
Russian Perfins of the Moscow Post Offices

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Collectors of Russian perfins can find an extra challenge in looking for answers to the many questions about the use of the private and official perfins which can be found in the stamps of Tsarist Russia. This article, which concentrates on the official perfins of the Moscow Post Offices, will answer some of these questions. In a future article the author will share information about official perfins from other towns in Imperial Russia.

How it all started

Around the year 1900 several ingenious individuals in Russia were making a very good living by stealing documents (with cancelled stamps) from post office archives, removing the stamps, cleaning the postmarks from these used stamps, and reselling them to the public. As soon as the government stopped one stamp cleaning and reselling ring, another one would form. The cost to the state treasury was in the trillions of rubles.

Postal Circular No. 75 of 16 October 1908

To stop this illegal practice, the Postal authorities introduced several methods to prevent used stamps from being reused. The first method, introduced in 1908, was meant to damage the stamp *at the beginning of the postal chain*, that is when the stamp was put on a letter or document and was postmarked by the post office where the sender brought his letter.

This introduction of prokols (Russian word for holes in stamps) and the preparation required to initiate their use was published in a circular from the Chief of the Main Postal and Telegraph Directorate (No. 75, of 16 October 1908), and was also published in the post-and-telegraph journal (No. 44 for 1908). The circular stated:

In view of the fact that certain establishments are removing used postage stamps from correspondence, removing the cancellation, and reusing the stamps, a method is hereby established so that postage stamps placed on letters, money transfer

tickets, and packages will be cancelled at the time of receipt in the capitol post offices and all large post offices handling up to 3rd class mail inclusive with a canceling device specifically designed to put prokols (holes) in the very stamp itself.

For a long time collectors assumed that this circular of 16 October 1908 started the use of perfins in Russian stamps. But it did not! This circular started the alteration of existing standard cancellers by the insertion of sharp points in the canceller so that the modified canceller would damage stamps when canceling them with the (circular, date-stamped [CDS]) postmark.

That's why the Circular continues:

Towards this goal, it is permissible to use a standard canceling device and modify it so that in the heart/core of it, in the free space (above the designation of the date, month and year) are located sharp points or spikes, which thoroughly pierce the stamp allowing the resulting prokols to become saturated with printer's ink.

Some authors have translated or interpreted the Russian word 'prokols' as "perfins". Using the word perfins has caused a lot of confusion. This confusion was one of the reasons for jumping to the wrong conclusion that Russian stamps were perfined first and postmarked later. In fact, this circular of Oct. 16th, 1908 isn't talking about perfins as we generally understand them at all. It starts the practice of using modified cancellers (with sharp points in the device). Using these cancellers the stamps were postmarked and slit cancelled the same time. While the canceling ink could still be washed from the stamp, the slits could not be repaired effectively.

In response to this circular, we begin to see what are known as "killer" cancellers that both pierce the stamp and apply the office's mark at the same time (fig. 1). These killer marks are noted from many towns within imperial Russia.

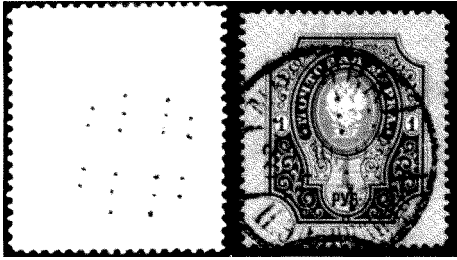


Figure 1

The killer cancellers were unpopular, both with the postal authorities and with the customers. The employees at the post office complained that the points needed sharpening often and that this was expensive. The business community protested that the contents of letters often were damaged. So the postal authorities needed a new idea to eliminate the possibility of reusing used postage stamps from which postmarks had been removed.

From the sharp points of the killer cancellers to the more efficient perforation of stamps using punching instruments or perforating machines was a logical and not very difficult step. However it was obvious that customers wouldn't accept this kind of perforating through their letters.

The idea not to perforate stamps on letters anymore wasn't considered a real problem by the postal authorities because they specifically wanted to prevent the reuse of stamps of high denominations, and these stamps were mostly used on money transfer forms or packet forms, not on ordinary letters.

Circular No. 22 of 9 April 1910

A new method to prevent the reuse of stamps was introduced on 9 April 1910. This method was meant to damage the stamp *at the end of the postal chain*, that is, in the post office which received the parcel or paid the money due from a money transfer ticket before sending the document to the Control Board.

Postal Circular No. 22 of April 9th, 1910 states:

...By agreement with the department of civic accounting, [postal] establishments handling money transfers and package delivery must perforate or cut in half the money transfer orders and the package

address cards before these items are sent for inspection by the Control Boards. This also applies to items that were postmarked at other locations and sent to the establishment for delivery...

This was the circular that first permitted the use of official Russian perfins. But the resulting perfins do not necessarily all have the form of perforated initials. Throughout the country they appear in many different shapes, because every post office was free to decide how to perforate the stamps before sending the stamps (and documents) to the Control Board for inspection. In fact, throughout the Russian Empire many kinds of perforating were used by the post offices.

Let's look closer at parts of this circular of 1910:

1. Perforating had to be done in the post office where money transfers were paid out (cashed in) or parcels were delivered. Thus, a Russian stamp with a postmark 'Riga' and a Moscow perfin comes from a document which was forwarded by the Riga post office to one of the offices in Moscow. The receiving Moscow post office perfined through the stamp and document together after having paid out the money or having delivered the parcel, and before sending the document to the Control Board.



Figure 2a

Figures 2a and 2b show documentation of a postal money transfer of 3 rubles from Korenevo to Moscow. The money transfer form is stamped (franked) with a 15 kop. Romanov stamp which is postmarked Korenevo, 20.12.14, and bears the perfin of Moscow's sub-office no. 14. On the reverse are three Moscow postmarks. One is dated 22.12.14 by the Moscow *6a Eksp.* office, the second is dated 23.12.14 by the Moscow *14 gor.pocht.tel.otd.* office and the third postmark is dated 30.12.14 by the Moscow *XIV gor.pocht.tel.otd* office.

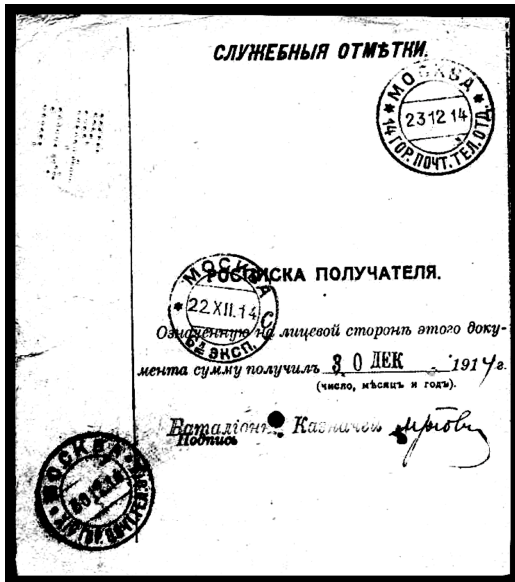


Figure 2b

2. Where the circular says: “ this also applies to items that were postmarked at other locations “, it also means: regardless of a killer canceller already made by the forwarding office, according to the rules of the Circular of 16.10.1908. In fact, some forwarding post offices continued to use their killer cancellers till 1914. That’s why we can find stamps with both a killer cancel and a perfin!
3. The rule “...to perforate or cut...” has led to an interesting variety of prokols (punches) in stamps and documents handled by Russian post offices. We can find prokols with perfins (perforated initials), with a perforated name of the city where the post office was located (fig. 3), with a number of holes making a design (fig. 4), with simple punched holes, with scissor cuts,

and otherwise. The post office in Moscow chose to use prokols with initials perforated through the stamps and documents. Therefore, from now on I will use the word ‘perfin’ when referring to the Moscow prokols with perforated initials.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Circular No. 27 of 18 May 1911

In addition to using stamps on money transfer forms and packet forms, the post offices in Tsarist Russia also used stamps of high denominations in the books of Finances (F[orma] No. 9).

Tsarist Russia had no postage due stamps. If a letter was underpaid, the amount due (usually double the amount of the underpayment) was collected by the postman when he delivered the letter. If the addressee refused to pay, the postman took the letter back to the post office. In this way there was a check on the amount collected by every postman; upon returning to the post office, he had to hand over the money or the returned letter(s).

Every day a record of the cash collected by the postman of a particular post office was entered in the above mentioned book of Finances, and stamps to the value of the total amount collected were affixed on the pages (form No. 9) in this book. For control purposes these (high denomination) stamps were tied to the page with a CDS postmark. For the Control Board it was important that these postmarks were easy to read. Therefore these stamps were generally cancelled with clear, ‘socked-on-the-nose’ cancels.

Circular No. 27 of 18 May 1911 gave the following regulation to prevent the stamps in the above-mentioned book from being reused:

Postage stamps, stuck in the book of Finances No. 9 must be perforated, or cut in half sideways from the edge of the page prior to sending this book to the Control Boards. . . .

As a result of this regulation, the stamps in this book, after being tied to the pages (form No. 9) with a clear circular, dated postmark, were perfined before sending the book to the Control Board. Therefore a stamp from the book of Finances No. 9 of a Moscow post office has the postmark and the perfin of that same Moscow post office! For an example of this usage, see figure 5 showing a part of a form No. 9 from this book.

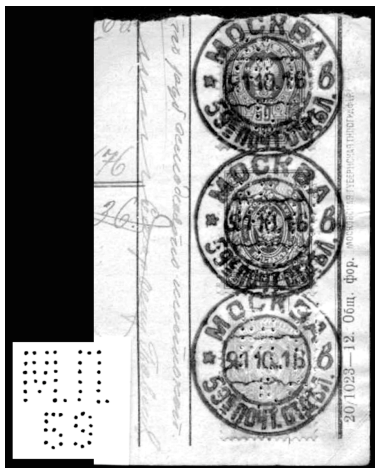


Figure 5

Moscow perfins: second cancellations

The perforating of stamps in accordance with the above mentioned circulars of 1910 and 1911 was done after the postal establishment had applied a dated cancel to the stamp. Thus, these perfins were the second cancellations of these stamps.

As noted above, the Moscow postal establishment used perfins showing perforated initials. According to the circulars of 1910 or 1911 these perfins were used either on money transfer and packet forms or to perforate the stamps in the book with forms No. 9. An interesting question is: can we distinguish between perfins used according to the 1910-circular

and those used in accordance with the 1911-circular? In most cases the answer is ‘yes’!

Moscow perfins from Circular No. 22 of 9 April 1910

When a stamp that has the perfin ‘M.P.’ (with a Roman or Arabic number of a Moscow sub- or dispatch office) but also has a CDS cancel from another city or region, it is obvious that this Moscow perfin was used according to the rules of circular No. 22 of 1910. You could encounter Kiev, Tiflis, Tashkent, Samarkand, Vladivostok and others. However, these are not common.

Figures 6a and 6b show the postal transfer of 10 rubles from Sosnovitsj to Moscow. The money transfer is franked with Arms stamps totaling 130 kop. which are postmarked Sosnovitsj, 16.2.14, and bear the perfin of Moscow’s sub-office No. 22. On the reverse are two Moscow postmarks. One is dated 18.2.14 by the ‘office for the payment of money No. 15’ and the other is dated 19.2.14 by Moscow sub-office No. 22.



Figure 6a

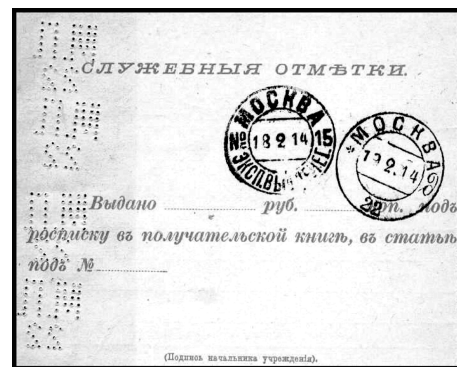


Figure 6b

The earliest use I know of a perfin according to this circular of 9 April 1910 is a Moscow VI. dispatch office perfin used on a 15 kop. Arms stamp. The stamp is cancelled 'Vilna, 18.5.10'. See fig. 7.



Figure 7

Moscow perfins from Circular No. 27 of 18 May 1911

The majority of the stamps observed with Moscow perfins 'M.P.' were used according to the circular of 1911. These perfins are seen with the CDS cancels of the Moscow Post sub-offices; the number of the postal establishment coincides with the number used in the perfins. These stamps were cancelled with very clear 'socked-on-the-nose' cancels because the date in the circular postmark had to be readable for accounting purposes by the Control Board according to the rules of this circular.

Double cancelled postage stamps (with the perfins 'M.P.' and cancelled with the postal CDSs of the Moscow establishments) are found on issues of the period from 1911 to 1917.

Different Moscow 'M.P.' perfins

Based on the known stamps with 'M.P.' perfins we see that they were used by the following postal establishments in Moscow:

- 42 of the 69 Moscow sub-offices. These perfins include one of the following Arabic numbers as a second line of characters in the perfin: 1-25, 33-35, 40, 54-57, 59, 61-63, 65-69.
- the office of the Moscow District of Khodyinsk. This is the Moscow perfin with the perforated initials "M.P./X.O." (M.P. Khodyinsk Okrug). It was probably used by the temporary office at the Camp on Khodynskoe Field (fig. 8.)

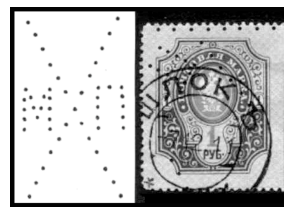
- 4 of the dispatch offices of the Main Post Office. These are the Moscow perfins 'M.P.' with Roman numerals (IV, V, VI and VII.)



Figure 8

One other M.P. perfin could also be from a Moscow postal establishment:

- the perfin 'M P' with a perforated cross between the initials (fig. 9.) This cross-shaped perfin 'MP' is very similar to the type 4 perfin of Moscow dispatch office no. VI, which shows the initials M and P in a perforated cross without a Roman numeral. (Further information later in this article.)



Moscow perfins 'M.P.' with Arabic numbers

As stated before, these "M.P." perfins with Arabic numbers have been found only from 42 of the 69(?) Moscow sub-offices. I have put a question mark behind the number of 69 because there is no evidence that all 69 sub-offices used postmarks or perfins. In the book *A Study of the Postmarks of Moscow 1765-1917* (by Gary Combs and Noel War) it is noted that the numbers 44-53 have not been observed in Moscow postmarks. Even supposing perfins from these 10 sub-offices do not exist, what has happened to the perfins of the other 17 Moscow sub-offices, specifically those numbered 26-32, 36-39, 41-43, 58, 60 and 64? Do these perfins exist?

An answer to this question is suggested by data presented in the above-mentioned book. A table on page 60 shows a list of Post and Telegraph numbers noted from Moscow sub-office cancels. From 1910 on (the start of official Russian perfins), only the postal numbers of 42 of these Moscow sub-offices

have been observed in Moscow postmarks. Further, the office numbers of these 42 Moscow sub-office cancels are exactly the same as those known in Moscow perfins!

Therefore I believe that the above-mentioned list of 42 known perfins from Moscow postal sub-offices is a complete list!

Form and dimension of the Moscow perfins with Arabic numbers

Most perfins, used by the postal sub-offices in Moscow, have the same basic form and dimensions. The vertical lines of the letters are 9-10 cm high and have 6 holes per vertical line of the initials 'MP'. The letter 'M' has 21 holes.

Some perfins, however, punched by perforators which were manufactured in 1914 or later, show a different type of the letter 'M' of:

- 19 holes: perfin M.P./65 and 'second issues' of M.P./9 and M.P./12 (fig. 10)

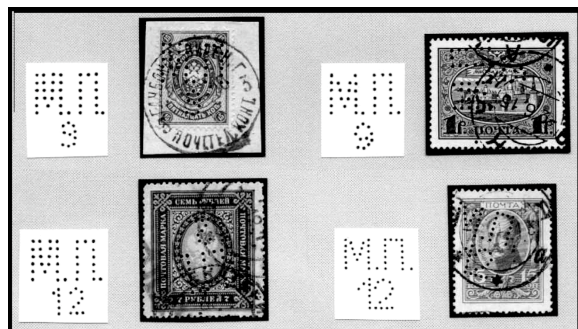


Figure 10

- 20 holes: perfin M.P./66 and M.P./67
- 15 holes: perfin M.P./69; also, the holes are also a little larger as usual

Further the perfin M.P./34 can be found with two types of the number '4' (fig. 11):

- 7 holes = type 1
- 8 holes = type 2



Figure 11

Moscow perfins with Roman numerals

Perfins of the Moscow dispatch offices have been found with the following numerals:

- IV: the perfin M.P./IV. is only observed in stamps with the CDS postmark of Moscow's 4th expeditionary office. It is important to note that only a part of the postmark is on the stamps. So these postmarks probably didn't need to be 'socked-on-the-nose' for accounting purposes. Therefore, I believe that these perfins were used according to the regulations of Circular No. 22 of 9 April 1910 (fig. 12)



Figure 12

- V: the perfin M.P./V is quite common (if you can ever speak of 'common' when talking about Russian perfins). This perfin is exactly like the ones used by the sub-office except that the number was a Roman numeral instead of an Arabic number. Stamps with this perfin have only been seen with clear 'socked-on-the-nose' CDS postmarks of Moscow's 5th expeditionary office. These perfins have been used according to the regulations of Circular No. 27 of 18 May 1911

- VI: the perfin M.P./VI. exists in 4 different types (fig. 13):



Figure 13

- type 1: Roman numerals are 6.4 mm high. Letter M has 11 holes

- type 2: Roman numerals are 6.4 mm high. Letter M has 13 holes
- type 3: Roman numerals are 7.6 mm high. Letter M has 13 holes
- type 4: letters M, P and Roman VI are separated by a perforated cross



Figure 14a

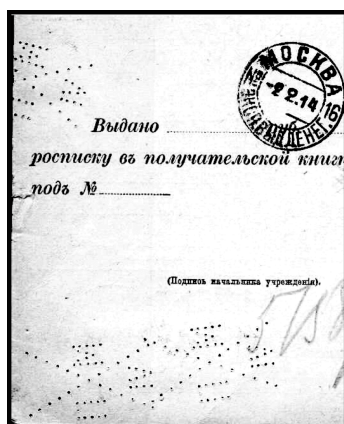


Figure 14b

Stamps with all of these four types of perfin are seen only with postmarks of Russian cities other than Moscow. Thus, these perfins were used according to the regulations of Circular No. 22 of 9 April 1910. Probably, office No. VI was a dispatch office for the forwarding of Russian internal mail.

Figures 14a and 14b show the postal transfer of 50 rubles from Bendin to Moscow. The money transfer is franked with Arms stamps totaling 140 kop., all postmarked Bendin, 31.1.14, and bearing the perfin of Moscow's dispatch office No. VI. On the reverse is one Moscow postmark. It is dated 2.2.14 by the 'office for the payment of money No. 16'. There is no postmark of

another Moscow sub-office. I assume that in this case the money wasn't paid, because the counterfoil is still attached to the money transfer form.

VII: the Moscow perfin M.P./VII. is quite large and needs two attached stamps to show a complete perfin. I have only seen this perfin in a 5 ruble Arms stamp and in 3 and 5 ruble Romanov stamps. The postmarks on these perfinned stamps are in purple ink and have a rectangular form, showing the date and *Poluchenov . Moskovsk . Pochtamt .* (poluchenov means received; fig. 15.)



Figure 15

The perfin "M.P." with fractional numbers are known in the postage stamps issued between 1902 and 1913. The denominations of these stamps mostly are the higher values: 1, 2, 3, 3 1/2, 5, 7, and 10 ruble. However, quite regularly, they are encountered in most denominations of lower value stamps of the Arms and Romanov issues. Further a perfin M.P./VI. is known in a semi-postal stamp issued in 1914 (fig. 16.)



Figure 16

In closing I have the following request for assistance. I am studying the Moscow perfins with the Latin numbers 59 to 69. These numbers were used only for a short time and I need additional information about postmarks (town name and date of use). I would appreciate it very much if you could send me scans or photocopies of these perfins in your collection! You can send them to dick.scheper@planet.nl or to me at Hogeland 1, NL-2264 JX Leidschendam, The Netherlands.