

The Perfins of **Russia**

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The story of Russian Perfins is complicated and far from complete. At the moment all we have available are bits and pieces of information, some basic contradictions, and a few Perfins about which very little really is known.

I have in my collection some old Russian stamps with the Perfin M.П. over a number. Most of these Perfins are on the higher values of the 1913 Romanoff set. The frequent appearance of the same basic first line with only a change in numeral suggests that the Perfins were used by some kind of government agency rather than by private firms.

With this clue, I set out to discover as much as possible about Russian Perfins. My first lead came from the Honorary Secretary of the British Society of Russian Philately, Mr. John Lloyd. He sent me a copy of an article published some time ago in the society journal. The article, by a Mr. Werth, gave an explanation of the nature of Russian Perfins.

Werth says that because Tzarist Russia had no postage due stamps, postmen collected postage due amounts in cash. Each day the money collected by all the postmen in a given post office was counted and stamps covering the total amount were affixed in a special book. These stamps were perforated with the initials of the appropriate post office. Obviously, the clerks made use of the high value stamps to save time and space, but sometimes kopek values were used to make the amounts come out to the correct fraction of a ruble. The books were kept in the post office valuts, but sometime during the Civil War, some of the books were stolen and the perforated stamps wound up on the market.

According to Werth, then, the Russian Perfins are some sort of official stamps used for internal accounting purposes.

I published this information in Czechoslovakia's Filatelie magazine and quickly received a letter from a Mr. Mazur of Moscow--and he told a totally different story.

Mazur claims that Perfinned stamps were never used to account for postage due money. Instead, he says, stamps equal to the amount paid for such things as registration fees, money order fees, and insurance fees were affixed to forms, countersigned by the sender and the clerk, and then kept in the postal archives for proof in the event of a claim. Originally the stamps--which were mostly the high values--were merely cancelled with the date stamp of the particular post office involved.

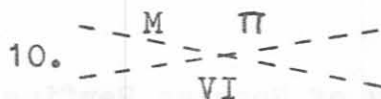
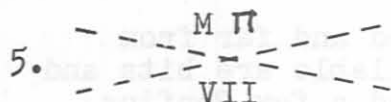
However, says Mazur, a robbery of the postal archives around 1910 led to a change. The robbers removed many of the stamps from the postal

forms, cleaned them, and sold them to unsuspecting people. To prevent a recurrence, the authorities decided to perforate the stamps on all future receipts.

Mazur says that Perfins can be found on Russian stamps from 1911 to 1918 and that Russian collectors know 16 dies.

- 1. M.П./numerals 1 to 69
- 2. П.О./numerals 2 and 3
- 3. X.K.
- 4. B.П.

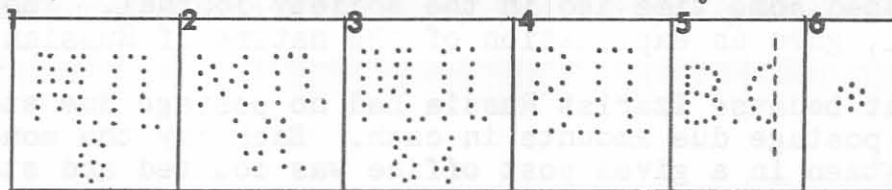
- 8. Г.Р.
- 9. A.K.



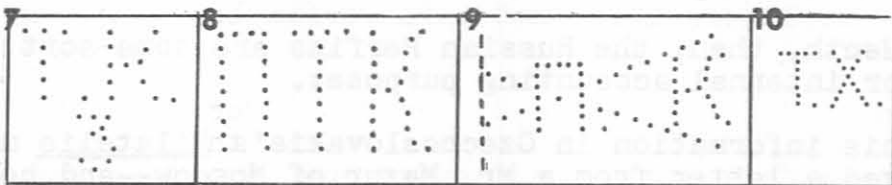
- 6. И.Р.
- 7. ИР/А

- 11. КИЕВ.Р.
- 12. КИЕВb 2
- 13. МИНСК.Р.
- 14. СМЕЛА
- 15. N.Р.
- 16. N./AP.

In my own collection I have various M.П. Perfins with the Roman numerals I to VI. It seems that the lower numbers were both in Arabic and Roman numerals. For example, I have M.П./6 (Figure 1) as well as M.П./VI (Figure 2). I also have M.П./9 and M.П./54 (Figure 3), and one Perfin B.П. (Figure 4). All these have been recorded by the Russians.



But I also have some Perfins that are apparently unknown to our Russian colleagues. I have a B.C. or possibly a B.O. (it is a split as shown in Figure 5), and I have a 7-hole "dot" as shown in Figure 6. I have a T.K./3 (Figure 7) as well as a T.K./1. I also have a П.Т.К (Figure 8), and a split (Figure 9) that is probably a three character pattern combined with a St. Andrew's cross. Finally I have a T.X. as shown in Figure 10.



I admittedly know little about any of these patterns, but the really important thing is that the T.K./3 and the B.C. (or possibly it is a B.O.) patterns are on Lenin stamps from 1926. This directly contradicts the contention that Perfins ceased to be used after the Revolution.

All of these "facts," however, do little more than bring up several points that need to be clarified.

- Everybody seems to agree that the M.П. Perfins belonged to different Moscow post offices. But if that is the case, then how is it possible

that these Moscow Perfins show up with other than Moscow date stamps? I have one in my collection, for example, which bears a Warsaw date stamp. Mazur suggests that the stamps were cancelled at the post office where they were bought and affixed to the receipts, but that the Perfins were applied at the main post office where the receipts were kept. However, we have uncovered 69 different Moscow Perfins but only two from Kiev and St. Petersburg. Surely there must have been more than two post offices in these huge towns. (Remember that until the Revolution, St. Petersburg was the capital of Russia; Moscow was made the capital in 1918.--Editor)

- The Perfins seem always to have been perforated from the obverse of the stamp. I have a small cutting from which Perfins have been removed and this paper--obviously part of an official form--is also perforated. This supports Mazur's theory: the stamps on relatively small receipts could be perforated after they were affixed but it would be impossible to perforate stamps glued to the pages of a thick accounting book. If the stamps were perforated before they were affixed in the book, they would have to exist also with Perfins struck from the reverse of the stamps.
- Mazur's explanation that the postal authorities decided to perforate stamps on certain receipts to prevent their misuse is not logical. In this particular case the authorities' primary interest was to keep the receipts safe in case of claims. The reuse of the stamps in the case of a loss of the receipts was of secondary importance only. The entire scheme seems to be too clumsy to be effective. Of course, one must acknowledge that the Tzarist bureaucrats were not the brightest.
- The theory that all Russian Perfins are of an official character and that they ceased to be used after 1918 probably won't hold up. First we have seen Perfins N.P. and N./PA which could hardly come from any Russian post office since they are written in the Latin alphabet. Is it possible that they are, after all, private Perfins? As to the Perfin CMEAA, there is a town of Smela some 50 miles south of Kiev. Today there are about 100,000 people living there. Before the Revolution it was much smaller and it is hard to explain why a post office in a small town so near the capital of the Ukraine would have its own Perfin when much bigger post offices evidently did not have them. Is it possible that this Perfin belongs to a private firm called Smela?
- The existence of T.K./3 and B.C. (or B.O.) Perfins on Soviet stamps of 1926 is very puzzling. What purpose did they serve? They could have been used to account for postage due since the postage due stamps were used only from 1924 to 1926.
- Is there anything official in any government document to support the use of Perfins in Russia? Neither Werth nor Mazur back up their assertions with quotations from a postal gazette or any such official publication. Any new postal scheme of this sort surely was made official with at least some paperwork.

In the absence of answers to at least some of these questions, Russian Perfins philately retains an air of mystery. Just what purpose did Perfins serve in Russia?

It is possible that somewhere inside Russia--or perhaps far removed from Russia--there lies the key to an understanding of Russian Perfins. If any readers of the Bulletin can provide additional leads, I hope they will contact me. I will carefully record new patterns, new postmarks, and new bits of information and I will keep the Bulletin fully informed of my findings.

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Editor's Note: This article is the first in what we hope will be a series of articles from Mr. Maxa on Russian and other East European Perfins. We urge readers who have Russian Perfins to contact Mr. Maxa and share their knowledge with him. Even if you have only a stamp or two, please share it. Philatelic research is always a very painstaking job of putting together many small pieces to come up with the whole puzzle.