

Postage Stamp Forgeries

Kevin Kraemer
Sequoia Stamp Club
April 8, 2025

“Dangerous counterfeits exist.”

—Scott Postage Stamp Catalogue

Agenda

- Background and history
- Detecting forgeries
- Resources

Background and History

Forgery Terms

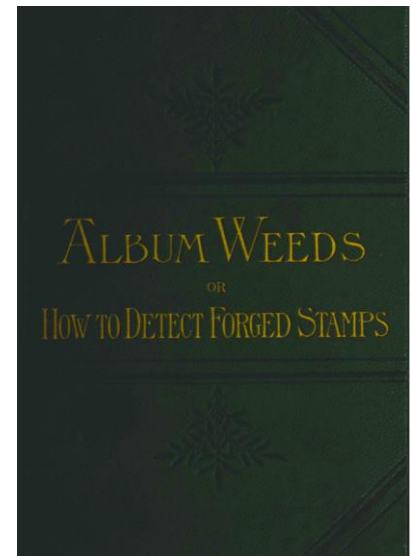
- Postal forgery
 - Try to get free postage
- Philatelic forgery
 - Try to sell fake to collector
- Reprints
 - Usually printed with original plates, but after initial issue - often legit, sometimes not (stolen plates)
- Fakes
 - Alter a real stamp to try to make it more valuable
 - Add/change overprint, postmark, perforations, color, etc.

History: Pre-1890's

- Forgeries started soon after 1840 Penny Black
- Initial forgeries to defraud the post office
- Focus moved to rare/valuable collectible stamps
- 1862-80: Spiro brothers (Germany) – 1st mass producers of forgeries
- 1863: Forgeries so common that "Forged Stamps: How to Detect Them" by Pemberton was published (36 page brochure)
- 1870's: "The Spud Papers" - 67 forgery articles in *The Philatelist*
- 1880's-90: Senf Brothers (Germany)
- 1882: Robert Brisco Earée "Album Weeds", multiple editions until 1906 - encyclopedic study of forgeries (lengthy descriptions)
- "Facsimiles" deemed acceptable by some - to fill album spaces

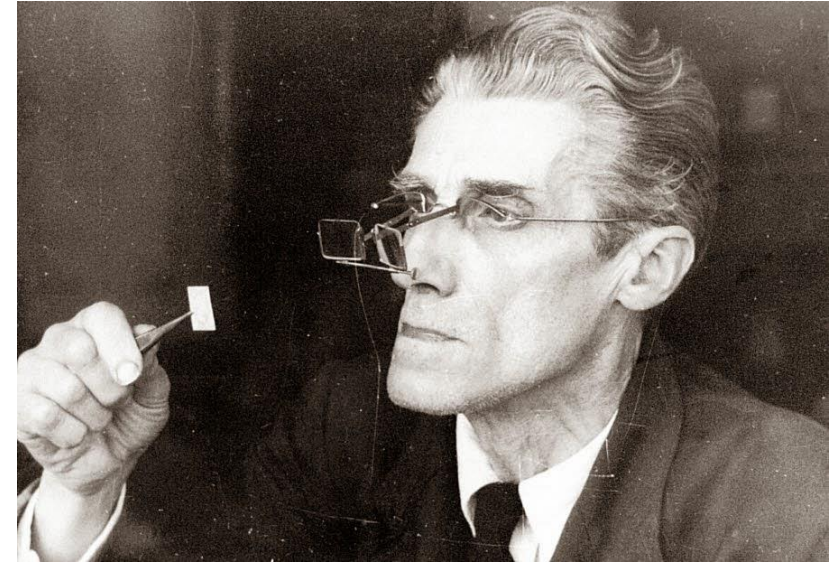


Spiro Forgery



History: 1890's to Mid-1900's

- Exponential growth of forgeries
 - Fueled by growth of “packet trade”
 - Rare as well as common stamps
- Many forgers, but 2 standouts:
- Jean de Sperati (France)
 - Produced forgeries from 1909-1940's:
 - Most accomplished of the forgers
 - fooled the experts
 - Forged over 500 stamps from 100 countries
 - Sperati forgeries can be worth more than originals



Sperati

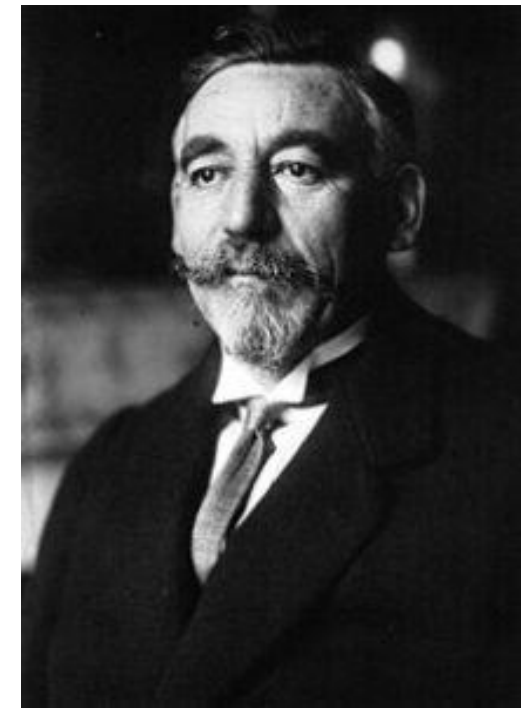


Real

Forgery

History: 1890's to Mid-1900's (cont.)

- François Fournier (Geneva, Switzerland)
 - Dominated forgeries market from 1904 until his death in 1917
 - Forged 3,500 different stamps
 - Published 64-page catalogue of forgeries
 - Representatives in 23 countries; 10,000 customers
 - 1917-23: Charles Hirschburger continued the business
 - 1927: Philatelic Union of Geneva acquired Fournier's remaining stock
 - 1928: *Album de Fac-Similes*
 - 480 copies - with actual copies of the forged stamps, plus known forged postmarks and forged overprints
 - Intended to help dealers identify fakes
 - \$7,000 on eBay!



Fournier

Fac-Similes	Prix	Description
1. Suisse (Helvétique) 1891	1/2	1/2 centime (rouge)
2. Suisse (Helvétique) 1891	1/2	1/2 centime (rouge)
3. Suisse (Helvétique) 1891	1/2	1/2 centime (rouge)
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99. Suisse (Helvétique) 1891	1/2	1/2 centime (rouge)
100. Suisse (Helvétique) 1891	1/2	1/2 centime (rouge)

Price List

ALBUM

DE

FAC - SIMILÉS

N° 264

ÉDITÉ PAR

L'UNION PHILATÉLIQUE DE GENÈVE

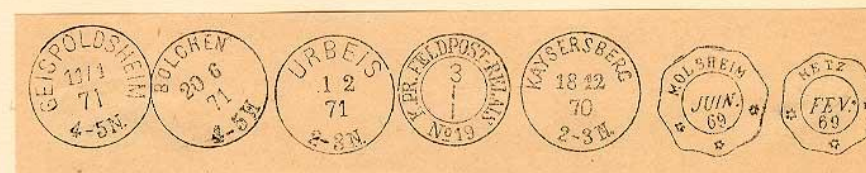
IMPR. F. DE SIEBENTHAL & C^e

ALSACE LORRAINE

1870



Oblitérations



ALBANIE

Surcharge sur timbre
de Turquie 1908-1910



Oblitération



Detecting Forgeries

Detecting Forgeries

- Takes time, diligence and patience!!!
- Scott Catalogue sometimes has notes to identify forgeries and reprints
- Are the perforations as catalogued? (gauge, comb, rough/clean)
- If a watermark is expected, is there one?
- Expected printing method? (litho vs. typo vs. photo vs. engraved)
- Different paper? (different color, thickness, size, etc.)
- Different color shade? (often hard to determine, but some are really obvious)
- Does the overprint/surcharge look different from the catalogue photo?
- Under magnification:
 - Are design elements not aligned, not straight, not smoothly curved, too thick/thin?
 - Are letters not well formed and/or the same size?
 - Is there a general lack of detail, areas of solid color where there is detail on the real stamp?
- Well, you MAY have a forgery... time to check the forgery resources...

But it's never so simple...!

- Why is the 4 so crooked on the real stamp ?!!
- But Sperati didn't get the color quite right... and "CHIFFRE" isn't great



Real

Sperati Forgery

Example #1 – ALL French Colonies 1892-1913



Forgery

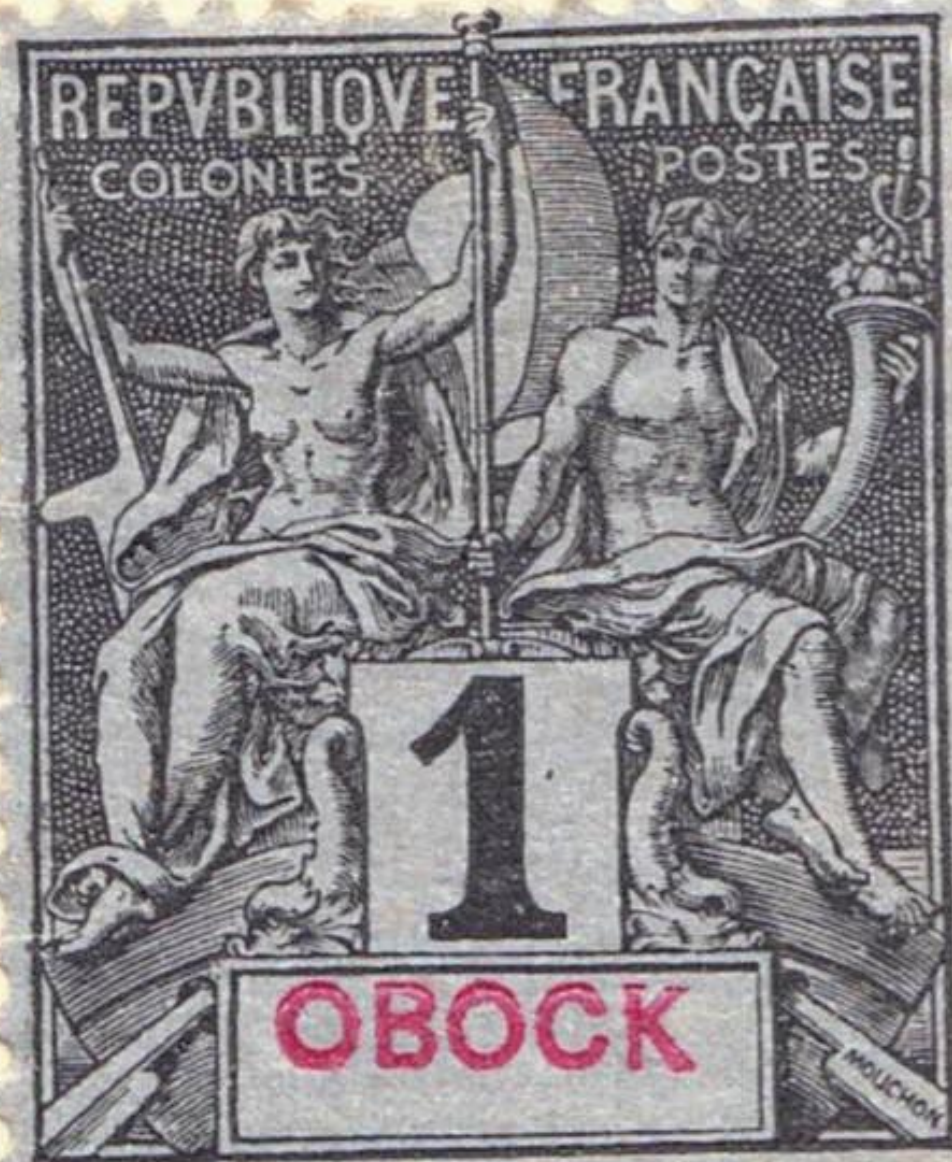


Real

- Forgery: Fruit merged with cornucopia rim; Mercury has no navel
- Forgeries are perf 13 ½ x 14; originals are perf 14 x 13 ½



FORGERY



Example #2 – Japan 1945-47 Definitives

- These are all real →
- Forgeries are unwatermarked, real are always watermarked
- Paper on forgeries is often much whiter – or too dark – but not always
- Cancellations on forgeries are 22mm diameter vs. 24mm diameter for real cancels
- Also small detail differences



24mm
Diameter
(real)

22mm
Diameter
(forgery)

JAPAN
Forgeries
(all unwmk.)

1945-47

See FoF p. 142-4

Forgeries are:

- Unwatermarked
- Often on very white paper
- 24mm diameter postmark (vs. 24mm)

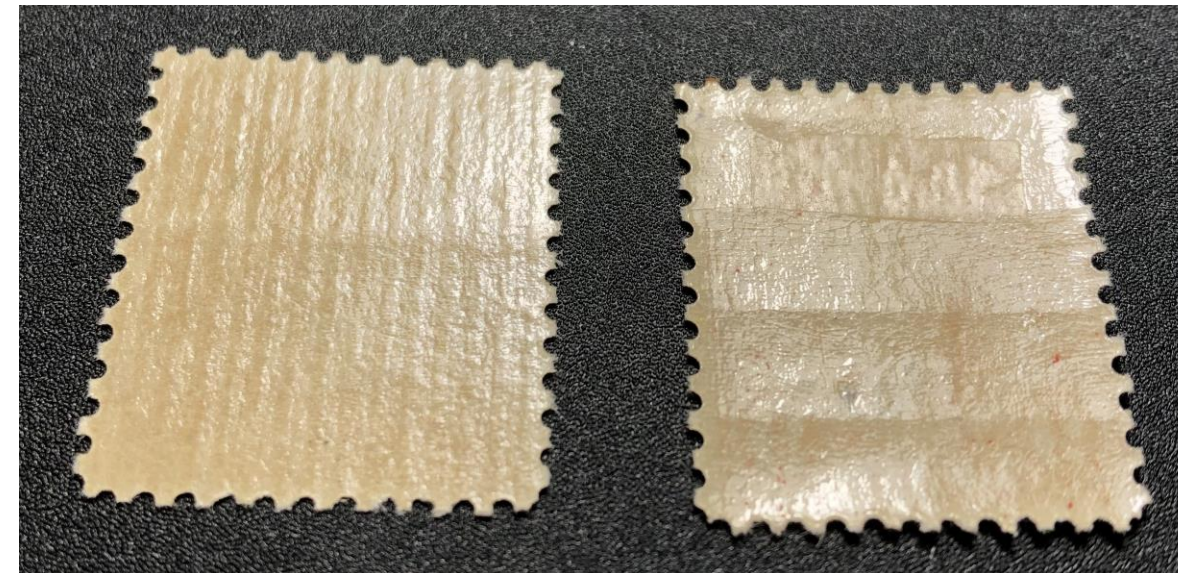


1946-47



Example #3 – US 1929 Kans. & Nebr. Overprints

- Forged overprints are common!
- This series comes in perf 10, 11 & 11x10 1/2
 - Real are only perf 11x10 ½
- Any straight edge = fake
- If canceled, overprint is on top of cancel (need 10x magnifier)
- If mint, no vertical gum lines = fake
- If mint, 3 types of gum breakers:
5.5mm, 22mm and 12mm apart
 - Real are only 22mm (1 line, max 2)
- Real overprint was added after stamp printed, but before gum added
 - Impression of overprint in gum = fake
- Now you have only eliminated the common forgeries!
 - Must now compare overprints against real examples...



Real

Fake

Example #3 (cont.)

- Scan stamps, then use image processing tools on PC to lighten overprint on suspect stamp, then overlay it on top of known real overprint
- Requires some technical skills...



Fake overlaid on real overprint



Real overlaid on real overprint

Example #4 – Syria & Lebanon 1940's-50's

- Printing:
 - Originals are mostly lithography
 - Forgeries look like typography
- Forgeries on much browner paper
- Much less detail in forgeries



- Often different color shades
- Haven't found forgery reference for these yet! Are they real?



Example #5 – Sudan 1897 Overprint Issues

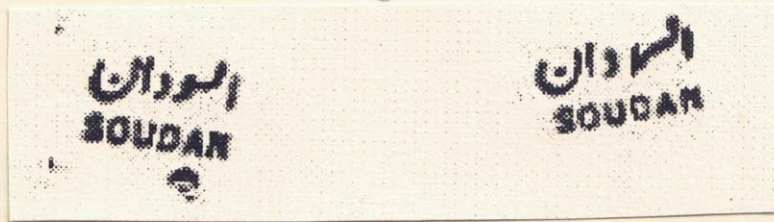
- Under magnification, overprints look slightly different – why?
- Real stamps have 6 varieties of the Arabic overprint!
- So are all overprints real?
Just 1 of these 6 varieties?



Of course not!

FORGERIES: (often overprinted on canceled Egypt stamps)

Fournier forged overprints:



Like type 4, but 2nd letter too high and 2nd from R letter too straight



Other forgeries:



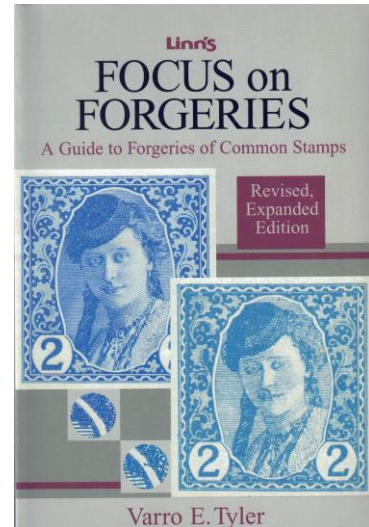
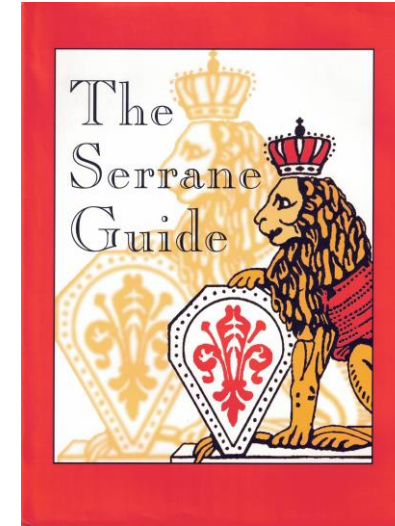
Example #6 – Forgeries of fakes!



Resources

Forgery Books

- ***The Serrane Guide***, by Fernand Serrane, 1927
 - Detailed sketches of differences
 - Originally in French, but English version now exists
- ***Linn's Focus on Forgeries***, 2nd Ed, by Varro Tyler, 2000
 - 321 "common forgery" articles in 1 book; nice pictures and descriptions
- ***World Forgery Catalogue*** by G. Kock, 1998
 - Comprehensive list of known forged stamps, and refs to who forged them
 - Free PDF download: <https://www.filatelia.fi/forglinks/catalogue.html>
- Philatelic Bibliopole's huge **list of books on forgeries**:
 - <https://www.pbbooks.com/fake.htm>
 - Can sort by country, forger, etc. to narrow in on area of interest
- Non-Scott catalogues, especially country-specific, may have forgery info
- Remember that the **WPL** has many country-specific forgery books!



Online Resources - History

- **Wikipedia Philatelic Fakes and Forgeries**
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philatelic_fakes_and_forgeries
- **Wikipedia List of Stamp Forgers**
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_stamp_forgers
- Plenty more – just Google it!

Online Resources – Worldwide Forgeries

- **Classic Stamp Forgeries**

- One of the best sites; good history/terminology info; annotated hi-res images
 - <https://stampforgeries.blogspot.com/2020/11/stamp-forgeries-part-of-philatelic.html>
- In blog format, so finding specific country forgeries sometimes hard; Someone has created an country index here:
 - <https://stampbears.net/thread/6812/classic-stamp-forgeries-sforgca-index>

- **Stamp Forgeries of the World**

- Hi-res photos of real/fake stamps; includes some "Album Weeds" and "Spud Papers" forgeries
 - <https://stampforgeries.com/>

- **World Stamps Project**

- Many real/fake photos
 - <https://worldstampsproject.org/>

Classic Stamp Forgeries example:

40C



40C Reproduction C

1. The frame line is weak along the right side and has some breaks at the bottom
2. The second 0 of 40 is attached to the white space below
3. The coloured background between the RE extends into the white space below
4. The bottom right leg of the right bottom star extends to the white space

1Fr



1Fr Reproduction A

This forgery is extremely deceptive. Tete-beche pairs of type A exist. It exists in several colors and with different cancels.

1. There is a white dot in the internal left part of the O of POSTES.
2. A break can be sometimes be found in the extreme left of the lower frameline.
3. Pairs of these reproductions can also be found (often referred to as Sperati type B)

Sperati Cancels

The used forgeries can be identified by the cancels. The following list does not include all of them.

Town cancels:

'BLETTERANS 1 MARS 1849 38'

'BOYNES 21 OCT. 1850 (43)'

'CREPY 10 JANV. 1849 (58)' 'CHARTRES 5 JANV. 1849'

'EPINAL 29 DEC 49 (82)'

'LA LOUPE 5 JANV. 1849 (27)'

'LE DORAT 20 AOÛT 1849'

Stamp Forgeries of the World example:

STAMP FORGERIES

Table of Contents



Genuine double overprint type IX

SG#9a



Forgery of overprint type IX



Original pen cancel removed. Forged overprint applied with moveable type (does not match any of the genuine types). Forged postmark.

GENUINE JOHORE OVERPRINT TYPES

According to Stanley Gibbons

JOHORE
(2)

JOHORE
(3) ("H" and "E" wide. "J" raised. Opt 16 mm long)

JOHORE
(4) ("H" wide, "E" narrow. Opt 16 mm long)

JOHORE
(5) ("H" and "E" wide. Opt 16¾ mm long)

JOHORE.
(6)

JOHORE
(7)

JOHORE
(8)

Online Resources - Worldwide Forgeries (cont.)

- **Comparative Philatelic Forgery Identification**

- Many real/fake images, plus hi-res images of all Fournier album pages
- Original site is gone - can only be accessed via WayBack archive:
 - <https://web.archive.org/web/20091027091209/http://geocities.com/claghorn1p/index.c.html#C>
- Direct link to Fournier album:
 - <https://web.archive.org/web/20091028150827/http://geocities.com/claghorn1p/FournierAlbum/index000.htm>

- **Sperati Forgeries**

- Comprehensive site describing known Sperati forgeries; hi-res images
- <https://www.sperati.org/SPAindex.htm>

- **Stamp Bears Discussion Board - Fakes/Forgeries group**

- Many threads about different forgery topics
- <https://stampbears.net/board/42/fakes-forgeries>

Online Resources – USA Forgeries

- **Riverside Stamps Fakes page**

- Analyses of many faked US stamps, with hi-res photos
- <https://riversidestamps.com/Fakes.shtml>

- **Fakes and Forgeries Purchased on eBay**

- Detailed descriptions with high-magnification images showing how US stamps were manipulated
- <http://www.slingshotvenus.com/stamps/fakes.html>

- **How to detect fake Nebr./Kans. Overprints**

- Riverside Stamps - <https://riversidestamps.com/KansNebrFakes.shtml>
- Linn's Stamp News - <https://www.linns.com/news/us-stamps-postal-history/2015/march/us-stamp-notes-tips-for-expertizing-the-kansas.html>

Online Resources – Country-Specific Forgeries

- **Persia/Iran:**

- Persiphila's Study of Philatelic Forgeries of Iran
 - <https://www.persi.com/forgeries/FakesHome.html>
- Big Blue Blog - Focus on Persian Forgeries
 - <https://bigblue1840-1940.blogspot.com/2013/01/StampForgeriesofIranPersia.html>

- **North Borneo Forgeries Blog (with images)**

- <https://mynorthborneostamps.blogspot.com/2016/09/an-introduction-to-forgeries-of-low.html>

- **Scandinavian Forgeries:** Jay Smith's page (with real/fake photos)

- <https://www.jaysmith.com/Topics/Forgeries/ForgeriesTOC.html>

- **Others?**

- Just Google for them!

Concluding Remarks

- There are far more forgeries than you probably ever imagined
- Your collection likely has many forgeries in it
- Now that you know this, you can't un-know it
- Relax! It's ok!
- Use this knowledge to make more informed buying decisions
- If interested, review stamps in your collection for forgeries
 - I went through Linn's *Focus on Forgeries* book first, over several months
 - Decide what you'll do if you find a forgery (I mark them as such, for future reference, but some may want to remove them)
- Give a presentation on forgeries! ;-)

Q&A