

The Greetings Stamp Issue of 1937



No satisfactory explanation is known of why Austria should suddenly have decided to issue these "Greetings" stamps on 12 December 1937, just before Christmas, since no precedent for such stamps existed in Austrian philately. They were to be used on birthday cards and letters. The stamps were designed by Prof. Wilhelm Dachauer, but his first submission was for a Christ-Child floating in a star of light, with the 12 signs of the Zodiac representing the 12 Apostles. This was rejected (perhaps an overtly religious theme was politically unsuited to that time of gathering thunderclouds) and a "Vase of Roses" took its place. However, "100 Jahre Österreichische Briefmarke" (Vienna 1950; p38) has an illustration of the original concept.



Professor Dachauer's accepted design was a vase of roses, framed by the signs of the Zodiac, in two values: 12 groschen blue-green and 24 groschen carmine (which were the inland postcard and inland letter rates at that date.) The stamps were recess printed at the State Printing Works in Vienna, comb perforated 13 (the 24gr is also known imperf) and were valid for postage until 31st October 1938. The number issued is unknown. The 12g can be found with plate numbers 1 - 6, the 24g with 1 - 4. Both exist imperf; as pairs-imperf-between; and in unissued colours. The signs of the Zodiac can be clearly discerned in the two vertical columns to either side of the stamps. From top to bottom: left hand side: Scorpio, (the scorpion), Sagittarius (the archer), Capricornus (the goat), Aquarius (the water carrier), Pisces (the fishes) and Aries (the ram); right hand side: Taurus (the bull), Gemini (the twins), Cancer (the crab), Leo (the lion), Virgo (the Virgin) and Libra (the scales). The roses are based on Hybrid Tea types.

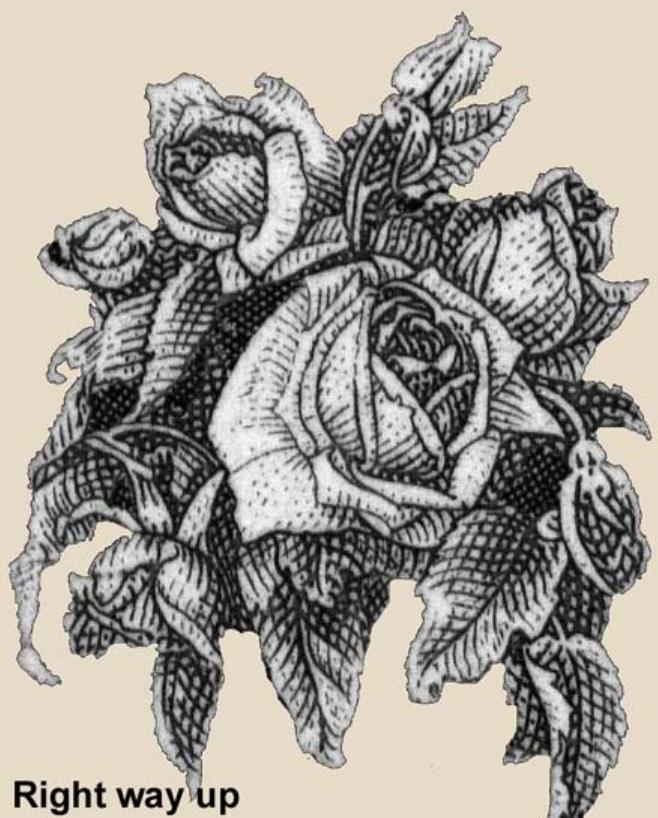
Post u Telegraphenverordnungsblatt 65/1937 ([Postal Ordinance 1937 Nr 65 177, now downloadable from the ÖNB site](#)) announced the introduction of special stamps of 12g and 24g for greetings letters (Greetings stamps). *From 12th December 1937 new stamps of 12g and 24g in a special artistic design become valid, which should serve for the franking of greetings letters; they are however valid for the franking of all kinds of posted material in both domestic and foreign service, until further notice without time limit.* The German word consistently used is 'Glückwunsch' which translates as 'greetings'. My dictionaries all suggest that if Glückwunsch is associated with anything specific, it is with the birthday of the recipient, and not with Christmas. The 'Christmas' link seems to be an invention of English-speaking cataloguers! The stamps are called "Glückwunschmarken", not "Weihnachtsmarken".

A secret?

Herr M. Palmer of Bad Aussee wrote to 'Die Briefmarke' (Feb 2002 issue p25), regarding the often-repeated assertion that the engraver had hidden in the blossoms of the roses the heads of the then decisive politicians. Enquiries of older persons had confirmed to him that this was correct: Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese premier are hidden in the roses. Herr Palmer then wrote to the Japanese state archive in Tokyo, explaining that three politicians are allegedly hidden in the stamp, but not indicating which or where. About two months later the answer arrived: all three politicians were identified by the Japanese state archive which indicated their exact locations.

Herr Palmer's mother told him later that she had known Professor Dachauer personally, and that he had often assured her that he had hidden the three politicians in the roses. Allegedly, she added, he got into trouble over this after the issue of the stamps. If one considers Dachauer's stamp designs, one might conclude that he could have had a certain tendency to the right-wing body of thought. Frau Palmer thought that he could also have been active in some illegal areas. But all that is history. Now however to the stamp itself [*some imagination may be useful*]. The politicians are easiest to find if one covers the rest of the stamp so that only the indicated roses become visible; for your convenience the image is shown both right-way-up and upside-down. The three politicians are hidden in these roses:

- Hitler: First rose on the right above (2 o'clock). Look at the stamp upside-down: the head shows on the left. Clear to see are forehead, nose, moustache and chin. A petal forms a kind of hood.
- Mussolini: Rose in the center. Again looking upside-down: the head shows on the left with the face, not completely clearly, in silhouette. A petal forms a kind of helmet, which is pushed in the neck.
- Japanese premier: Rose on the left below (8 o'clock), looking at the stamp the normal way up. The Japanese state archive confirmed that it deals with a Japanese politician. It is not however completely clear who it is; there are three possibilities. Most likely is Hirota Koki, 32nd Prime Minister from 9 March 1936. It could however be Hayashi Senjuro, 33rd Prime Minister from 2 February 1937; somewhat improbable is the 34th Prime Minister Konoe Fumimori from 4 June 1937.



Right way up



Upside-down