

In search of the world's prettiest stamp

## Boats and Ships part two

The American Topical Association has provided important context in my quest for the world's most beautiful (and ugliest) stamp. Its large catalogue of topic

categories, and the ever-increasing number of stamps in each one, exposes my quest as little more than a saunter among my most favorite (and least favorite) stamps. I may widen my vision as I go along, coming across more beautiful (and ugly) stamps while I sift through my chosen

theme or topic — in this case, boats on stamps. But how can I claim definitively that I have found the world's most beautiful (and ugliest) stamp in any category? Not only is this exercise subjective and susceptible to taste (for example, my enthusiasm for



You might call this the earliest topical collectible of a ship on a stamp. It happens to be the rarest stamp on Earth, the unique and fabled British Guiana one cent black-on-magenta from 1856. Behind the busyness of the hand-cancellation and the printed "Demerara" postmark, you can just make out the line drawing of a sailing ship.



Here are a few more stylized ships on stamps — beautifully engraved, but rather dull.



It suddenly struck me how similar these two stamps are — both bi-color engravings of ships from the 1930s, with frames in shades of red. The stamp at left was for the British colony of Malta. The other one, printed in London, was for the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. Which do you like better?



A humble canoe may stretch the definition of a ship or boat. But let's not discriminate. On the other hand, this Sudanese stamp is too humble to be the prettiest.



Is this a ship? A boat? A magical, mystical watercraft of some sort? A chariot, drawn by horses through the sea. Sea horses? Britannia rules the waves in this British stamp, with her triton and shield. Imperial overtones aside, this is a fantastic allegorical engraving — dynamic, crisp, inspiring. A classic British design.



## Sidebar: French Gallery

engraved stamps), but I cannot claim to have exhaustively explored even this one category. The ultimate philatelic gem (or bit of coal) may still be out there!

Dr. Google informs me that there have been about 250,000 different stamps issued since 1840.

The ATA records more than 420,000 stamps in its database of overlapping categories. This number must be updated continually because of the stamp mills — oops, I mean the Postal Authorities around the world that keep issuing sheaves of new stamps. They cater to topical collectors with sets that never come close to the post offices of the nations they purportedly represent and serve.

(More of that lecture at “A Spreading Stain” <<https://mancryfmf.com/2018/02/>> and “A Nightmare of Abuse and Excess” <<https://mancryfmf.com/2018/03/>>)

Take the subject at hand — “ships and boats.” It should not be surprising that



Strong design elements make this high value definitive stamp from French Africa special.



The brilliant Polish stamp engraver Czeslaw Slania produced this beauty for the Faroe Islands.



This graceful stamp from Monaco is light and airy.



To start a quick review of ships on French stamps, here is the SS Normandie. The powerful liner was launched in 1935. Its timing was terrible, its fate ignominious — in 1942 it was seized for war service; while being retrofitted it caught fire and ended up being scrapped in 1946. Nice stamp, though.



This quartet of French stamps features sailing ships. The three engravings are splendid, one prettier than the next; the painted ship (lower right) holds its own.



Here are two more, both interesting in their ways.





Here are some sets of ships on stamps from Iceland (above), Australia (below), Norfolk Island (bottom left) and Italy (bottom right). None of them contenders for top honors, I'm afraid.



Here's a rather ignoble set of boats on stamps — sinking boats. I can't resist including it because the issuing postal authority was Transkei, one of the four main "homelands" set up by the apartheid government of South Africa in a futile effort to maintain racial separation and white supremacy. Those four rickety homelands sank a month after these stamps were issued in 1994.

there are many, many philatelic representations of ships and boats. The ATA breaks down this large topic into more than two dozen categories, with the number of stamps in each — rowboats and galleys (321); Tall Ships (409); Cruisers/Liners (579); Sloops (273) and Tankers (96). The topic of Sailing Vessels — Miscellaneous (3,509) — comes close to capturing the total current number of ships and boats on stamps. (Other topics are much larger — like birds or other animals, whose images grace more than 30,000 stamps.)

Needless to say, my approach to this "topic" is not-at-all systematic.



This British stamp from the 1960s is a striking design with its stark relief and bold profile.



The painted colors on this Irish stamp are so beautiful they almost make my eyes ache.



Germany barely has a sea coat, but it did produce this charming stamp of an 18th century vessel.

The ship at rest (right) forms a ghostly backdrop for the flying bird (albatross?) in this beautifully engraved stamp from French Antarctica.



It draws on my 60-plus years as a stamp collector, during which time I have had the opportunity to view tens of thousands of stamps, including hundreds depicting ships and boats. Of that inventory I can summon from memory particularly beautiful examples, some of which I share with you here, along with more I have found along the way. It's a trip I hope we all are enjoying. I still hope to reach my "destination" and find that one stamp I've been dreaming of.



The tiny South Pacific island nation of Nauru put out these nice stamps of ships. Moving on ...



We end our essay with a sneak preview of this Canadian beauty. Stay tuned for a full appreciation.

**TO BE CONTINUED**

