

First Cat Stamps from Mount Athos (Greece)

by GREG BALAGIAN



Wood carvings of lions are on stamps from Mt. Athos (Greece): Scott 155, and 162 on the label and stamp, issued in two different 2015 sets. *See the Mew Listings on page 78.*

Inhabited since ancient times, the mountain and peninsula of Mount Athos, in Northern Greece, has experienced nearly 1,800 years of continuous Christian presence. Home to twenty Eastern Orthodox monasteries, Mount Athos is under the direct and autonomous jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. About 200 monks from Eastern Orthodox countries live an ascetic life there, isolated from the rest of the world.

Because the monasteries feature a spectacular collection of well-preserved artifacts, rare manuscripts and books, ancient documents, and incredible artwork, Mount Athos is designated a World Heritage Site.

Mount Athos also has an interesting philatelic history. A Russian post office was established there at the end of the 19th century. In the winter of 1915-1916, the Allied Forces in the anticipation of the occupation of the Holy Mountain issued a set of six stamps, but they were never used. In 1915 the Greek government overprinted some 1912 and 1913

stamps and even prepared some stationery for political reasons, but these issues also were never used.

Grecian postal authorities began issuing postage stamps in 2008 available only at post offices in Karyai and Dafni. Mount Athos continues to issue stamps today.

Lions, panthers and various fantastic feline-like beasts, as well as cats, appeared in medieval works of art along with other animals in religious allegories called medieval bestiaries.

The first two cat stamps from Mt. Athos are medieval wood carvings in different art sets: a fighting lion from the Chilandariou Monastery (Scott 155) and a lion's head on the stamp with a full lion on the label from the Koutioumousiou Monastery (Scott 162).

A fighting panther is in the cachet of a first day cover also issued in 2015; the stamps do not picture cats. 🐾

A lion is in the cachet for this first day of issue cover from Mount Athos. The 2015 stamps are noncat (Scott 165, 158).

