

When the mediterranean island of Malta joined the euro-zone on January 1 2008, the change in currency meant that new stamps were needed. In 2008 and 2009 stamps with value in both Maltese Pound and Euro were used to let people get used to the new currency.

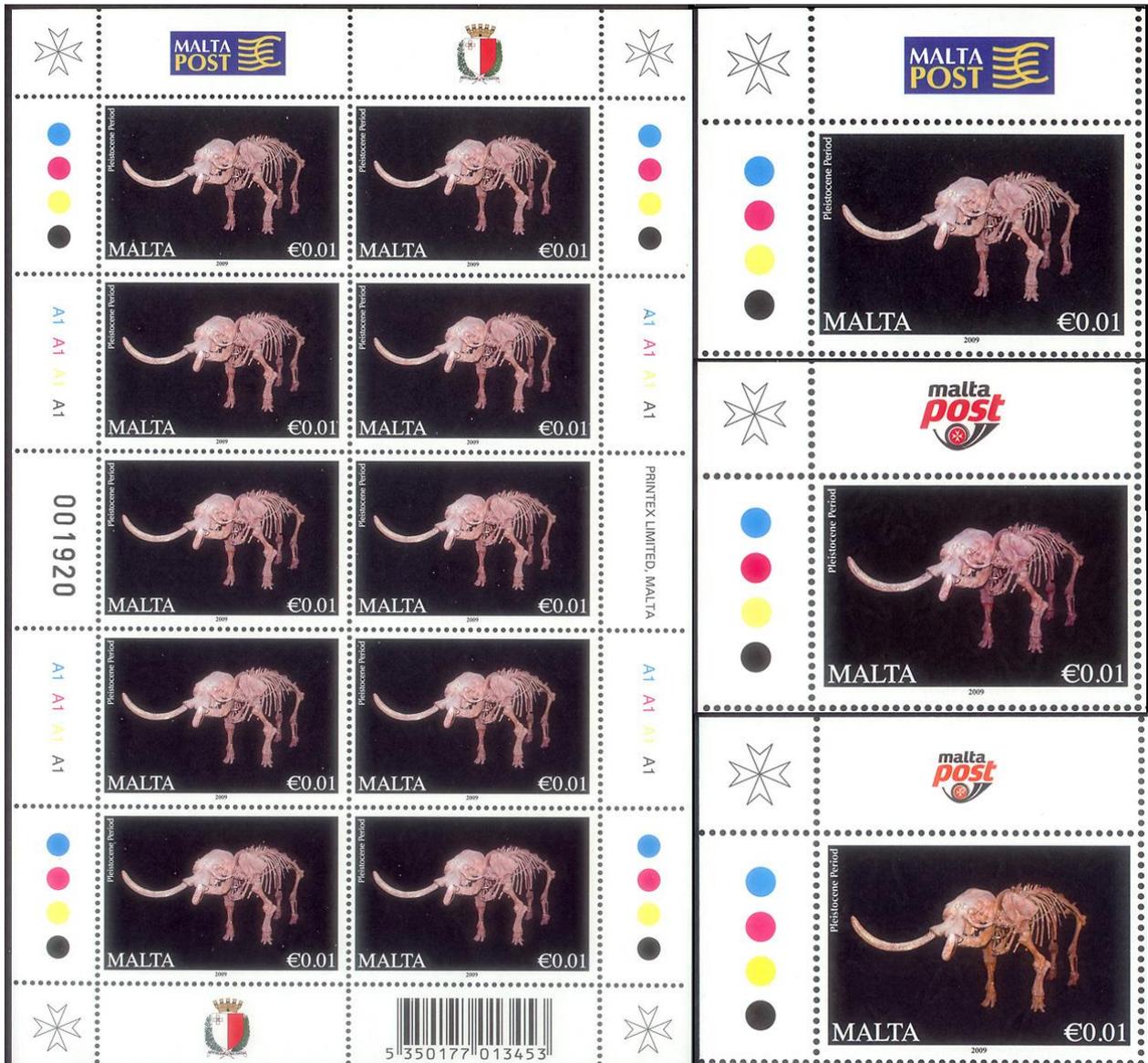
For the new set of definitives with the face value only in euro currency the history of the island was chosen as topic. The oldest subject ('Pleistocene Period') appears on the stamp with the lowest face value (€0,01) and is a fossil skeleton of the dwarf elephant *Elephas falconeri*. For this value 40.000 sheets with ten stamps each were printed, the issue went on sale on December 29 2009.

After a few years, stock of the stamp ran low, and thus another 120.000 sheets were printed in 2011. In 2015 the value was reprinted again, 50.000 sheets this time.

Sheets from the three different printings are easily told apart by looking at the 'MALTA POST' logo above the top left stamp. The 2009 first print has a logo with 'MALTA POST' in a blue rectangle, the 2011 and 2015 reprints have a different logo with 'MALTA' in black, 'POST' in red, with a horn below that. This logo is larger on the 2011 reprint, smaller on the 2015 reprint.

The sheet numbers on the left margin can also be used to tell the printings apart. The 2009 sheets are numbered 000001 to 040000, the 2011 sheets 040001 to 160000, and the 2015 sheets 160001 to 210000.

There are also minor differences in the colour of the fossil skeleton. On the 2009 and 2011 stamps it is reddish-brown, but the 2009 stamp is slightly paler than the 2011 stamp. The skeleton on the 2015 stamp has a more orange-brown colour.

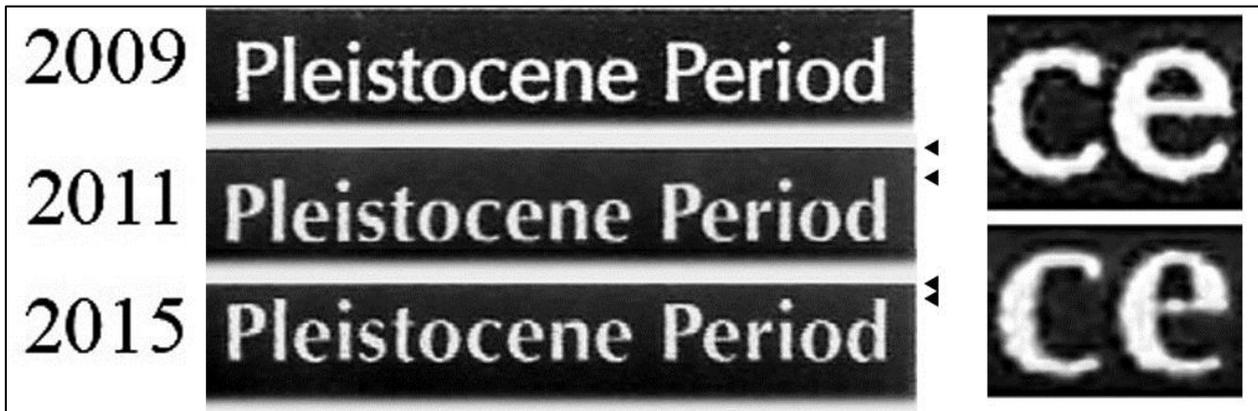


At first glance, the colour is the only difference between single stamps from the three printings. With the help of a hand lens, however, they can be told apart quite easily by looking at the text 'Pleistocene Period' in the upper left corner.

On the 2009 stamp this text is in a font in which the lower tips of letters like 'c', 'e', and 's' are strongly curved and are squared off. In the font on the 2011 and 2015 stamps, the tips of these letters are not as strongly curved and

taper to a point (see details at right in the figure below). This makes the text on the 2009 stamps look heavier, bolder. The line of text is also slightly shorter than on the 2011 and 2015 stamps.

The 2011 and 2015 reprints differ in that the distance between the text and the edge of the design is twice as large on the 2011 stamps. This is indicated by the small triangles in the figure below.



It should be noted that the year of issue, printed in the lower margin of the stamps, cannot be used to tell the reprints apart, it is 2009 on all stamps.

At a stamp fair in December 2015, I had the opportunity to compare a number of postally used copies of this stamp in a dealer stockbook. I had no trouble separating the 2009 copies from the 2011 copies; no copies of the 2015 printing were present. The man next to

me, who collected Malta but did not know about the reprints, was visibly impressed.

This shows that philately need not be about rare and expensive stamps, even a common and recent stamp from a European country can yield interesting surprises.

Thanks to M. Kogan for initiating this article and for sharing information.

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