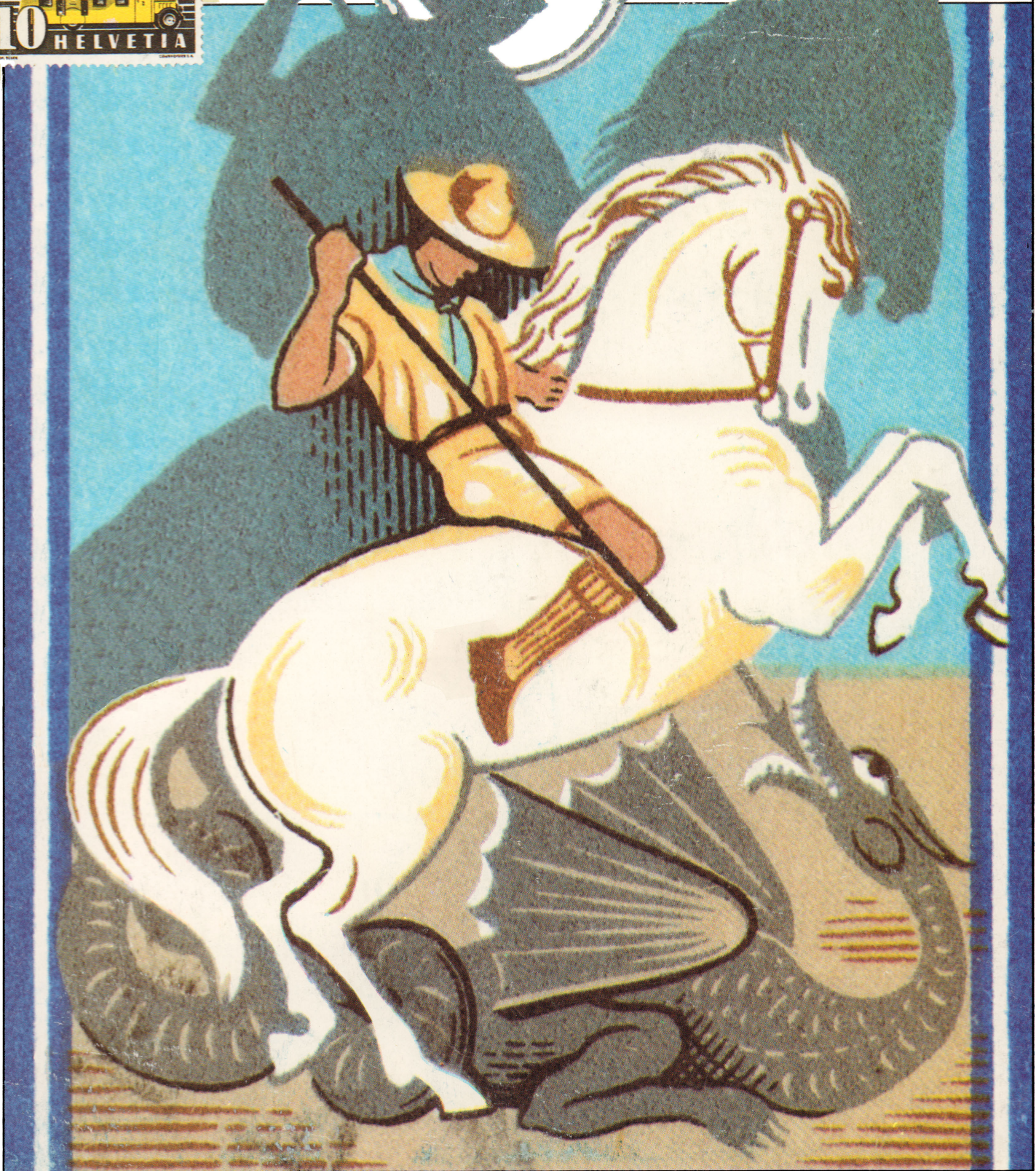


Stamp Monthly

WITH SCOTT CATALOGUE UPDATE

Riding the
mail bus

Dragons: a fire-
breathing topical!



Stamp Monthly

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ON THE COVER

A ghostly figure of St. George shadows a Boy Scout on horseback on Greece Scott 669. The continuing battle of "good vs. evil" lives on... in stamp collecting. See page 6.



IN THIS ISSUE

Come ride with us in a brightly colored Swiss mail bus as we travel across the mountains. Switzerland and other countries have postally honored this unique mode of transportation. See page 16.





Dragons

A FIRE-BREATHING TOPICAL

by Malcolm M. Ferguson

The Archangel loved heights. Standing on the summit of the tower that crowned the church, wings unspread, sword uplifted, the devil crawling beneath, and the cock, symbol of eternal vigilance, perched on his mailed foot, Saint Michael held a place of his own in heaven and on earth..." Thus began a classic book on medieval architecture, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, by Henry Adams.

Just over 1,000 years ago, on the rocky islet of Mont-Saint-Michel off the French coast, an architectural wonder began to rise in honor of the archangel Michael and his battle with Satan, in the form of a dragon. France shows this monastery on Scott 249, and re-engraved on Scott 250. Later, in the millennial year 1966, France pictured in slightly different form this summit statue of the embattled duo (Scott 1156).

Here is the quintessential dungeons and dragons story. Dungeons: for by this battle,

Satan was dethroned and sent to incarceration in Hell. And incidentally, in the case of Mont-St. Michel, the abbey was used as a prison in the 18th and 19th centuries until 1863, when extensive restoration began and the statue of St. Michael was emplaced.

Dragons: for the story echoes and re-echoes, in a second St. Michael Mount of

the coast of England's Cornwall, and in the stamps of Belgium (Scott 79-81). An outstanding version of this allegory is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, from the 1660's.

A parallel story is that of St. George and the dragon. St. George himself was claimed by several countries at various times, preferring a mortal to an archangel.

One legend has him born in Coventry, England, where at birth he bore significant marks: a dragon on his breast, a garter round one of his legs, and a blood-red cross on his right arm. He was stolen in infancy by "the weird lady in the woods..." When he grew to manhood, he fought against the Saracens. In Libya he heard of a huge dragon, and arrived in time to rescue the king's daughter, Sabra. He is pictured slaying the dragon with his lance. In one version he married Sabra and returned to Coventry.

In Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, written in the 1500's, he is the Red Cross Knight. In John



Opposite: 15th century painting of St. George by follower of Konrad Witz.

Left: Latvia's Scott 66 depicts warrior slaying dragon as a political allegory.

OPPOSITE PAGE CREDIT: SEI/ART RESOURCE, NY; KONRAD WITZ: ST. GEORGE

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, he is Christian, slaying the dragon Apollyon.

These versions, which tend to date St. George as a Crusader of around 1089, are responsible for several attractive British stamps, such as the one of George VI designed by Edmond Dulac (Scott 288) and of Elizabeth II (Scott 338-340). This latter series blends legends further, for this is the Welsh dragon to commemorate British Empire and Commonwealth Games at Cardiff. This dragon may have been derived from the standards borne by Roman soldiers.

St. George, too, appears in an earlier version, from 303 A.D., when a St. George of Cappadocia (in modern Turkey) was martyred under Diocletian. In an earlier adventure, it was he who slew the dragon and rescued Princess Sabra.

Perhaps because of this diversity of legends, St. George as dragon-slayer is featured on stamps from various countries. Among these are Belgium (Scott B389), Russia (Scott B8), Liechtenstein (Scott 434),

Romania (Scott 2301, B99-B109) and Greece (Scott 669). The Greek stamp used the theme as a motif for the Boy Scouts. Czechoslovakia (Scott B156-B158) used this to proclaim the country's liberation after World War II.

Great Britain's recent Arthurian stamps could also be readily included in the category of dungeons and dragons. The 17-penny value shows us Merlin the Magician who departed from Camelot when he "fell in a dotage on one of the damosels of the lake hight Nimue." She robbed him of his magic and induced him to open a rocky cave in Cornwall which was then magically closed to become his dungeon. Sir Thomas Malory's Arthurian legend also has two dragons, one being a Questing Beast whom Sir Tristram or Sir Palomides may have encountered. The other is "a Fiendly (not friendly) Dragon" slain by the famous Sir Launcelot. These creatures were sometimes described as "loathly" or "laidly."

Austria, whose stamps are usually attrac-

tive, features on a memorable 1926 semi postal (Scott B71) Siegfried slaying the dragon Fafner. This Teutonic epic is the subject of Wagner's opera. Here is a magic cloak, Siegfried is invulnerable except in one spot between his shoulders, and the dragon's blood has magic properties.

There are other European dragons, with unidentified slayers, in allegory representing the overthrow of one government by another, as in the case of Latvia (Scott 64, etc.). The USSR thus shows the New Russia triumphant (Scott 187). In a folklore theme, in Liechtenstein, the Giant of Guffina wields a dragon-killing sword (Scott 421).

By extension, we might also include the Norwegian dragon boats (Scott 588) or France's stamp showing the struggle against cancer (Scott B110). Perhaps the fantasies of Cervantes' bemused but valiant knight Don Quixote might qualify, if only because the author himself was imprisoned several times in his own adventurous life (Spain Scott 287-296). Then there are other dra-

Great Britain's King George VI looks on as St. George does in the dragon on Scott 288.



gons to be sought: the constellation Draco, the alchemist's hermetical dragons, while others might be found in heraldic designs.

Oriental dragons are somewhat different from the European kind. They are often friendly, representing powerful natural forces, and by implication, protective of the prevailing government — in China, Japan, Shanghai, Vietnam, Laos, and the Ryukyus. Encounters with these magic creatures often involved trickery; cunning rather than bloodshed.

Then, too, there are the cream-puff dragons of stage, dance, puppet shows and television. These are both Oriental and Occidental. Sure enough, if one looks hard enough, there is a Polish television dragon, named Telesfor (Scott 2114).

So there appears to be a certain worldwide inevitability about dragons: they seem to turn up everywhere. As the old maps said, "Here be dragons." Curiously, they are not always the heavies in the story, and they remain a continuing source of fascination. □



Above: at left, Scott 14; a Great Britain regional issue from Wales and Monmouthshire. At right is Vietnam Scott C7. Below: Belgium Scott 79 (left) and Russia Scott B8.

