without specialist literature, stamp collecting would never have attained this world-wide expansion. Information was necessary, or else the fickle elements would soon have given the death blow to this new area of collecting.

Thus, there is sufficient reason for us to be celebrating the 100th anniversary of philatelic literature today. For this occasion, a special exhibition

“The Literature of the Postage stamp”

will be mounted from 1st to 31st October 1962 in the State and University Library, 40 Moorweidenstrasse, Hamburg 13. It will cover 100 years of philatelic literature and will be open Mondays to Fridays from 10.00 to 18.00hrs. The organisers of the exhibition are the State Library and the Hamburg-Altona Philatelic Society, which has now been working to promote philately for almost eight decades.

The exhibition is completely neutral. Individual names of exhibitors are not given, so no distinction can be made. The arrangement of the exhibits is as follows:

- I. Specialist journals of the world, a unique panorama of all magazines on stamps currently appearing world-wide, from some 45 countries.
- II. Specialist books
 - a) Classical works, before 1900
 - b) Textbooks
 - c) Works on Old Germany
 - d) Germany
 - e) German region and colonies
 - f) European countries
 - g) Overseas regions
 - h) Works on cancellations
 - l) Airmail and entires
 - k) Thematic areas

III. Catalogues of the World

IV. Special Literary works

V. Graphic techniques to combat forgeries.

The official opening before invited guests took place on Monday 1st October 1968. The catalogue of the exhibition and the programme of events, plus details of special postcards and special cancellations can be obtained from Dr. A. Lienau, Am Weiher 3, Hamburg 19.

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