



Representations of the Blueberry in Romanian Philately

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author ALP designed the study, performed the literature searches, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author BVC managed the analyses of the study. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/ACRI/2021/v21i1130226

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Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/66050>

Received 23 January 2021

Accepted 01 April 2021

Published 08 April 2021

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Forest products play a vital role in our lives in many ways we can imagine. Berries, for example, are still an important source of food, being of real use in defining a healthy diet, as well as in natural medicine. But does blueberry have other roles at the community level? Can the blueberry be viewed from another perspective? Here are some questions we aim to answer. In this context, to show that there have been and still are concerns regarding the highlighting of the role of berries in the community, the present study is proposed to analyze their entire Romanian philatelic history. As such, the first approach is limited to the philatelic appearances of the blueberry (postage stamps, "first day of issue" envelopes, maximum postcards, occasional envelopes), appearances identified within the various platforms with philatelic content. The identified philatelic pieces for the reference period 1964-2020, show that there have been and are concerns for the promotion of a healthy diet, a diet that can be thought of in a balanced way by including the consumption of berries, including blueberries.

Keywords: *Berries; blueberries; forest benefits; natural products; Romanian philatelic issues.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFR : Romanian Philatelists Association
CMPR : Catalog of Romanian Postage Stamps, 1984
CMR : Catalog of Romanian Postage Stamps, 1974
LP : Romfilatelia Philatelic List
Mi : Michel Catalog (Germany)
Sc or S : Scott Catalog (USA)
Sgor G : Stanley Gibbons Catalog (England)
Yt : Yvert et Tellier Catalog (France)
Zm or Z : Zumstein Catalog (Switzerland)

1. INTRODUCTION

The berries, which color the meadows and clearings of the forests every summer, were eaten by humans even before the advent of agriculture and are still an important source of food for many species of animals [1]. Berries are some of the healthiest foods that should not be missing from your daily diet. In general, they are small, round fruits of various colors (especially blue, red, or purple), sweet or slightly sour [2]. It is recommended to eat berries because they are an important source of vitamins (vitamin C), minerals (manganese), antioxidants (anthocyanins, resveratrol), fiber, etc.

Due to its low calorie and carbohydrate content, the consumption of berries is recommended both for patients with diabetes and in the composition of low-calorie diets for overweight/obese patients [3]. Due to its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, the consumption of berries is also recommended for patients with oncological, cardiovascular, and skin protection conditions.

Blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus* L., or with the Romanian popular name: blackberry, mountain blueberry, currant, mountain cranberry) is a bushy shrub in the *Ericaceae* family. It can be found in Europe, North Asia, Greenland, western Canada, and the western United States. It is a subshrub branch, with a green stem, 30-60 cm long, with angular branches. The leaves are short, petiolate, small and oval, dentate and green on both sides. The flowers are reddish-green, white, or pink with the petals joined in the shape of a bell, arranged 1-2 at the axil of the leaves. It blooms in May-June. The fruit is called blueberry and is a dark blue or blue brumaria berry, round in shape, 0.5-0.6 cm in diameter, with a pleasant, sweet and sour taste. It can be propagated by sowing or by cuttings, obtained from the lateral branches that are rooted in peat with the sand mixture. For this, moderate humidity and a temperature of 18-25°C must be ensured.

Blueberries grow in alpine regions, at an altitude of 2,000-2,500 m, especially on shady and humid slopes, through coniferous forests, mountain meadows, rocks, and siliceous soils. Leaves and fruits are the organs used in human nutrition. The leaves contain tannins, arbutin, hydroquinone, and neomirtilin, while the fruits contain tannin, pectin, sugars, provitamin A, vitamin C, organic acids (citric, malic, oxalic, succinic, lactic) [3]. Blueberry leaves and fruits have astringent properties due to the tannin. They have antibacterial activity (favorably modifying the pathogenic intestinal flora) and antidiarrheal. With an important content of antioxidants, blueberries are fruits that should not be missing from the daily diet, whether they are eaten fresh, frozen, or used in the form of tea.

It is recommended for treatment of diseases associated with diabetes, gout, enterocolitis, intestinal parasitosis, urinary tract infections, and uremia, as a minor antiseptic and diuretic, as well as in rheumatism, dermatological diseases, peripheral circulatory disorders, and chronic bleeding ulcers. Especially the leaves are those that are part of dietary tea.

Blueberries are also used to make a fairly popular alcoholic beverage, or cakes and other sweets. Blueberries are an important source of vitamins and minerals. Their intake per 100 grams of fresh fruit, as a percentage of the recommended daily dose, is shown in Table 1 [3]. Blueberries have a glycemic index of 53 and the glycemic load is 6.4.

A related species is the red-blueberry [4], which is an indigenous shrub, with numerous underground stems from which emerge aerial, cylindrical branches up to 30 cm high. In our country, it grows in the mountains in the coniferous area. The flowers are white or light pink, fragrant, grouped 2-6 at the top of the stem. It blooms in May-June. The fruits are spherical berries, at first ripe and ripe to taste. Cranberries

are well preserved in fresh water and are consumed in the form of compote, jam, sherbet, juice, and pickles. It is also used when making wine. Cranberry tea has an effective action in combating kidney and urinary tract diseases. The whole plant is rich in tannins and can be used for tanning and dyeing. Cranberry leaves are sought after in medicine.

Berries can be eaten both fresh and frozen. Consumption of frozen fruits is a good option because most of the time they are frozen immediately after harvest, thus preserving the intake of nutrients [3]. Among the most famous berries are blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, currants, etc. Their importance in food is materialized from a philatelic point of view by the reappearance of the subject in different philatelic issues that appeared at different time intervals. This easily led to the possibility of making thematic philately by postage stamp enthusiasts.

The present study aims to reveal and describe the philatelic pieces (postage stamps, First Day Covers, maximum postcards and other materials) that have in the foreground the blueberry. The study comes to supplement the possibility of representing blueberries. Not so much from the perspective of medicine, pharmacy, nutrition, agriculture, or economy (data are well known in the literature), but from an old, and yet new perspective (that of thematic philately). This promises and allows a different analysis, in which the emphasis falls partially on communication and applied ecology.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The documentation for the present study was made starting from the chosen topic (berries and blueberries). Based on this, the main philatelic issues presenting berries were identified and indexed. After identifying them in the philatelic catalogs, a short technical presentation was made, after which we investigated several online databases to validate the existence of philatelic pieces over time (maxims, postal covers, occasional envelopes, etc.). Knowing the postal role of stamps, we also tried to identify the circulations that were stamped with such postage stamps and we highlighted the post-philatelic aspect that they brought.

Platforms such as Allnumis, Colnect, Delcampe, eBay, Oasis, StampWorld, and wopa-plus were consulted in an attempt to find philatelic pieces with blueberries. Also, where the information was

little or not exactly what the piece explicitly described, the help of collectors and philatelists was used. The information received from them was subsequently validated by the specialized catalogs with philatelic content, described in the Abbreviations section.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Romanian Postage Stamps Illustrating Blueberry, 1964-2020

From a philatelic point of view, the Romanian postal administration issued three postage stamps with the blueberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) in 1964, 1993, and 2020, and one with its close relative - the cranberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*) in 2001, all reproduced in Fig. 1 [5-7].

One of the best postage stamp makers that Romania had between 1956 and 1977 was Aida Tasgian-Constantinescu. At the competition for the layout of the postage stamps from 1964, she took second place with the model of the 8-stamp series "Berries" (LP #598), which brought her a prize of 3,000 lei [8].

Published on 20.12.1964, the philatelic issue had a circulation of 500,000 series, being printed in offset system on coated paper. The stamps have dimensions of 28x39 mm and the lace of 13¼:14¼ units [6]. Blueberry is reproduced on the stamp with a face value of 1.20 lei (see Fig. 1a), being the fifth value in the series [9,10]. In the graphical composition, there are two branches full of fruits, and in the background, in the upper left corner, it can be seen a butterfly. In philatelic catalogs, it is indexed with the following catalog codes: CMPR '74 #2457, CMPR '84 #2541, Yv #2088, Mi #2365, G #3233, S #1707 and Z #2427 [11-14].

Graphic designer Aurel Popescu worked for almost three decades on the layout of Romanian postage stamps. Throughout his career he has approached a wide range of topics, his achievements being well appreciated from a graphic point of view [8]. The last issue modeled by him was "Medicinal Plants" (LP #1310) published on March 30, 1993, consisting of 6 stamps. The series was printed in deep-print (tiefdruck) on chrome-gummed paper, in finished sheets of 25 postage stamps, with a total circulation of 360,000 complete series. The stamps have the size of 33x48 mm and the lace of 13½ units (perforated specimens 13¼ and 13¾ are also known) [7]. The value of 30 lei (see Fig. 1b), the fourth in the series [15,16], was

printed in a circulation of 600,000 copies and illustrates two blueberry twigs, one with flowers and one with fruit. In the philatelic catalogs, it is indexed by CMPR '95 #5047, Yv #4060, Mi #4869, G #5504, S #3807 [11-14].

At the beginning of his career as a layout designer, the graphic designer and painter Sorin Florian Țârlea debuted in 2001 with his first issue of postage stamps [8]. "Berries" (LP #1547) is composed of 4 stamps [7], and the value of 11,500 lei is illustrated by the red blueberry (see Fig. 1c) [17,18], with a circulation of 331,450 copies. The series was printed on chrome paper in five colors and paged in finished sheets of 50 pieces. The stamps have the size of 27x42 mm and are laced 13¼. In philatelic catalogs, it is indexed with the following catalog codes: CMPR '2009 #5753, Yv #4682, Mi #5570, G #6197, and S #4445.

One of the most prolific contemporary designers of S.C. Romfilatelia S.A., George Ursachi is the winner of numerous awards at international computer graphics competitions [8]. In 2020, he successfully modeled the philatelic issue "Bears" (LP #2309) published on December 3. The series was printed in offset system in 4 colors on chrome-gummed paper, and paginated in a sheet of 32 stamps + tête-bêche and tabs, and a mini-sheet of 4 stamps with illustrated cuff [7].

Blueberry appears on the postage stamp of 5 lei (Fig. 1d) [19,20], as a decorative element, in the form of three berries positioned in the lower right corner. The connection between blueberries and bears is given by the fact that these fruits are part of the summer-autumn diet of the omnivorous mammal. The stamp measures 48x33 mm, is the third value in the series, and was printed in a print run of 23,720 copies [7,21].

3.2 First Day Covers (FDCs) Illustrating Blueberry, 1964-2020

Even if in the philatelic catalogs consulted there are no references regarding the existence of some FDCs at the 1964 issue, on the philatelic trade sites, we managed to identify two models of the two envelopes related to the series, which we reproduced in Fig. 2a and Fig. 2b [22-24]. The difference between the two models consists in the application of the stamp. If in the first variant the stamp "first day of issue" is applied linearly, in the second it is applied inclined, at an angle of 45°. For the 1993 and 2001 issues, the philatelic catalogs mention the existence of two FDCs that we reproduced in Fig. 2c (3,300 numbered series) and Fig. 2d [25,26]. For the 2020 philatelic issue, 202 envelopes equipped with the issue's stamps were made, numbered, and canceled with the "first-day" stamp [27].

Table 1. Intake of vitamins and minerals per 100 grams of fresh fruit, as a percentage of the recommended daily dose [3]

Vitamin and Mineral	mg	% recommended daily dose for adult male	% recommended daily dose for adult female
Vitamin C	9,7	11	13
Vitamin K	19,3	16	21
Vitamin E	0,6	-	-
Vitamin B ₆	0,1	-	-
Mn (manganese)	0,3	13	17
Cu (copper)	0,1	-	-



(a) *Vaccinium myrtillus*, "Berries", 20.12.1964, Bucharest



(b) *Vaccinium myrtillus*, "Medicinal plants", 30.03.1993, Bucharest



(c) *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*, "Berries", 12.04.2001, Bucharest



(d) *Vaccinium myrtillus*, "Bears", 03.12.2020, Bucharest

Fig. 1. Blueberry represented on various philatelic issues, 1964-2020, Romania



a) Variant A of the FDCs of the "Forest fruits" or "Berries" philatelic issue, 1964 [22,23]



b) Variant B of the FDCs of the "Forest fruits" or "Berries" philatelic issue, 1964 [24]



c) The FDCs of the "Medicinal Plants" philatelic issue, 1993 [25]



d) The FDCs of the "Berries" philatelic issue, 2001 [26]



e) The FDC of the "Bears" philatelic issue, 2020 [27]

Fig. 2. FDCs of blueberry-containing philatelic issues, 1964-2020

3.3 Post-Philatelic Aspects: Tariffs and Circulations

From the postal point of view, the tariff of 1.20 lei corresponded, at the date of putting into circulation the first indexed issue (1964), with the equivalent value of the recommendation fee for an internal letter. For this reason, these stamps will be found on correspondence pieces accompanied by other fixed or mobile stamps [28].

In Fig. 3a was identified a recommended "other localities" letter with acknowledgment of receipt (A.R. stamp), sent to 27.05.1968, on the Horezu - Sibiu route [29]. The postage is composed as follows: 55 bani - the equivalent of a letter "other locality" weighing up to 20 grams resulting from the fixed mark (RSR coat of arms) of the postal code 215/1967 with semiillustration Peleş Castle in Sinaia, 1 leu - "receipt certificate" for which the stamp with the atomic reactor from the usual issue "Domains of economic activity" (LP #498) put into circulation in 1960 and 1.20 lei was applied - "recommendation fee" for which it was applied blueberry stamp from 1964.

The other identified piece reproduced in Fig. 3b represents philatelic postage in the amount of 5,335 lei related to an external recommendation (3,410 lei) of a small package weighing between 101-250 g (1,925 lei), sent in 1995 on the relationship Romania-People's Republic of China [30].

In 1993, at the date of putting into circulation, the issue of medicinal plants, the tariff of 30 lei corresponded to the sending of a postcard (simple or illustrated) abroad. In a short time, inflation would also leave its mark on the postal

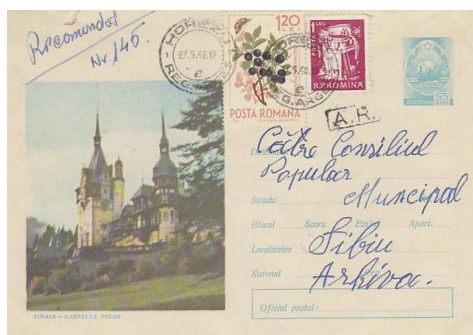
services, which were experiencing galloping tariff increases. In the next two years alone, tariffs have already quadrupled, and things will get worse in the next period. Unfortunately, from the queries we made in the various philatelic databases, we did not identify stamped circulation of this postage stamp.

On 12.04.2001, a tariff of 11,500 lei was valid for the international postage of a simple letter, weighing up to 20 grams, and an air chart or the minimum fee for postage insufficiency. In December 2020, the tariff of 5 lei corresponded to the sending of a nonpriority external correspondence weighing up to 50 grams. This time, too, we did not identify cross-border traffic on the parts in question.

3.4 Philatelic Effects Illustrating Blueberry

Fig. 4 reproduced a series of maxims identified on different philatelic sites. With the postage stamp of 1.20 lei, we identified a maximum illustrated made in Maramureș (see Fig. 4a) [31], obliterated with the day stamp of the Cavnic P.O. on April 2, 1968.

Using as support the illustrated postcards modeled by Dan Țăran, the philatelists achieved different maxims using the stamp of the philatelic exhibition "Botanica '93", Bucharest (see Fig. 4b) [32], and the one made on the occasion of "Forest month '95", Jitia (Vrancea) (see Fig. 4c) [33]. Maximafilatelist Alexandru Antonache, using the wave of illustrated postcards "Allex Collection" made in 2020 a beautiful maxim with the brown bear of the brand with the nominal of 5 lei which was flashed with the stamp on the first day of the issue.



(a) Registered "other localities" letter with acknowledgment of receipt [29]

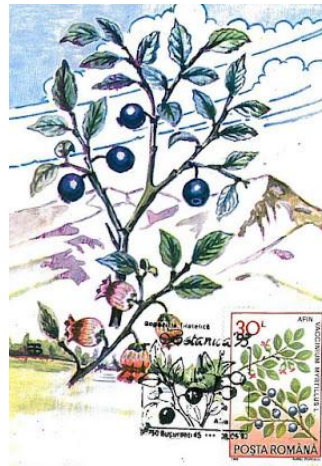


(b) Registered external letter with acknowledgment of receipt [30]

Fig. 3. Correspondence stamped with blueprints representing the blueberry [29]



(a) "Berries", 02.04.1968, Cavnic (Maramureș) [31]



(b) "Medicinal Plants", 28.03.1993, philatelic exhibition "Botanica", Bucharest [32]



(c) "Medicinal Plants", 15.03.1995, philatelic exhibition "Luna Pădurii", Jilia (Vrancea) [33]



(d) "Bears", 03.12.2020, Bucharest [34]

Fig. 4. Maxims made with postage stamps representing the blueberry

The philatelic associations in the country have achieved a series of philatelic effects bearing the blueberry brand. If in the period 1993-1996, the value of 30 lei did not enjoy postal use, the marks were successfully used to make occasional envelopes. However, a thematic connection of the brand with the semi-illustration of the envelope or the marked event was not always made. At the beginning of 1994, the philatelic exhibition "Nature Protection" took place in Suceava. For each day of the exhibition, a thematic envelope and a special stamp were made. Monday, January 24, was dedicated to blueberries, the philatelic piece made (Fig. 5a) having a triple concordance: the semi-illustration of the envelope - and the postage stamp - the model of the special stamp [35]. To respect the

postal tariffs of the time, an additional stamp was applied on the back of the envelope, with the nominal value of 5 lei from the usual issue of "Hotels and chalets (I)", also canceled with the stamp of the exhibition. Thus, the total postage became 35 lei, equivalent to the price of an illustrated postcard sent internally.

Towards the end of 1996, the philatelists from Cluj wanted to pay homage to the German beekeeper Johann Noichl, who, at the age of 70, obtained, for the first time in the world, a new species of bee without a needle. The new species was obtained after years of research and has its origins in the Australian bee species "Carnica", known as a very less aggressive species. Therefore, a series of occasional



a) Envelope canceled with the stamp of the philatelic exhibition "Nature Protection" held in Suceava in 1994 [35]

b) Envelope with special stamp "Bee without needle" applied in Cluj-Napoca in 1996 [36]

Fig. 5. Occasional stamped envelopes with blueberry stamps

envelopes and a special stamp were made, which was applied on December 12. Some of the envelopes were stamped with a stamp of 30 lei (Fig. 5b), having on the back additional postage of 40 lei [36], to adjust the postal rate in force in order to send a letter "loco", simple, up to 20 grams.

Each collector invests in his own collection time, work, and a lot of money. In addition to all this, he invests a large part of his soul so that, in the end, he, others, or even his descendants can enjoy a well-done thing. Unfortunately, "blinded" by his passion, he never thinks that, in all this long journey, he could be fooled in his good faith. Not once has the piece in his collection turned out to be anything other than what it appears to be. The most experienced, however, want their pieces to have an element of authenticity that gives them solitude: the postage stamp that certifies the actual circulation of the piece. Those that cannot prove authenticity are considered souvenirs, and among experienced philatelists, they are treated as such and are not preferred in the exhibition collections.

Unfortunately, in Romania, such practices have occurred over time and they still happen. Hundreds of envelopes were circulated and put up for sale at philatelic fairs with occasional stamps not approved or not used under the legislation in force, in the post offices on the date inscribed on them. In this sense, in 1995 Aurel Dârnu investigated the magazine "Philately" no. 7-8 / 95, a similar case was presented at the Steering Committee meeting and then at the F.F.R. in Brașov by the representative of A.F. Hunedoara, Mrs. Erzilia Fara. She drew attention

to the existence of pirate stamps that some fraudulently apply on behalf of others, presenting in front of everyone zinc made in Bucharest, on the occasion of the exhibition "Month of the Forest '95", sent to the Post Office no. 2 of Petrila to be used as a thematic stamp on March 15. However, at the date of the congress (May 28), zinc was new, unassembled, and therefore unused. And yet, at the philatelic fair in Brașov, hundreds of envelopes and maxims obliterated with this stamp were found for sale. The ensuing journalistic investigation revealed that some of the six stamps made on this occasion are undesirable, and the pieces obliterated with them should not be accepted in philatelic exhibits. Such a stamp is also the one shown in Fig. 4b which officially does not exist even if hundreds of pieces were sold at fairs in Brașov, Bucharest (and other places).

4. CONCLUSION

The stamp, by its nature, is made and put into circulation to postage the correspondence sent through the postal administration. Its nominations are closely related to the tariffs charged following the provisions of the International Postal Union. Unfortunately, a practice that is maintained even today by the Romanian administration that aims to issue the postage stamp is to differentiate the circulation, a small part of the stamps out of print reaching the post office of the postage service itself for correspondence.

Most of it is intended for philatelic use, thousands of brands being canceled by the complacent or sold through philatelic stores. Postage stamp enthusiasts and lovers purchase these stamps to

create philatelic products (maxims or occasional envelopes) or to stamp their correspondence with less usual pieces. That is why we recommend the readers of these lines to check their correspondence (from Romania) and to let us know if they have postage stamps belonging to the topic proposed in this article.

Strictly speaking, the pieces representing blueberries are relatively few, even if we are talking about a generous reference period, from 1964 until the beginning of 2021. So here is a serious limitation in the study. Moreover, few philatelic issues refer to berries in general, this theme can still be exploited by the Romanian postal administration. However, we would like to recommend such an initiative because the theme of berries can be easily related to the idea of healthy eating, where we found again few philatelic occurrences.

DISCLAIMER

The products used for this research are commonly and predominantly use products in our area of research and country. There is absolutely no conflict of interest between the authors and producers of the products because we do not intend to use these products as an avenue for any litigation but for the advancement of knowledge. Moreover, the research was not funded by the producing company, rather it was funded by the personal efforts of the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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