

1924 Paris Olympics – Milo of Croton: From Design to Use



A traditional approach to the stamp's “birth” and “life.”

A Presentation for the Rochester Philatelic Association
by Tom Fortunato



Once upon a time in France...

This is the story of the creation of a postage stamp from design through to its printing and uses. It deals with a stamp I've been interested in for some time, the 1924 French "Milo of Croton" issue, part of a set commemorating the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. Unlike today's modern issues, producing a stamp like this one went through a labor-intensive process. The following presentation will take you through various stages of its design, production and use.

Here's a peek at data about the stamp we'll be looking at. It depicts Milo, a famous wrestler born in Croton, southern Italy, in what was then a Greek colony. This six-time ancient Olympiad champ was the ideal persona for a modern Olympic issue.



Stamp catalog : Stamp > Olympic Games

Country:	France
Series:	Summer Olympic Games 1924 - Paris
Catalog codes:	Yvert et Tellier FR 185 Michel FR 171 Stamp Number FR 200 Stanley Gibbons FR 403
Themes:	Gods and goddesses Olympic Games Sports
Issued on:	1924-05-25 04-01
Expiry date:	1924-12-31
Size:	24 x 40 mm
Colors:	Black Brown red
Watermark:	No Watermark
Designers:	Edmond Henri Becker
Format:	Stamp
Emission:	Commemorative
Perforation:	comb 13½ x 14
Printing:	Typography
Face value:	30 French centime
Score:	50% Accuracy: Very High
Description:	Printed in sheets of 75 stamps. 150 Exists according to the Yvert catalog: - imperforate (a), - double impression of the center (b). variety: moved under Postes France crossed and white column Find similar items on eBay
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DESIGN

The stamp creation process starts with an artist drafting sketches of design ideas. Often they start out as rough images that eventually progress to large drawings or paintings of what is hoped would be finally accepted. This is the final image designed by Edmond Henri Becker submitted to French postal officials for their approval, modeled after a sculpture by



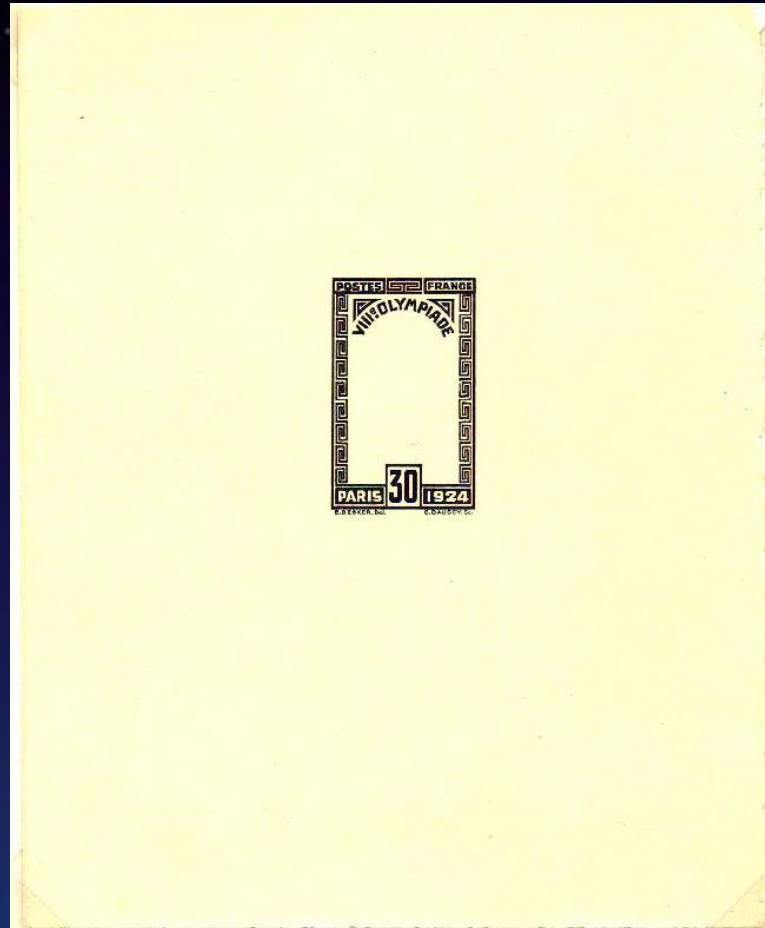


As this stamp uses two colors, both black and brown-red elements needed to be engraved, eventually coming together in the final stage.

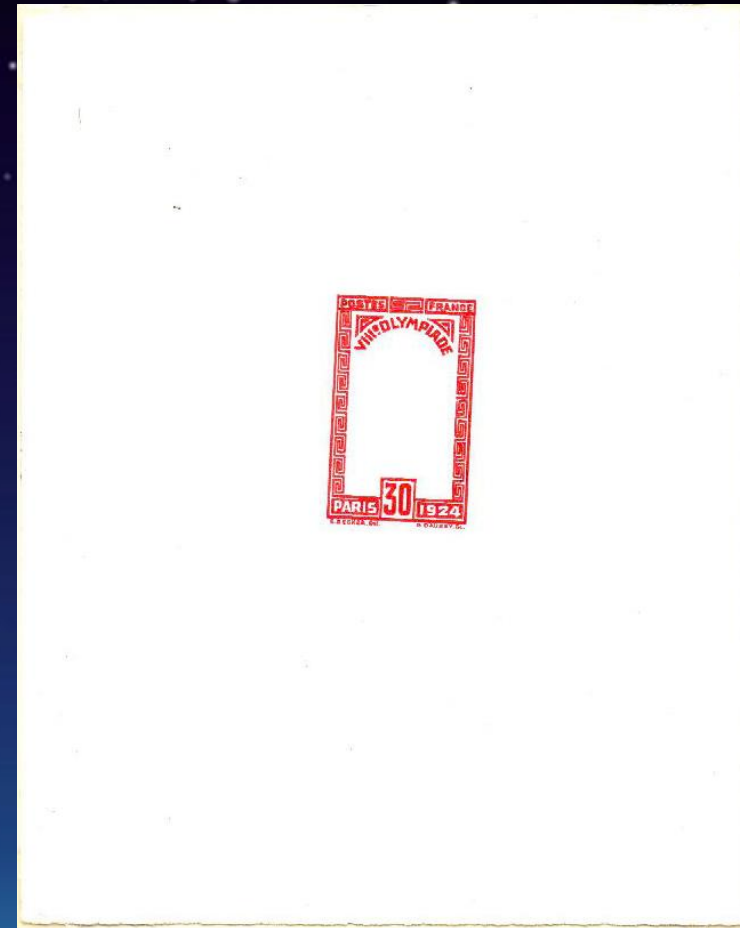
Master engraver G. Daussy turned the frame and vignette designs into dies.

Here is a die proof of the frame in violet brown ink and printed on glossy paper.

It was common practice to print examples of die proofs in various trial colors and on different types of paper.

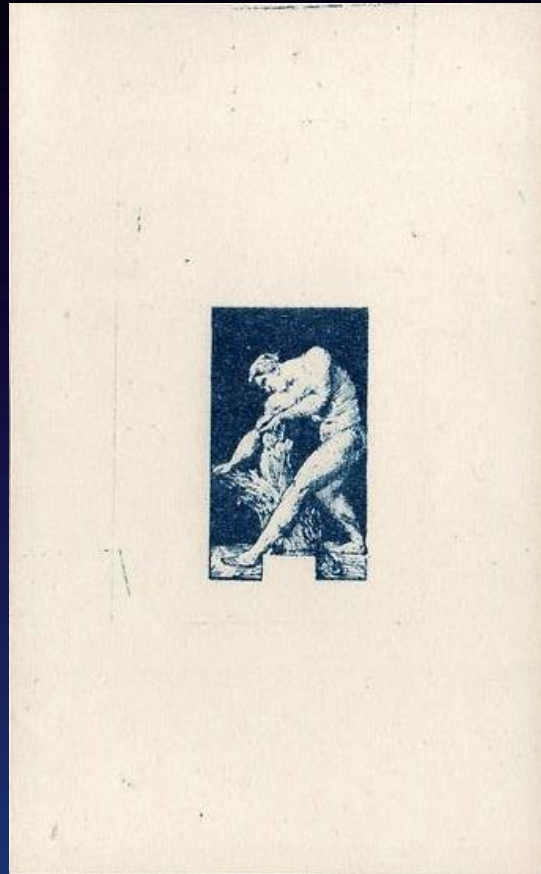


dark blue



red

The vignette, modeled after a Louvre marble sculpture of Milo from 1768 by Edme Dumont, underwent several color trials.



blue



red w/printing
block surround

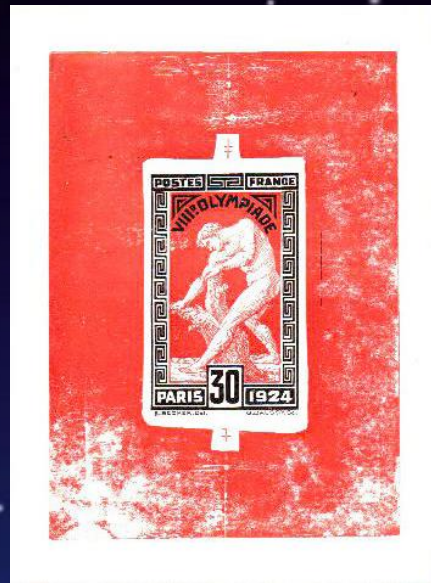


brown w/printing
block surround

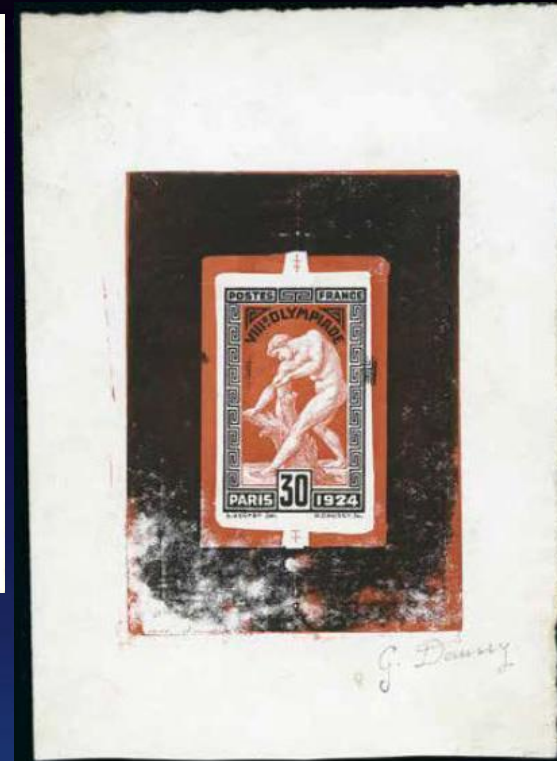
With the final die completed, duo color trial proofs began. Here are a few with printing block surround ink added...



orange-brown
and black



dark orange
and black



dull red and black
(as issued)



red-brown and
dark blue

...and here are some without.



light blue and black



rose and purple



grey
and red

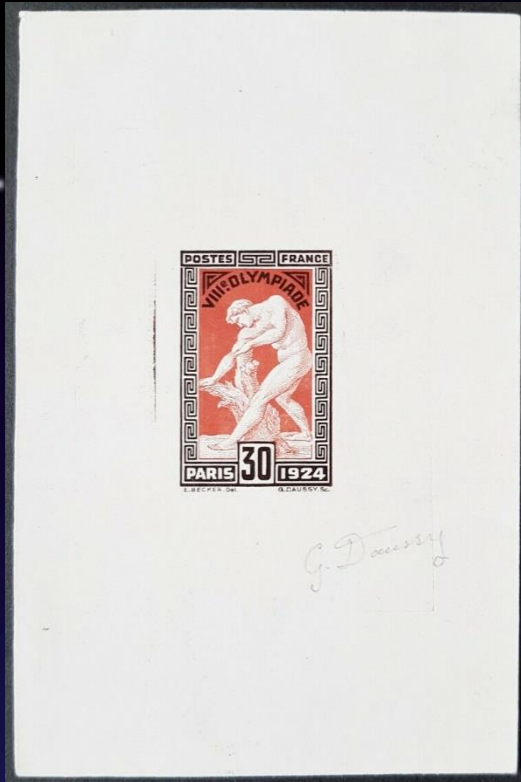


green and black

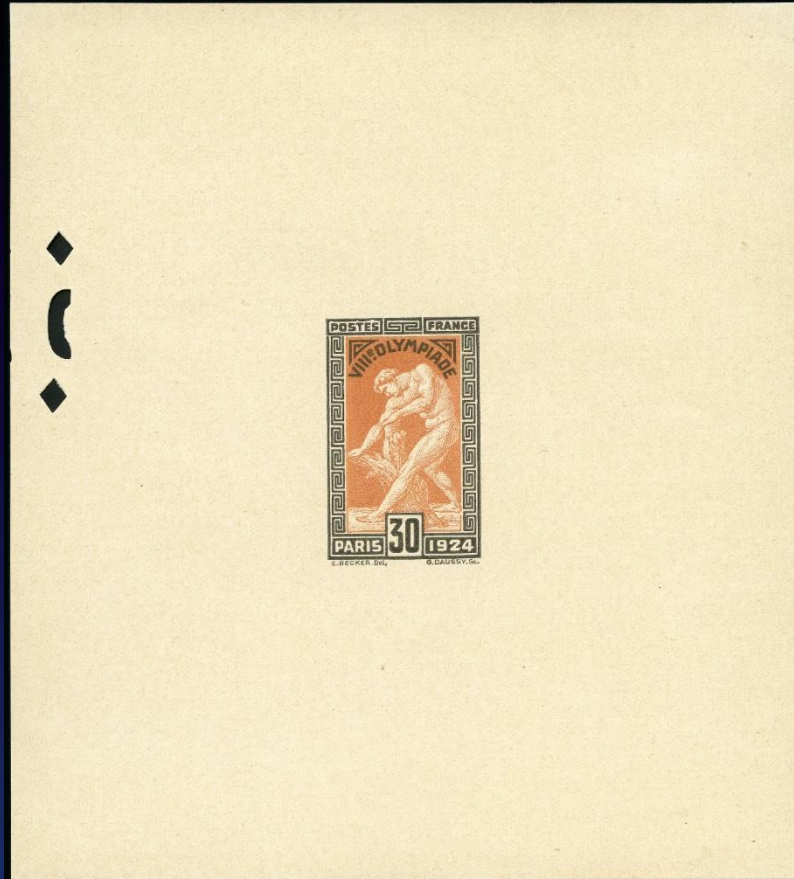


bright mauve and
dark purple

Final proofs in the approved colors.



engraver signed



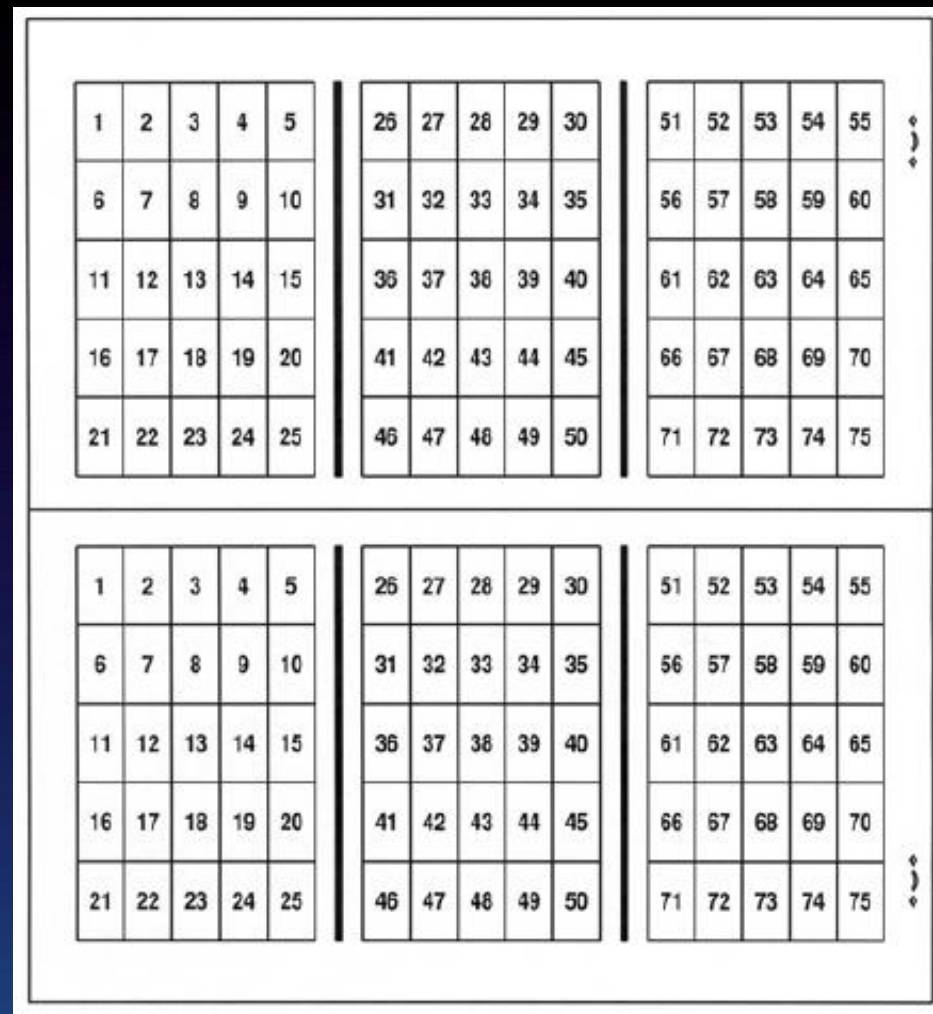
presentation proof with control holes (1 of 10)



final proof pull,
Jan. 5, approved
Jan. 8, 1924
(unique, now at
the Lausanne
Olympic Museum)

PRODUCTION

The stamps were printed by the French Government Printing Works by typography, the opposite of engraving, where the design is raised in relief above the printing plate that gets inked and under pressure transfers the image to the paper. Each press sheet contained 150 stamps cut in half (2 panes of 75 each) when delivered to post offices per this diagram.



Top pane layout with 2 gutters between blocks of 5x5 stamps.



The stamps were printed daily on Press #9 between Friday, May 2 to Thursday, May 8 with the exception of Sunday, May 4 when the facility was closed. Plate inscriptions are dated.



thinner yellowish
paper variety



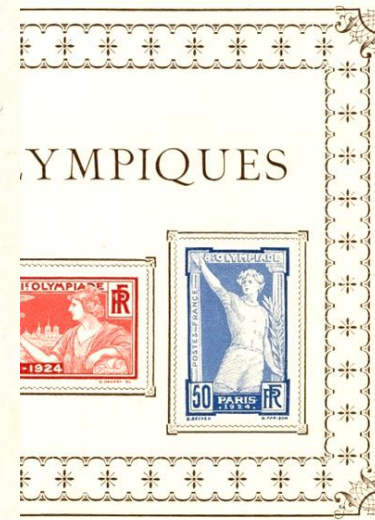
A diamond control mark was placed on every 10th sheet when received and reviewed by the quality control acceptance team.



The stamp set was issued on April 1, 1924. By law the stamps would only be on sale for four months until July 31, like their 1896 Olympic predecessors intended as a short term fund raiser. They were demonetized on September 30 and the remaining balance destroyed.



A limited presentation proof sheet was given to government officials and dignitaries on the release of the issue.



between
135-153
produced in
2 varieties-
with a
control hole
and without,
the latter
distributed
at the UPU
meeting in
Stockholm
July and
Aug. 1924

Specimens exist for the stamp.



from the Madagascar post philatelic records

According to the “Catalogue Descriptif des Variétés de France” (2nd edition, 1949), published by the Office Philatelique de Paris, there are three shade varieties due to ink mixes used, given these color designations. Reported printed were 25,000 sheets of 150 stamps of all 4 values.



dull red and black



brown red and gray black



light orange red and black

As a bi-colored stamp, the registration of both the frame and vignette was paramount during printing. Not bad, but perfect alignment was not always possible.



There is only one constant plate flaw known for this issue.
The “muscular arm” variety is found on plate position 17.



Non-constant varieties are known.



imperforate



paper fold



printed on the gum side, when one sheet was inserted improperly

Printing EFOs (errors, freaks and oddities) exist.



vignette double printed, one of two pairs known



vignette set-off, full and partial

known but not shown:

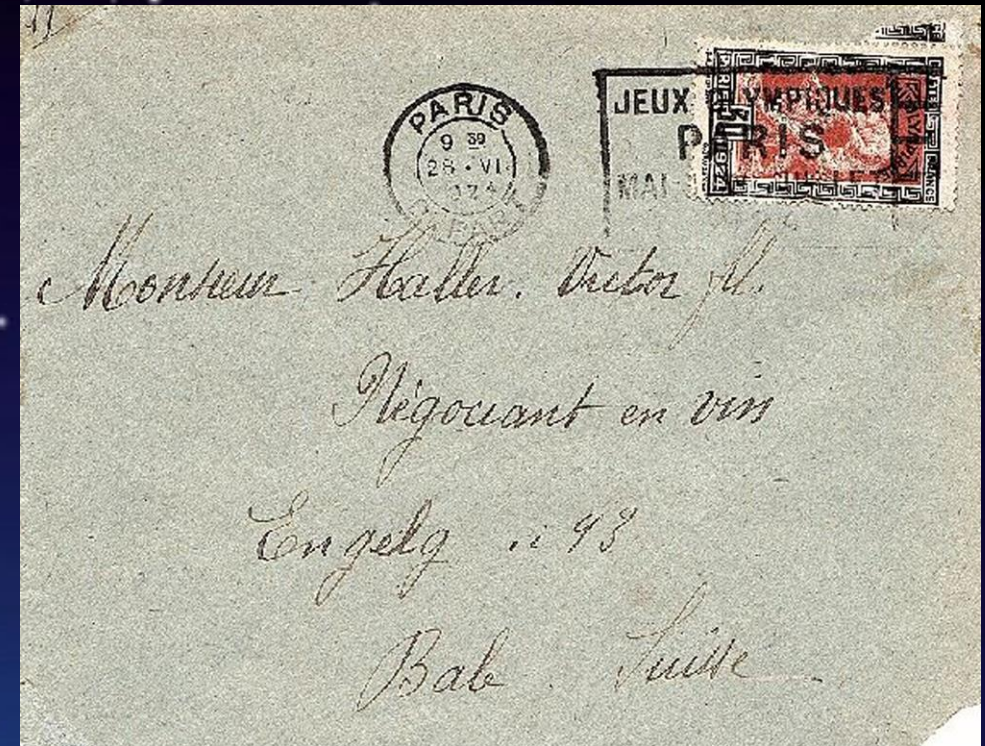
- gummed on front and back
- frame printed on the gum side

USE

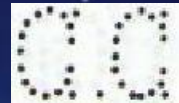
The 30 centime value stamp singularly paid the basic printed matter rate of 50-100 grams to neighboring Switzerland.



newspaper, mailed July 16 from Paris to Zurich
received July 17, readdressed and forwarded



printed letter, mailed June 28 from Paris to
Basel with CC perfin



In most cases it was used as a “make-up” stamp to fulfill a specific rate.

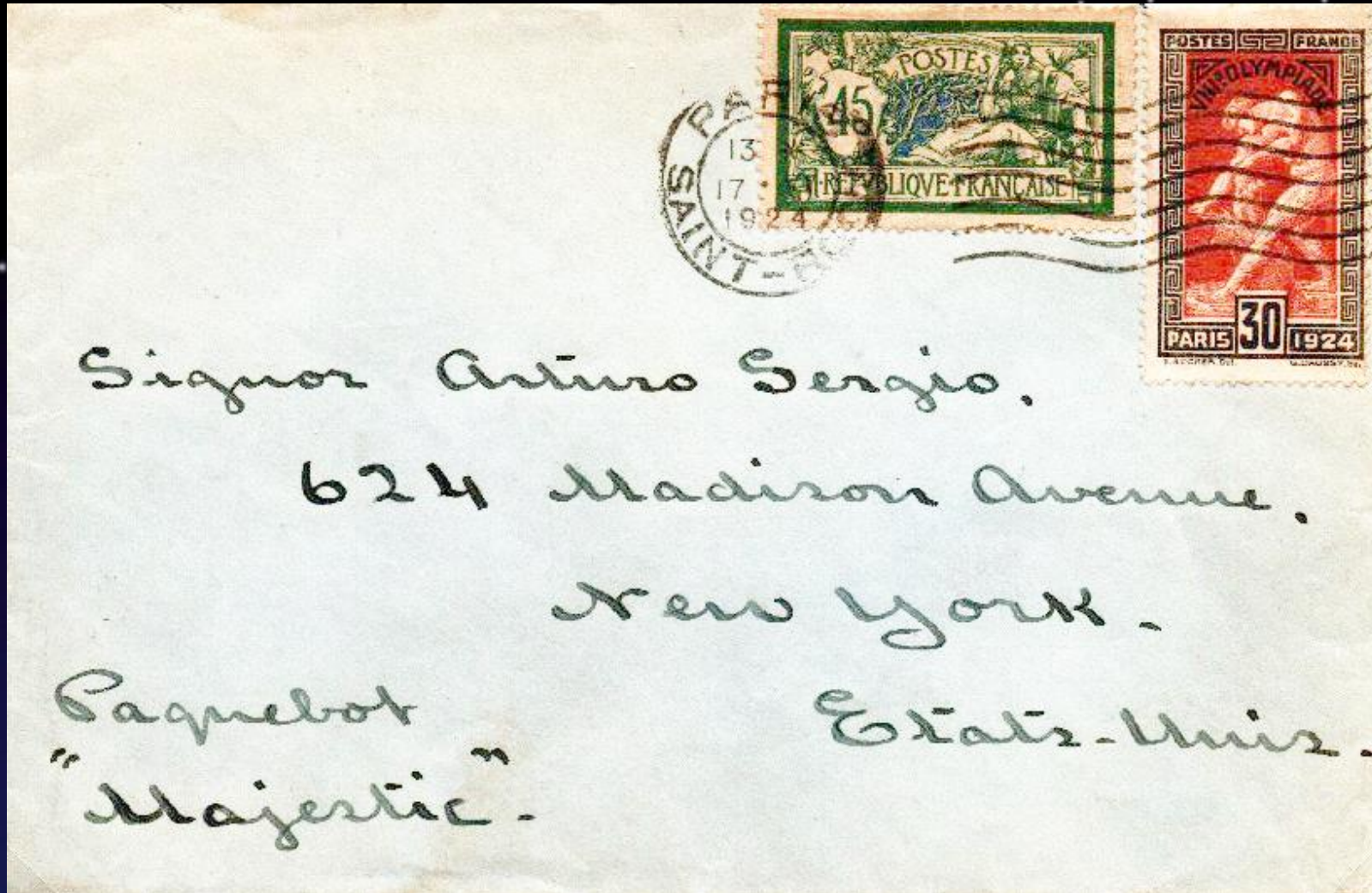


domestic registered + insured letter

Total Postage = 1.25 Francs
25 centimes letter rate
60 centimes registration fee
40 centimes insurance fee
(for items valued to 1,000 Francs)

Paid for by
2 x 30 centimes
50 centimes
15 centimes

And another...



international letter
(sent via surface 'boat' rate)

Total Postage = 75 centimes
0-15 grams

Paid for by:
30 centimes
45 centimes

to the USA

And another...



military airmail
(letter sent free of postage,
but airmail surcharge required)

Total Postage = 50 centimes

Paid for by:
30 centimes
2 x 10 centimes

Sometimes use of the stamp(s) overpaid a rate.



domestic letter
25 centimes (< 20 g)

overpaid by 5 centimes

And another...



domestic registered letter

85 centimes correct rate
25 centimes letter rate (< 20 g)
60 centimes registration fee

paid for with
3 x 30 centimes

overpaid by 5 centimes

And another.



international postcard

15 centimes correct rate

Paid for with
30 centimes

overpaid by 15 centimes

This set, of course, was issued to promote the VIII Olympiad in Paris from May 4 - July 27 featuring 44 teams, 3,088 athletes and 126 events. The Olympic Village had its own post office, 7 mail boxes and its own hand cancel.



opening day Olympic Village cancel of May 5 on cover to Czechoslovakia

Records show 10,000 30 centime Milo stamps were supplied to the Olympic Village Post Office along with the others from the set.



correct 45 centimes postcard rate to Germany

Athletes, trainers and officials took time to write home.



domestic registered letter

Total Postage = 1.05 Francs

45 centimes letter rate
(for 20-50 grams)

60 centimes registration fee



posted July 25, days before the close of the Olympic Village on July 28

reverse

Postcards proved to be popular souvenirs to Olympians and commoners alike, showing Dumont's 1768 work and Pierre Puget's earlier marble death sculpture of Milo of 1682.

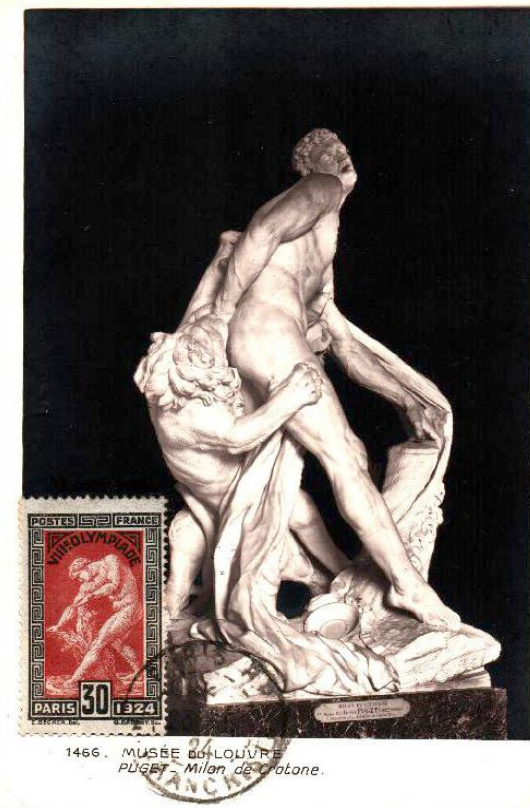


Dumont sculpture



Edme DUMONT (1720-1775) — Milon de Crotone

Dumont sculpture



1466. MUSÉE DU LOUVRE
PUGET — Milon de Crotone.

Puget sculpture

That's not quite the end of the story...

French stamps were overprinted for use in Lebanon and Syria, the former Ottoman Empire territory partitioned under mandate of the League of Nations after World War I. So, too, were the four values of the 1924 Olympic issue.



Lebanese stamps were overprinted in two different formats...



... as were
those for
Syria.



Lebanese overprint varieties abound.



"0" in 1.50 has 2 broken points
position 17



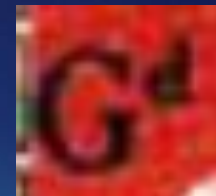
thin G in
"Grand"



inverted



dot in d of "Gd"
position 8



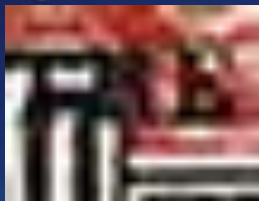
Syrian varieties also exist.



inverted and
doubled



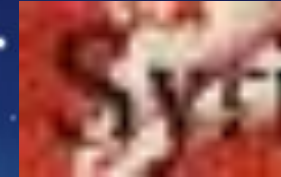
open "R" in Piastre
position 4



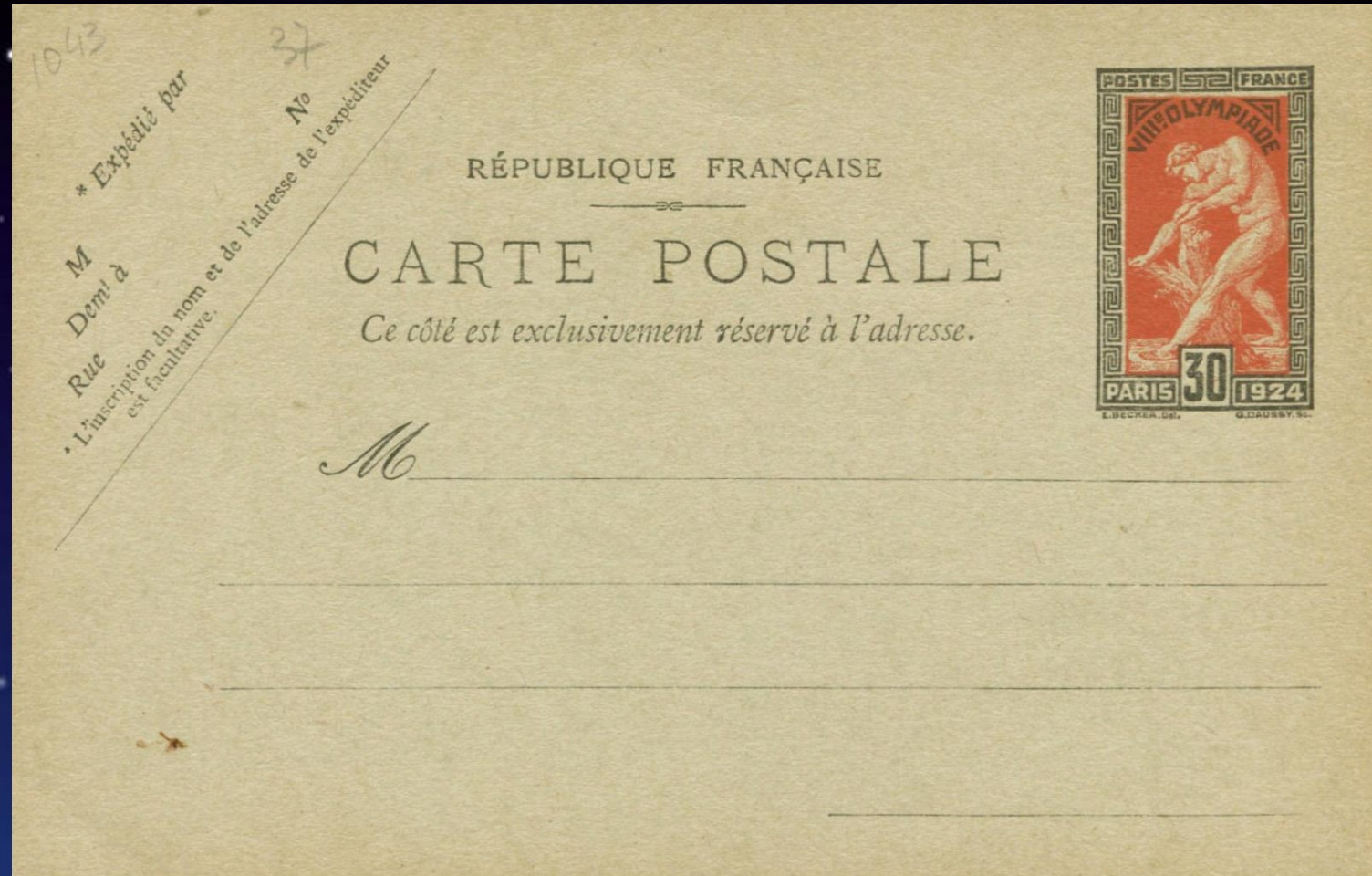
Inverted and thin "S" in Syrie
position 20



thin "S" in Syrie
position 9

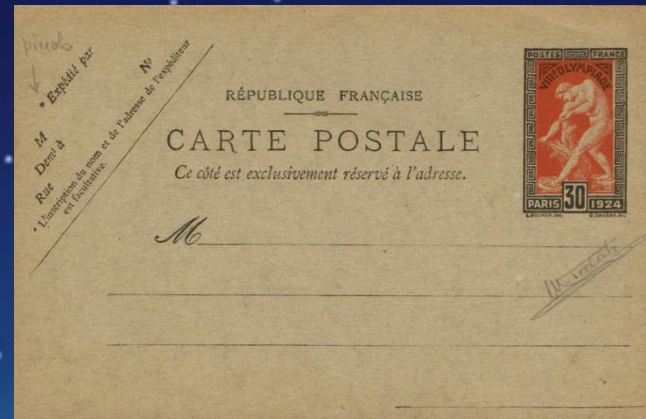


But that's still not the full story, as France also used Milo on the world's first Olympic postal card, issued April 1, 1924.



138 x 92 mm
and variants

The paper stock used for the postcards was inconsistent in shade and weight, as many types have been documented.

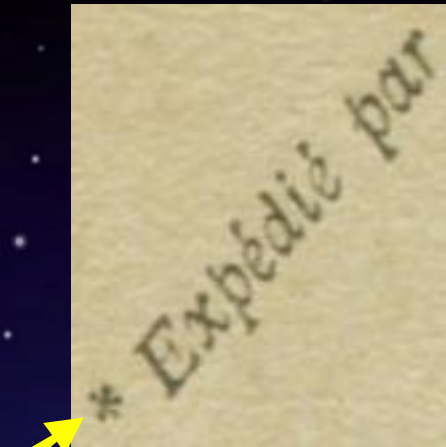
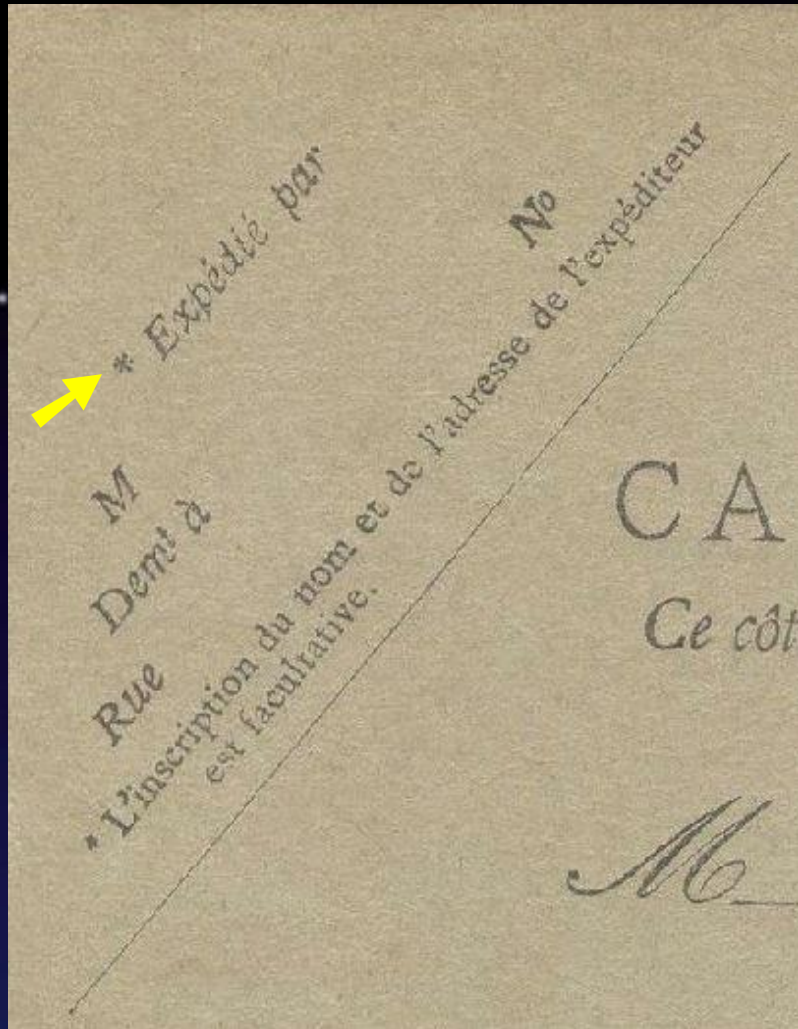


Similar to the stamps, these were produced using two colors, applied separately. Alignment and shade differences abound.

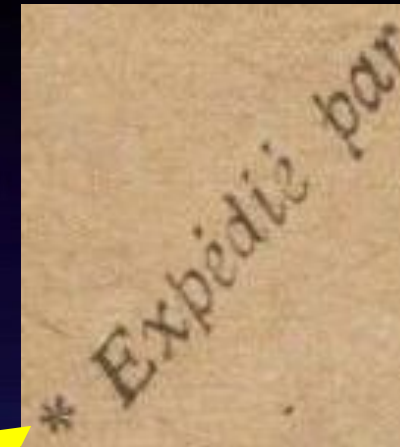


two text/frame and vignette shades

There are also three distinct “star” settings in the upper right.



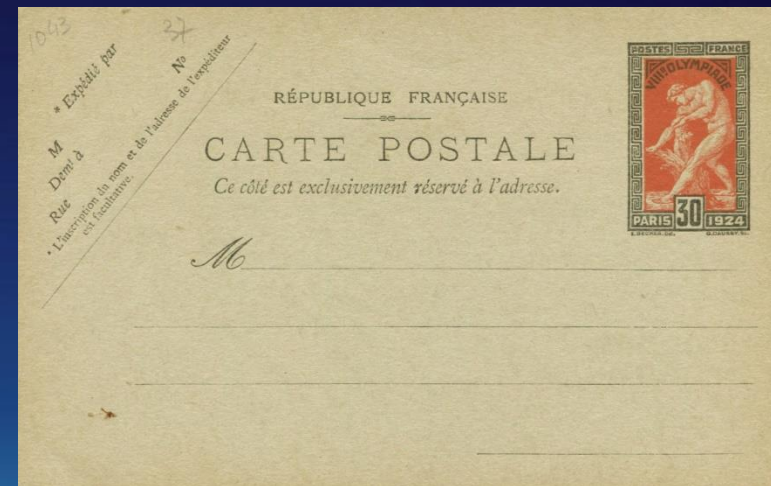
5 points closed



6 points closed



6 points open



Before the April 1, 1924 postal rate increase, 30 centimes paid the international postcard rate. After that date the rate increased to 45 centimes, except to Switzerland (20 cent.).

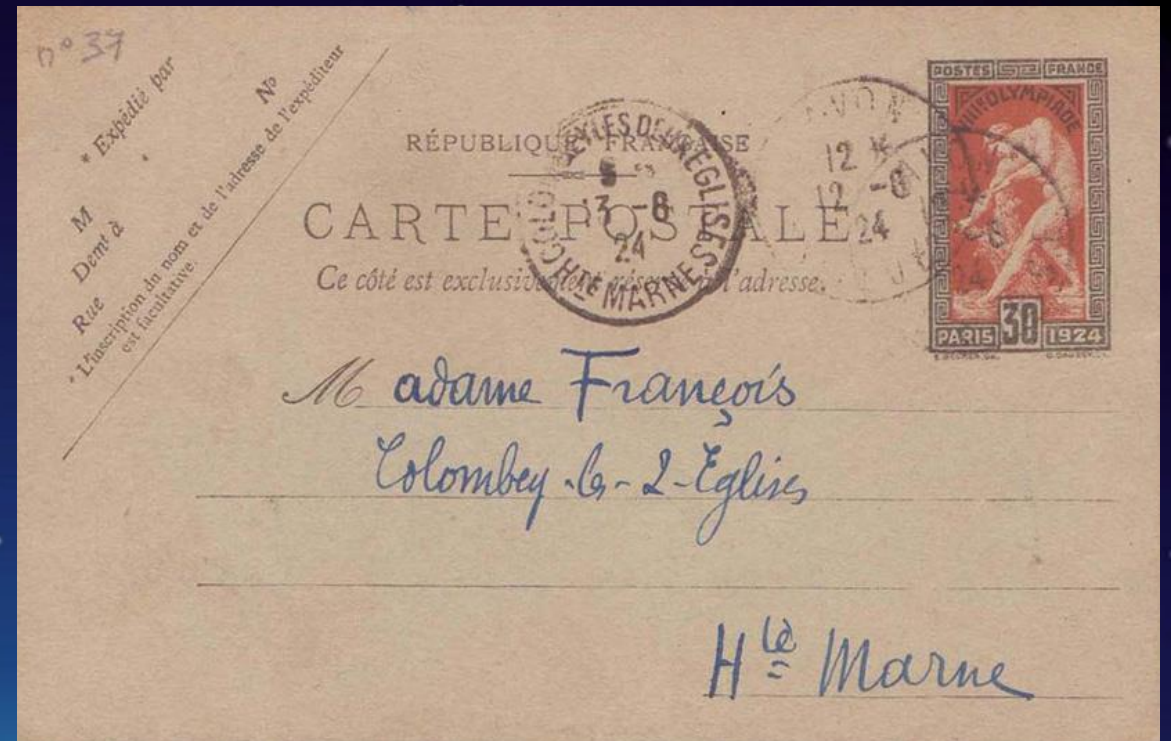
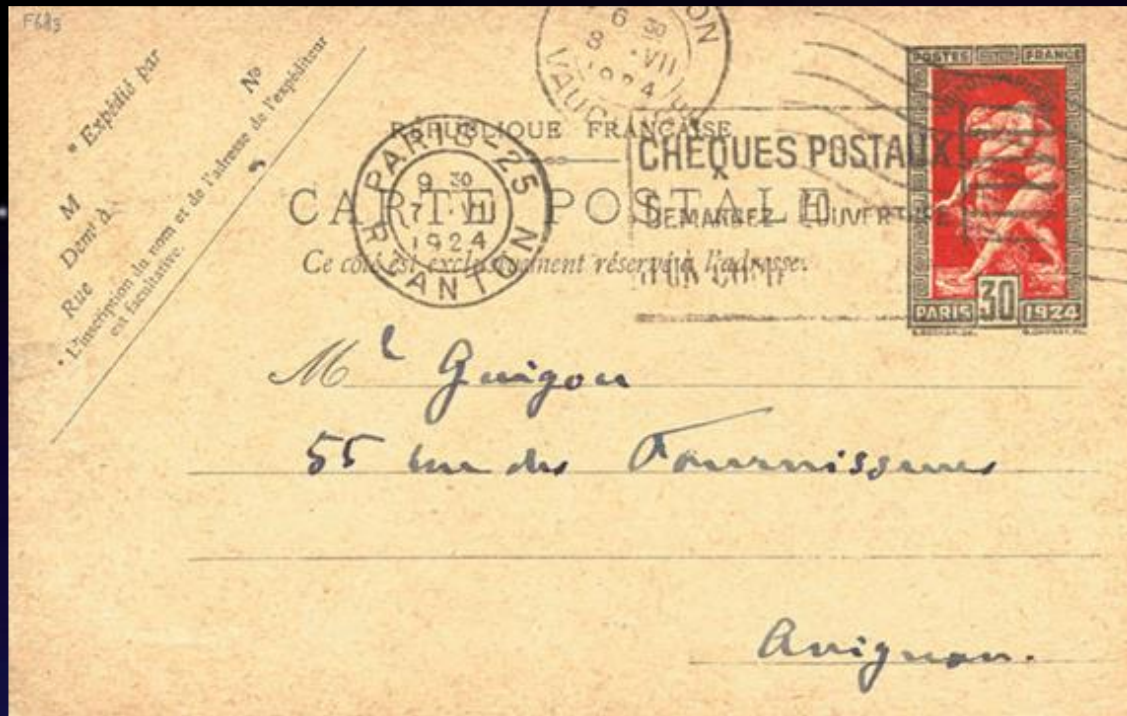


to Germany



to the Netherlands

The French domestic postcard rate after April 1 was 20 centimes, but countrymen happily(?) overpaid the postage.



Epilogue

France printed compound single-color trials in 1925, including the Milo stamp and others doubling each on the sheetlet in various colors.




as produced, but with trimmed margins



error in lower right Milo tablet
wrong year: 1824, not 1924



These were printed on thin gummed paper. The Milo design is not that of the final as-issued stamp. It lacks the designer and engraver's name just below the design  and the year in the lower right tablet is wrong, 1824 and not 1924.





I hope you enjoyed this presentation created to honor the 100th anniversary of this stamp issue and the remarkable 1924 Paris Olympics.

