

LIGHTHOUSES ON BULGARIAN POSTAGE STAMPS – CELEBRATING MARITIME HISTORY AND HERITAGE THROUGH PHAROLOGY'S INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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Abstract: *This paper explores the interdisciplinary significance of lighthouses, through their evolving role from navigational aids to symbols of maritime heritage and cultural identity. It highlights how lighthouses, long admired by scientists and artists alike, have become compelling subjects in philately worldwide. The work presents a case study on Bulgaria's philatelic representation of lighthouses, noting a limited yet meaningful number of postage stamp issues since the establishment of the Bulgarian postal service. The study is based on the confluence of disciplines – architecture, engineering, history, museology, visual arts, in interpreting lighthouses' evolving socio-cultural relevance as maritime heritage elements.*

Following the author's long-standing contribution to promoting Bulgaria's Black Sea lighthouses, the paper emphasizes her participation in the 2023 commemorative stamp marking the 140th anniversary of the Navy's Hydrographic Service. The work underscores the fusion of tangible and intangible maritime heritage through collaborative creative efforts of artists, researchers and institutions. The interdisciplinary viewpoint both on philately and on aids to navigation reinforces the function of stamps as multivalent artifacts and the symbolic role of lighthouses as enduring beacons of cultural continuity.

Keywords: *lighthouses; postage stamps issue; maritime heritage; pharology; interdisciplinarity*

INTRODUCTION

According to the individual viewpoints of scientists, artists or amateurs, the lighthouse stands for a signal of safety, a beacon of enlightenment, a territorial marker, a testimony of people's historical relationships with the sea. In the broader context of communication, regularity and synchronicities of signals substantiate the intentionality of the party's efforts to convey a message. This is also valid when considering light and sound in particular – the different beam characteristics and foghorns identifying each lighthouse location. However, the interdisciplinary approach to a symbol with such a broad set of interpretations reveals sometimes unexpected connections between the widespread fields of knowledge. Furthermore, the cognitive exchange across disciplines transforms not only the object of study but the disciplines themselves (Strang 2018).

Postage stamps issuing, launched as the main function of any State's Post services, has caused the spring up of one of the major collectors' societies worldwide – philatelists. Lighthouses have ever since been an important topic of interest in the postage stamps collections emitted by many countries, even if they do not possess lighthouses on their territory (Asadurov 2022). Bulgaria, with dozens of lighthouses along its Black Sea coast, could boast a large variety of stamps and other related

collectable products. However, just a few lighthouses have appeared on philatelic issues and only in the present century, despite the fact that State Postage Service has been established in 1879.

The author's extensive activity in promoting the lighthouses of Bulgaria (Benova B. 2020) as elements of the maritime heritage has reached an important fulfillment with her taking part in the creation of the newest Bulgarian postage stamp issue with a lighthouse. In 2023, the Hydrographic Service of the Bulgarian Navy celebrated its 140th anniversary. For the occasion, the Headquarters officially invited the author to provide recent photographs of several Bulgarian lighthouses. One of them was used for the creation of a commemorative postage stamp issue, whereas some of the others entered a souvenir notebook, published by the Navy's press-center for the same occasion.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present paper follows an interdisciplinary approach to lighthouses via consilience of heritage preservation, contemporary maritime history and philately.

Methods used by the author for developing the subject include: selection and studying of relevant publications in the fields of pharology, heritage, postage stamps, etc.; research on postage services and maritime history; investigation of philately archives and data bases of state postage services and private collections; analysis and verification of the retained facts and information items; application of pharology expertise for comparison of Bulgaria and other countries' lighthouse stamp issuing; synthesis of instructive conclusions on the interdisciplinary worth of lighthouse stamps as elements of heritage, maritime history and art.

The paper outlines the author's contribution in creating the most recent Bulgarian lighthouse postage stamp issue and related stationery item (souvenir notebook) commemorating the same event.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Since their becoming automated and by consequence – obsolete, lighthouses are undergoing a social renaissance, compensation for the loss of their navigational necessity. They become symbols of local maritime community, cultural identity and heritage.

Interdisciplinarity of Pharology, Maritime History and Heritage

At its origin as a discipline, pharology studies the construction and use of light-houses, lightships and all other aids to navigation (Gómez y Patiño 2010). Nowadays, with their importance lessened, this knowledge domain approaches the notion 'lighthouse' from the perspective of many – and any – other sciences, arts or activities. Pharologists derive from a constantly widening network of research fields like architecture and engineering, optics and electronics, history, geography, heritage preservation, ecology and sustainability, maritime transport and communications, anthropology and sociology, literature and arts, etc. Thus, interdisciplinarity is at

the core of pharology. Its subject of studies – lighthouses, as elements of maritime history and heritage can only benefit from a large palette of scientific viewpoints.

Nowadays, heritage is being explored through the specific scope of a constantly growing number of sciences – archaeology, history, geography, art and cultural studies, museology, conservation and restoration, anthropology, sociology, politics, ecology, psychology, linguistics, semiotics, architecture, engineering, information technologies and many others (Loulanski, 2016). This increasing variety in the ways how heritage in general and maritime heritage in particular are perceived as research subjects, engenders a further complexity in terms of definitions, values and quantifiability. Notwithstanding, it facilitates the transition between viewpoints and thus promotes interdisciplinarity as a universal approach. Established back in the modern and post-modern era, this approach proved to be offering new cross-connections that led not only to innovative concepts, practices and “Art – Science” aesthetic relations, but also to the inception of whole new paradigms (Benova A. 2020).

Postage Stamps as an interdisciplinary element of Heritage

The present paper showcases lighthouses in the context of another major heritage component – postage stamps. Launched as a way of payment, developed into works of art, they have quickly become and still remain nowadays one of the main collector’s items. Official symbol of the State and nation, the postage stamp is a comprehensive international ambassador of its identity and values (Libera 2020). Furthermore, stamps themselves as well as their related promotional products – maximum cards, stamped envelopes, first day covers, miniature and souvenir sheets, provide a credible insight on the country’s historical, political, sports and cultural timeline.

In order to promote causes, celebrate events or register achievements, collaborations between institutions or private stakeholders and the national postal service result in commemorative, jubilee and other special stamp issues. As per UNESCO’s Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, postage stamps benefit from international patronage as tangible and moveable heritage items. Their status at the intersection of several functional fields – State services, international exchange, cultural identity, history, art, etc. defines them as an interdisciplinary heritage element.

Bulgarian Postage Stamp issues with Lighthouses – author’s contribution

More than a century separates the beginning of Postage stamps issue from the first lighthouse stamp in Bulgaria. Only 6 of all the lighthouses along the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria and no foreign lighthouses have been pictured on Bulgarian postage stamps. Stylized images by Viliam Kitanov of Shabla and Kaliakra lighthouses appear on 2 stamps from 2001. Both stamps are reissued in 2003 and redesigned in a 4-stamp block for the International Philately Salon Sofia 2013 (Fig. 1 left). An artistic view from above of Sveta Anastasia lighthouse, by Ivan Gazdov, is present on one of the 4-stamp block “Regions” (Fig. 2 left), issued in 2015. A series of 4 indi-

vidual stamps and a block of them by Todor Vardjiev is issued in 2017 (Fig. 1 right), depicting Ahtopol, Shabla, Burgas and Galata lighthouses. A decree by the Minister of Transport from 2021 withdraws them from use, thus transforming this postage stamp issue into an even more attractive and praised philatelic entry. A 1-stamp block by Todor Angeliev, celebrating 80 years of the Union of Bulgarian Philatelists, has been issued in 2018. Outside of the stamp itself, the lighthouse of Burgas can be discerned (Fig. 1 right).

In previous research, as an answer to an open call from the State Post Service, the author created a project with a series of stamps with lighthouses – an idea that unfortunately was not selected for the following year's State postage stamps plan (Benova B. 2022).

The newest postage stamp issue depicting a lighthouse in Bulgaria was validated on December 1st 2023 (Petrov 2023), to commemorate 140 years of the Bulgarian Navy's Hydrographic Service. This State institution has been in charge of the lighthouses since the very early years after the country's Liberation (Kukurov 2023). The stamp in a block (Fig. 3 left), the maximum card (Fig. 3 right), the first day cover and the stamped envelope (Fig. 4 right), have been designed by Teodor Liho as per a photograph from the same year (Fig. 4 left), by the author of this paper, provided specifically for the purpose as per the Navy's Headquarters' invitation honoring the author's long term pharology research and contribution in promoting the lighthouses of Bulgaria.



Fig. 1. Lighthouse Stamp issues from 2013 (left) and 2017 (right).



Fig. 2. Stamp issues with lighthouses – “Regions” from 2013 (left) and from 2018 (right)



Fig. 3. Postage Issue “140 years Bulgarian Navy’s Hydrographic Service”: stamp (left) and maximum card (right).

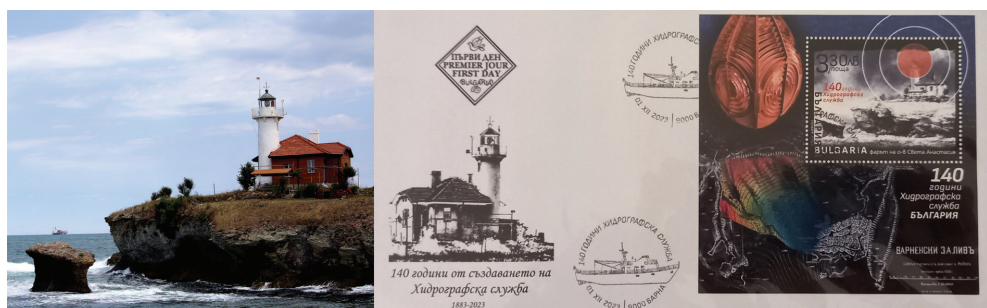


Fig. 4. Bela Benova’s photograph of Sveta Anastasia lighthouse (left) used for the stamp issue and the envelope (right).

The postage stamp issue was depleted the day of its validation, due to the small circulation number and the importance of the occasion it celebrates, thus notably increasing its value and praise in the philately circles. Another worth of this postage stamp issue is the fact that it not only depicts a famous heritage element – the lighthouse of Sveta Anastasia, but also commemorates an important anniversary on Bulgaria's contemporary Maritime history timeline thus enhancing the popularity of a scantily known intangible heritage element – the Navy's Hydrographic Service. The author is proud to have also contributed with several of her own photographs of Bulgarian lighthouses for the publishing by the Navy's press center of a souvenir notebook commemorating the same occasion.

CONCLUSION

Postage stamps, as an element of heritage, go beyond their initial purpose of payment method, as they reflect specific time frames, events and processes in the State or the World. Highly collectible items, they play a social role too, conditioning the evolution of philatelic activities and groups, thus promoting wider and more elaborate cultural exchange.

Maritime heritage items themselves, lighthouses face a constantly growing interest from each time wider range of research or art professionals and passionate amateurs, due to their becoming obsolete. Philately is just one of the fields, warrants for such tendency, as lighthouses appear every time more often on postage stamps worldwide. Although the Post Service of Bulgaria cannot match this trend, the visual and historical potential of most Bulgarian lighthouses will surely guarantee them the place they merit on future stamps.

During the last 18 years, the author's various activities to promoting the lighthouses in Bulgaria have demonstrated the interdisciplinarity of pharology through literary work and books, photo exhibitions, scientific and popular publications, sport and tourism events, heritage preservation projects, discussion forums and musical performances, collaborations with other artists and researchers. The possibility to take part in the creation of the most recent lighthouse stamp is a particular honor for the author, who is proud to have this crucial contribution to many aspects of Bulgaria's contemporary maritime history.

The newest lighthouse stamp not only showcases one of the most famous lighthouses of the Black sea coast – Sveta Anastasia Island, but also celebrates a very important anniversary – 140 years of the Navy's Hydrographic Service. This institution has been in charge of all aids to navigation on the territory of Bulgaria since the country's Liberation. Issuing a specific stamp for this particular occasion is another evidence of how maritime heritage entwines tangible monuments and historic events for the interdisciplinary benefit of pharology, as well as of any other activity, aiming the preservation of the Past for the sake of the Future.

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ПОЩЕНСКИ МАРКИ С ФАРОВЕТЕ НА БЪЛГАРСКОТО ЧЕРНОМОРИЕ – ПОПУЛЯРИЗИРАНЕ НА МОРСКАТА ИСТОРИЯ И КУЛТУРНО НАСЛЕДСТВО В ИНТЕРДИСЦИПЛИНАРНИЯ КОНТЕКСТ НА ФАРОЛОГИЯТА

Резюме: Настоящата статия изследва интердисциплинарното значение на фаровете в контекста на тяхната еволюция от навигационни съоръжения до символи на морското културно наследство и идентичност. Подчертана е ролята на фаровете, които освен отдавна обект на възхищение от страна на учени и творци, са и вдъхновяваща тема във филателията по цял свят. Разработката изследва филателното представяне на морските фарове в България, с акцент върху ограничения, но стойностен брой пощенски издания от създаването на Български пощи до днес. Проучването се основава на съчетаването на дисциплини като архитектура, инженерство, история, музеология и визуални изкуства, разглеждайки нарастващото социално-културно значение на фаровете като елементи на морското наследство. В контекста на дългогодишна дейност за популяризиране на фаровете по Българското Черноморие, статията представя участието на автора в създаването на юбилейната марка от 2023 г., посветена на 140-годишнината от основаването на Хидрографската служба на Военноморските сили. Изследването акцентира върху синтеза на материално и нематериално морско културно наследство чрез творческо сътрудничество между артисти, изследователи и институции. Интердисциплинарният поглед към филателията и навигационните съоръжения утвърждава марките като многопластови артефакти, а фаровете – като устойчиви символи на културната приемственост.

Ключови думи: морски фарове; маркоиздаване; морско културно наследство; фарология; интердисциплинарност

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