ISSUES OF WESTERN HUNGARY (LAJTABÁNSÁG) IN 1921

BY

LESLIE S. ETTRE

SOCIETY FOR HUNGARIAN PHILATELY

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The title page shows the coat-of-arms
of the short-lived Lajtabánság.

This monograph is published on the 50-years
anniversary of the events in the former
Western Hungary - the present Burgenland

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When I was a high school student, in the town of Szentgotthárd, on the present border of Austria and Hungary, our school placed a wreath each All Saints' Day on the grave of a college student in the local cemetery who had died during the skirmishes of Fall 1921. The history of those events was still living at that time in our town and having always had a keen interest in history, it is natural that I became interested in it. As a logical conclusion to this, when I started to collect stamps, I kept a special eye out for the Lajtabánság-issues and on material related to them. My first stamp collection - with many such items in it - was lost at the end of the Second World War but, when I started this hobby again, one of my goals was - and still is - to specialize in this field.

The issues of Western Hungary (Lajtabánság) belong to the stepchildren of philately. By many, they are not considered as real stamps but as private, speculation issues, and this is certainly reflected by the fact that among the general stamp catalogs, only Michel lists - and I might add, significantly underprices - them. Probably the main reason for this is political. The events of Fall 1921 in Western Hungary became a heated political controversy and Austria, as well as the newly formed successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, denounced the activities of the insurgents, and indirectly, of Hungary. Thus, the stamps issued by them became almost automatically condemned. In my opinion this is deplorable, because one's opinion about political events cannot invalidate the stamps accompanying the events.

It must be clearly understood that at least some of the issues of Western Hungary must be considered as regular stamps by any standards. First, the post offices in this territory had to return the Hungarian stamps during the official transfer period (until October 3, 1921; see BACKGROUND INFORMATION). Actually, most offices carried out this order leaving the post offices with only a small inventory of Hungarian stamps when the independence of Lajtabánság was declared. Secondly, the insurgent troops took over both the military and political administration of the territory not yet occupied by Austria. Thus, they had the legal power to issue stamps. Thirdly, the Universal Postal Union, in Berne, Switzerland, was notified of the independence of Lajtabánság and the decision to issue
its own stamps. Finally, during the insurgency, foreign countries accepted these stamps as legal issues and nowhere was a postage due stamp affixed to letters bearing Lajتابánśág stamps. Even Austria accepted the legality of these stamps; during the fights letters bearing these stamps and mailed to Austrian addresses have been forwarded to the addressees, and after the end of the hostilities, for two weeks after the final take-over by Austria, the Lajتابánśág stamps could be used in Surgenland. Envelopes with such stamps - alone or together with Austrian stamps - and cancelled with Austrian cancellation marks exist.

Actually the best proof of the validity of these stamps and the right of the Lajتابánśág authorities to issue their own stamps was given by the Austrian courts. As will be discussed later, the seventh series - the first permanent Lajتابánśág issue - was printed in Vienna and on November 17 - i.e., after the finish of the take-over by Austria - Austrian authorities confiscated those stamps which were still at the printer. They initiated a legal suit with the charges of fraud and high treason. However, after a long deliberation, the Austrian State Prosecutor refused to handle the case. He reasoned that during the preparation of these stamps Austria de facto did not control the territory of Western Hungary and thus, could not exercise the postal rights.

I found probably the most fitting answer to those questioning the "validity" of these issues in a general stamp catalog issued in Switzerland, in 1921 (*). When dealing with the so-called occupation issues of Hungary, the catalog answered those who expressed the opinion that these stamps should not be considered as "official issues" by the following statement:

"For the decision to classify an issue as regular it is enough that the stamps were issued for postal use by a competent local authority or by one which came to power by either legal means or by force".(**)

* Catalogue de Timbres-poste "JEKA". S.A.JEKA, Zurich, 1921; p.586.

** "Pour être classés parmi les émissions régulières il suffit qu'elle ait été émise postalel par une autorité local compétente ou une autre qui s'est emparée de la puissance d'une manière légałe ou par force".
In my opinion, the stamps of Western Hungary represent a period when the whole of Middle Europe was in a state of flux, and the whole life in a transition. Thus, these stamps - by looking at them in historical context - are typical representatives of their times and therefore should not be overlooked.

Today, on the 50th anniversary of these events, one should have the historical perspective to look on these stamps in this way, as representatives of the past, without the need to be partisan in regard to the events which happened almost two generations ago.

As mentioned, the literature pertaining to these issues is fairly scarce. Except a brief listing by Billig, I do not know of any English literature on this subject. Thus, one of my principal aims was to discuss these issues in as much detail as possible.

This booklet serves as a monograph as well as a catalog. For this reason, the actual listing of the stamps is given separately with the hope that, at a later date, we might reissue it by incorporating an indication of the prices of the individual stamps.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. O.G. Schaffling (Cheshire, Conn.), Mr. E.F. Blinn (Woodbury, N.J.), and Mr. D. Szabados (Fairfield, Conn.) for permission to use material from their collections. I am particularly deeply indebted to Mr. Schaffling for making the photos for the illustrations in this booklet.

I sincerely hope that this discussion will revitalize the interest in these issues and will bring new information to light. Any addition or correction is certainly most welcome and will be used in the NEWS OF HUNGARIAN PHILATELY and in a future revision of this monograph.

Norwalk, Connecticut, July 1, 1971

Leslie S. Ettre
TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIRST PART: INTRODUCTION

I. EXPLANATION TO THE LISTING .................. 1
II. LITERATURE
   A. Literature About Stamps; Catalogs ....... 2
   B. Literature on History and Geography ... 3

SECOND PART: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I. GEOGRAPHY .................................... 4
II. POLITICAL EVENTS ............................ 8
III. STAMPS ISSUED IN WESTERN HUNGARY ...... 10

THIRD PART: ISSUES OF LAJTAẞÁNSÁG

I. FIRST SERIES ................................ 11
   Error Prints ................................ 15
II. SECOND SERIES ............................... 16
   Error Prints ................................ 16
III. THIRD SERIES ............................... 20
   Error Prints ................................ 20
IV. FOURTH SERIES ............................... 24
   Error Prints ................................ 24
V. FIFTH SERIES ................................ 25
   Error Prints ................................ 25
VI. SIXTH SERIES ............................... 26
   Error Prints ................................ 26
VII. SEVENTH SERIES ............................ 28
    Tête-Bêche Pairs ............................ 29
    Error Prints ................................ 29
VIII. EIGHT SERIES .............................. 31
IX. NINTH SERIES ................................ 33

FOURTH PART: ISSUES OF BURGENLAND

INTRODUCTION ................................... 38
I. THE JENNERSDORF ISSUE ....................... 39
   Error Prints ................................ 41
II. THE FIRST BURGENLAND SERIES ............. 41
III. THE SECOND BURGENLAND SERIES .......... 42
FIFTH PART: CATALOGUE OF THE STAMPS

EXPLANATION TO THE LISTING ......................... 46

A. Issues of Lajtabánság
   I. FIRST SERIES ........................................... 48
   II. SECOND SERIES ........................................ 48
   III. THIRD SERIES ........................................ 49
   IV. FOURTH SERIES ........................................ 49
   V. FIFTH SERIES .......................................... 50
   VI. SIXTH SERIES ......................................... 51
   VII. SEVENTH SERIES ..................................... 52
   VIII. EIGHT SERIES ....................................... 52
   IX. NINTH SERIES ......................................... 53

B. Issues of Burgenland
   I. THE JENNERSDORF ISSUE ................................. 54
   II. FIRST BURGENLAND ISSUE ............................. 54
   III. SECOND BURGENLAND ISSUE .......................... 55

The map of the territory of the former Western Hungary
is on page 5 while a bilingual (Hungarian-German) listing
of the names of the more important towns, cities, and riv-
ers is on pages 6 through 8.

The photos of the stamps discussed in this monograph and
listed in the catalogue part are shown on pages 43 through
45.
FIRST PART: INTRODUCTION

I. EXPLANATION TO THE LISTING

As mentioned in the preface, this booklet has a dual purpose: it is a monograph discussing the issues of Western Hungary but, at the same time, it is also a catalog, listing the individual stamps and their variations. For this reason, the two are separated: first, the information related to the individual issues is summarized and this is followed by the catalog of the stamps.

Both in the discussion as well as in the catalog, the monetary units are abbreviated in the following way:

Hungarian currency:  
\[ F = \text{fillér} \]  
\[ K = \text{korona} \, (100 \, F) \]

Austrian currency:  
\[ H = \text{Heller} \]  
\[ K = \text{Krone(n)} \, (100 \, H) \]

It should be mentioned that on the stamps of the sixth issue of Lajtabánság the Hungarian currencies are actually abbreviated as fill. (fillér) and kor. (korona).

It was not easy to decide how to list the various towns. The problem here is that at the time of the uprising in Western Hungary, the original Hungarian town names were still in use while on present-day maps the German (Austrian) names are naturally utilized. In order to facilitate the bilingual usage the map included later in the GEOGRAPHY section utilizes the present (Austrian) names of towns and rivers which one would find in any modern map; however, this map is followed by a bilingual alphabetical listing of the town names. Of course, this listing is not complete; it simply tries to give a collection of the most important town names. In the text of the monograph the two - Hungarian and Austrian - names are always used together; if at the time discussed the town was in Hungarian (insurgent) hands, the Austrian name is given in parentheses while if Austrian cancellation marks are discussed this is reversed and the Hungarian name is in parentheses.

A minor problem exists also with the spelling. Both in Hungarian and German, minor spelling differences exist between the writing of 1921 and today; for example, in 1921, the letter "c" was spelled as "cz" in Hungarian while the German words "Turm" and "Tal" were spelled in 1921 as "Thurm" and "Thal". Also some names were changed; for example, Mattersdorf is called today Wattersburg while the Hungarian city of Mosonmagyaróvár was called in 1921 as Magyaróvár, without the "Mosen" prefix. I have tried to point out these differences in the listing; however, I do not indicate minor spelling changes.