

Additional Notes on Russian Perfins

It has been more than two and a half years since I wrote my first article on Russian Perfins (Bulletin, June 1973). Thanks to further research and the generous help of many collectors, especially Pavel F. Mazur of Moscow, new information has been uncovered--new information which permits me to make new conclusions.

The most important conclusion is that it may now be assumed that in pre-1917 Russia there were two different types of Perfins in use--private and official.

The two categories should be treated separately.

PRIVATE PERFINS

Circular Letter Number 60 of the General Management of Posts and Telegraphs, issued on August 22, 1907, and published in Issue 34 of the Postal Gazette authorized the use of Perfined stamps on ordinary and registered mail (including letters, postcards, wrappers, printed matter, and samples). This permission became effective September 18, 1907, and the use of Perfins was subject to the following conditions:

1. The perforated symbol can consist of letters, numerals, and other signs;
2. These symbols must not obliterate more than a third of the stamp face;
3. Parts of stamps showing value must not be obliterated by the Perfin; and
4. Covers bearing perfined stamps must have the firm's name and address printed on.

This very important document was discovered in Russian archives by Mazur and published in Number 4/75 of Filatelija, SSSR.

Similar information is to be found in the Postal Handbook edited by Th. Alexeieff in 1912 and cited by B. E. Saarinen in his article on Finnish Perfins in the January 1953 Suomen Postimerkkilehti (See an English translation in The Posthorn Number 4/1954.)

OFFICIAL PERFINS

Most Russian Perfins fall into the category of official Perfins.

It is well known that in the first decade of the 20th century the Russian postal officials had to cope with a large and daring gang of bandits (operating in the western part of the country) who stole vast quantities of postal records (parts of parcel post and money transfer forms with cancelled stamps on them), removed the stamps, chemically washed off the postmarks, regummed the stamps, and finally sold them at great discounts to small scale vendors who were licensed to sell stamps.

This fact is acknowledged by the well-known author of the Catalog of Russian and Soviet Postage Stamps, T. G. Tchutchin (Moscow, 1928, p 28), by the foremost American specialist on Russian stamps, A. Rosselevitch, and by others.

Now Mazur has found another Russian postal document which, although it does not give a full explanation for the birth of Russian official Perfins, nevertheless does point out the reasons for their introduction. This document is a circular letter from the general manager of Posts and Telegraphs (Number 75, October 6, 1908) which was published in Number 44 of the Postal Gazette.

The letter authorizes postmasters to use cancellers with sharp points incor-

porated into their designs. The devices were to be adopted by post offices in the main cities immediately and later on in all first and second class post offices. The letter also says that should the postmasters encounter any problems in adapting their present cancelling devices they should consult the director of the Moscow post office. The letter suggests that the cancellers be used for all types of mail, but specifically directs use on receipts for packets and money transfers.

According to Mazur, these cutting heads were put on cancelling devices in Moscow, Vladimir, St. Petersburg, Libava, Caricyn Orenburg, Tiflis, Saratov, Kazan, and other cities (Filatelija SSSR 4/73). In my own collection, I have two such stamps pierced by cutting cancellers. One is from Tiflis and dated April 8, 1913. The other is from a town called V.....A (may be Vinnitza?) and is dated February 24, 1914.

The cutting cancellers were unpopular both with the postal authorities and with customers. The postmasters complained that the points needed sharpening often

and that this was expensive, and the business community protested that the contents of letters often were damaged.

There are indications that the cancellers with sharp points were re-introduced as a protective device two or three times during the next two decades--and each time their use was abandoned.

The most important point about the use of these piercing cancellers is that it was a logical and not very difficult step from the sharp points on the cancellers to the more efficient perforation of stamps before they were applied to paper.

The Russian stamp journal Filatelija (#3,1917) published in St. Petersburg, reported that "The last new fashion in our hobby consists of collecting stamps with perforated initials of Moscow post-offices. Stamps of higher denominations used on money transfers and packet forms are cancelled by perforation instead of cuts. Since Moscow has more than fifty post offices, it takes a lot of work to put together a collection of stamps according to the numbers of the post offices. A well known Finnish stamp col-

CHECKLIST OF PRIVATE PERFINS ON RUSSIAN STAMPS

- | | | |
|------|-----------------|---|
| 1. | A.K. | |
| 2. | A.O. | |
| 3. | ASEA | Allmanna Svenska Elektriska A.B., Helsinki (later on Finland) |
| 4. | B.C.I. | Banca Commerciale Italiana, Constantinople (Russian Levant) |
| 5. | B.O. or
B.C. | This may be in the Latin alphabet B.O. or B.C. or in the Russian alphabet V. O. or V. S. The only known copy is a split found on a 10 ruble Soviet stamp of 1925. |
| 6. | (CL) | Credit Lyonnais branch in Constantinople (Russian Levant) |
| 7. | F. & Co. | Finlayson and Company, Tampere. Earliest copy known with date 1898 is ten years before official permission for Perfins was granted. |
| *8. | Я, | This Russian character is read Ya and the Perfin was reported on a Russian Levant stamp |
| 9. | K.B. | Karl Bostrom, Hanko (Finland) |
| 10. | K.P. | These Russian characters read K.R. |
| 11. | Л.О. | These Russian characters read L.O. |
| 12. | R.S. | Found on Russian stamp; date not clear |
| 13. | S. | Mutual Insurance Company, Sampo, Turku, Finland |
| *14. | СМЕЛА | This Russian word reads Smela |
| 15. | T.X. | These Russian characters read T.Ch. (the ch is pronounced kh) |
| 16. | V. | Unknown firm from Turku, Finland, probably Vakuutusyhtio Cerdandi |
| 17. | V.E. | Viktor Ek Cy., Helsinki, Finland |

Numbers 7, 9, 13, 16, and 17 are not found on the stamps of independent Finland (after 1918). Number 3 was in use until 1933.

CHECKLIST OF OFFICIAL PERFIN ON RUSSIAN STAMPS

- 1. В.О.
- 2. Х.К.
- *3. ИР This Perfin was previously listed incorrectly as NR
- 4. ИР/А This Perfin was previously listed incorrectly as NR/А
- *5. И/РА
- *6. Г.Р.
- 7. К.Г.Р.
- 8. КИЕВЪ 2
- 9. КИЕВЪ Р.
- 10. ЛШПТК Lodz (Poland) Central Post and Telegraph Office
- 11. М.К.
- 12. МИНСК Р.
- 13. М.П./ 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, +8, 9, 10, 11, +12, +13, 14, 15, +16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, +25,+26, +27, +28, +29, +30, +31, +32, 33, 34, 35, +36, +37, +38, +39, 40, +41, +42,+43, +44, +45, +46, +47, +48, +49, +50, +51, +52, +53, 54, 55, 56, +57, 58, 59, +60, 61, 62, 63, +64, +65, 66, +67, 68, +69.

Perfins of this type exist on the regular issues of 1904, 1909, and 1913 (Romanov) series and on all denominations, including the 1,2,3, 7,10,14,15,25,35,50, and 75 kopeks, but more often on the 1,2,3,3.5, 5,7, and 10 rubles. The patterns numbered 1 to 69 belonged to Moscow branch post offices.




- 14. М.П./IV
 - 15. М.П./V
 - 16. М.П./VI
- } These three patterns belonged to the three delivery branches of the Moscow general post office.

- 17. ~~М П~~
- *18. ~~М П~~
VI
- *19. ~~М П~~
VII

- 20. М.П./Х.О.
- 21. НСКР
- 22. О.П./К
- 23. П.О./2
- 24. П.О./3
- 25. ПТК
- 26. Т.К./1
- 27. Т.К./2
- 28. Т.К./3
- 29. Т П Н
- 30. В.К.
- 31. В.П.

I have this pattern on a 1924 Soviet stamp

OFFICIAL PERFINS CHECKLIST CONTINUED

32. **ВИЛІАЧЕНО** This Russian word is read "uplatcheno" and means "paid."
33. **ОБРАЗЕЦЪ** This Russian word is read "obrazetz" and is the equivalent of the English word "specimen." It was used for the perforation of stamps sent to various persons or organizations as specimens.
34. **В О С** If in Russian characters, this Perfin reads VOS and is found on a Soviet souvenir stamp block.
35. 
36. 
37.  This perforated symbol was reported by Yu Alexandrov with a January 1917 date from Voronezh.

EDITORIAL NOTE: The "camera ready" copy for this article was prepared by Floyd A. Walker from a draft supplied by Vojtech Maxa. Additions, corrections, or comments about the article or about Russian Perfins should be addressed to Vojtech Maxa, Box 50, Praha 170 00, CZECHOSLOVAKIA. Because of the situations sometimes encountered in international mail, registered mail should be used for all letters containing Perfins or other philatelic material..

lector from Helsingfors was the first to start this new specialized branch of Russian philately." This clip was found by Mazur and published a second time in Filatelija SSSR 5/73).

The author of the 1917 article was exaggerating somewhat: the Finnish collector apparently had no great following but it seems certain that he was the first collector and student of Russian Perfins and he was obviously a very early Perfins collector regardless of country.

The available information then may be interpreted this way:

Russian stamps with Perfins consisting of a monogram which includes the post-office initials and in some cases numerals may be regarded as official Perfins of special character. Their role was to safely cancel postage stamps on certain postal documents and thus prevent their fraudulent reuse. These Perfins were introduced sometime after October 1908.

According to Mazur, the earliest known date of a Moscow official Perfin is January 2, 1911, and the latest is December 1919.

There has been a suggestion by some Russian specialists that the Perfins which we have classified as officials are

in fact private Perfins used by large banking houses or similar businesses.

There are a couple of objections to that idea. It is hard to imagine an Moscow business firm using Perfins consisting of two letters and the numerals 1 to 69.

And it must be noted that the size of many of these Perfins exceeds the prescribed one-third of the face of the stamp and obliterates the values of the stamps. Those facts seem to eliminate the possibility that these Perfins were in fact private perforations.

However, the seemingly obvious conclusion that these are official Perfins does itself have some weak points.

One has been pointed out by Rosselevitch. He claims that small scale vendors of postage stamps were authorized to sell only low denomination postage stamps and that they would be unlikely to provide a market for the higher value stamps stolen in the robberies of the post offices. This may be answered by the fact that bribery was rather widespread in Czarist Russia and since postal clerks were not very well paid they were often susceptible to bribery. It does not seem unlikely that a postal clerk could be

found who would buy the "recycled" stamps from the robbers and sell them over the postal counters at full price.

Another objection to the scheme--and it is mine--is that the official Perfin answer seems too clumsy and does not remove the core of the problem. It seems only logical that the postal officials would have been interested not only in preventing the reuse of stolen stamps but also in preventing the theft of the stamps in the first place. However, we must remember that the Czarist bureaucracy was no brighter than the bureaucracy in other parts of the world. The fact that the Perfin scheme was not introduced in the whole country as obviously planned suggests that somebody may have realized its impracticability but did not abolish it altogether.

Maybe other documents exist which will shed further light on this problem when they are uncovered.

I am planning a catalog of Russian Perfins at some future date, but there is still considerable work to be done before such a work is attempted. In the meantime I have prepared a checklist of all known Russian Perfins--both private and official.

I have provided the list as part of this article. Full scale drawings of the dies are being prepared but are not included here.

The majority of the Perfins listed here were seen by me; I either saw the actual stamp or I received a drawing of the die. In a few cases I learned about the Perfin from an article and these patterns are indicated by an asterisk (*) before the number.

The listing and numbering is done separately for the two categories. It is possible that I have listed some private Perfins as officials and some officials as private Perfins. As new information is uncovered, adjustments can be made.

I welcome any further information anyone can provide on this subject. The work I have done so far would not have been possible without the help of many people around the world.

In addition to those persons cited in the article, I offer my thanks to Dr. Harvey Tilles, and to Boris Pritt and John Lloyd from the British Society of

Russian philately.

And last but not least I wish to express my deep gratitude and admiration for Pavel F. Mazur for his tireless research work in the Russian postal archives--work without which it would have been impossible for me to even try to do this work on Russian Perfins.

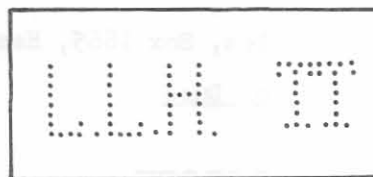
Additional Patterns

From Bosnia-Herzegovina

Reported by Maxa

As a student of East European Perfins, I was deeply interested in Jan Prins' article on the Perfins of Bosnia and Herzegovina published in the September issue of the Bulletin. His identifications of Perfins' users are most valuable to every philatelist.

In his listing, Prins includes two patterns which are not in my collection (B.A.G. and C.D.), but I can add another pair of Perfins he does not list: L.L.H. and TT (see drawings below). This makes a total of 11 different Perfins known to have been used in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The L.L.H. Perfin is from Sarajevo and I have it on the 5h Emperor Franz Joseph issue (Scott #68). The TT pattern has an illegible postmark and I have it on the 10h countryside view (Scott #35).

I have a feeling that there are other patterns from Bosnia and Herzegovina and I urge anyone who can add to the story of this territory's Perfins to come forward.
-----Vojtech Maxa, Praha CZECHOSLOVAKIA

U.S. AND FOREIGN PERFIN
ARE AVAILABLE
FROM THE SALES MANAGER
WRITE HIM TODAY