

The "Centenary of the Danube Steam Navigation Co." set of 1937

On 9th June 1937 there appeared a set of three stamps to celebrate the centenary of the Danube Steam Ship Navigation Company.

- 12g brown lake "Maria Anna" 1837 paddle steamer (2,500,000)
- 24g slate blue "Helios" steamer (2,500,000)
- 64g green "Österreich" steam-tug (1,000,000)



The frames of the stamps were designed by Professor Franz Ritzl who had also produced the frames for the 1936 Winter Relief set. The set was printed by photogravure on chalky paper and line perforated 12. It was valid for postage until 31st December 1937. The usual imperf, colour etc oddities exist.

The 24g stamp has three constant plate errors. The 10th stamp of each sheet has the "C" in "ÖSTERREICH" with a deformed lower serif; the 31st stamp has a dark spot which appears as a cloud underneath the "ST" in "ÖSTERREICH"; and another stamp has a sausage-shaped mark above the flag.

F.S. Schanzer wrote at length on "The Ships and Boats on Stamps of Austria" (Bulletin of A.P.S. of New York 1955.7(8) pp3-6). He said: *"The first stamp pictures the oldest steam-propelled water vehicle on the Danube river, the 'MARIA ANNA', a side wheeler and a real antique. Propelled by a coal-fired steam engine, the MARIA ANNA had two huge paddle wheels and was the big attraction of her time. When the DDSG celebrated its 100th anniversary, the Company built an exact replica of the old MARIA ANNA, and her maiden voyage carried her up-river on the Danube from Vienna to Austria's border."* The Maria Anna was built in 1837.

The second stamp of this set shows a more modern passenger boat on the Danube, the steamship HELIOS, which was one of a series of four ships, all built alike, and after which the whole series or class was named. The four boats were the HELIOS, the SATURNUS, the JUPITER and the URANUS. Schanzer says that the first three ships were built before the first World War, while URANUS was put into service in 1924. However the Register at <http://www.hajoregiszter.hu/> gives the build dates as 1922, 1918, 1916 and 1920 respectively. All four ships ran an express service between Vienna and Giurgiu, Romania. During the second World War the HELIOS was sunk to the bottom of the Danube near the town of Hainburg, but when the war was over, the Russians lifted her and set her afloat again. She was then remodelled and put into service under the new name of KAUKASUS. Some older catalogues wrongly call this boat the FRANZ SCHUBERT. The latter was the sister ship of the passenger boat JOHANN STRAUSS; both were much smaller than the HELIOS and both covered the passenger route between Vienna and Passau. Besides, the FRANZ SCHUBERT was built differently: above the stateroom deck was the dining room and on top of that a promenade deck. The HELIOS class has another deck of staterooms between the dining room and the promenade deck.

Finally, the last stamp of this set pictures a freighter on the Danube river, the ÖSTERREICH, built in 1927. Ships like her, mostly coal-fired side wheelers, were the hard workers on the Danube, towing from one to three trailer boats (Schlepper) behind them.