

The Fakes & Forgeries of the Large Hermes Head of Greece

Few years after the introduction of the first postal stamps in Great Britain (May 6th, 1840) and in France (January 1st, 1849), philately, then also called: "*timbrogie*", "*philotélie*" or "*timbromanie*"..., began in the early 1860's in these two countries, all over Europe and in America. The precursor stamps collectors started to exchange the precious figurines between themselves and then to trade them: A new business was born and almost immediately the philatelic forgers appeared!

The first Greek stamp, the so-called "*large Hermes head*", was introduced exactly at that period (October 1st/13th, 1861). Like the stamps of the others countries, the "*large Hermes head*" of Greece has been imitated and proposed to the appetite of an emerging kind of collectors: the philatelists.

In this presentation we will review the "*large Hermes head*" forgeries from identified, or not, forgers. Obviously official archives are not existing except for the forgers who have been judged (**de Sperati**, **Oneglia**) or the ones who were running established business of facsimiles like **Fournier**. But, as for any other collection, forgers & forgeries are fascinating the collectors, so literature (books, studies & articles) on the counterfeiters and their technics is really abundant since one century and half.

The first LHH forgeries done, in the second part of the 19th century are coarse and easily recognisable. But as the printing technics evolved, the ones created in the first part of the 20th century (the "*golden age*" of philately) were becoming more and more perfect (**Alisaffi**, **Imperato**...) and even identical to the genuine stamps as the utilized printing process was photo-lithography (**de Sperati**)...



Plan:

- Introduction Page 1
- Fake mock-up & die-proofs Pages 2 - 5
(Istanbul merchant, **de Sperati** & **Maury** catalogues)
- Identified fake stamps Pages 5 - 14
(**de Sperati**, "*poor sad Hermes*", **Spiro** brothers, **Alisaffi**, **Imperato**, **Oneglia** & **Fournier**)
- Other fake stamps Pages 15 - 16

Bibliography:

- **L'Union Philatélique de Genève**, *Album de Fac-Similés*, **Genève**, 1928
- **Jean de Sperati**, *La Philatélie sans experts ?*, **Paris**, 1946.
- **British Philatelic Association**, *The work of Jean de Sperati*, **London**, 1955
- **Jean-François Brun**, *Faux et Truqués*, **Paris**, 1989
- **Varro E. Tyler**, *Philatelic Forgers - Their Lives and Works*, **Sidney/Ohio**, 1991
- **Orestis Vlastos**, *Comparisons of Hellenic Postal Stamps (1861-1923)*, **Athens**, 1992
- **Rienk M. Feenstra**, *Greece - A Collection of Forgeries*, **Ridderkerk**, 1993
- **Robson Lowe & Carl Walske**, *The Oneglia Engraved Forgeries*, **Limassol**, 1996
- **Bill Ure**, *Forgeries of Greek Stamps of the 19th Century*, **Athens**, 2010

Fake mock-up of the "large Hermes head" of Greece

It exists about a fifteenth of various forged drawings (pencil or China ink) of the "large Hermes head", some of them bearing false signatures of the Chief-Engraver, **Désiré-Albert Barre** and of the famous French collector **Maurice Burrus**, like this one. They appeared in the 1960's, with Dutch, French and Spanish ones too, from a dealer in Dublin and have been seen since then in **Paris & Athens** auctions... See the detailed article of **Jean-François Brun** in *Philotelia* No 678.



Richard found the collection of Mr. Maurice Burrus, Feb. 1959, Shawcross Auctions, Dublin Ireland, I.R. Paul Sanger of Maurice Burrus

Albert Barre
Paris - Sept 61

D. Sanger

Maurice Burrus

Fake die-proofs of the "large Hermes head" of Greece

Several types of false die-proofs of the "large Hermes head" exist. The two types presented here have not been done by forgers to deceive the philatelists but by philatelic dealers to illustrate their publications or to thank their customers. Other types of false die-proofs made by notable forgers (**de Sperati & Fournier**) are presented later in this presentation.



In the beginning of the 20th century, the famous French editor and philatelic expert, **Arthur Maury** (1844/1907) from **Paris**, asked the French stamps printing administration, *l'Atelier du Timbre*, to print reproductions of the first stamps of various countries in order to illustrate his popular catalogues & books. For the preparation of this work, trial sheetlets of 4, 6 and even 13 illustrations of the first stamps of these selected countries, in various colours (black, red, green & brown...), have been realized by the printer. The presented false die-proofs have been cut from these sheetlets.

See the detailed article of **Jean-François Brun** in *Philotelia* No 705.



These die-proofs, printed in typography, are known in 5 different colours (black, red, bottle-green, deep-blue & plum). The philatelic literature (**W. G. Moseley, R. M. Feenstra...**) is reporting that they have been ordered by a stamp dealer based in **Istanbul** to be offered to his customers. They are supposed to be printed in Belgium before the second world war...

Fake die-proofs & stamps of the "large Hermes head" of Greece by de Sperati



Jean de Sperati (1884/1957) is the most famous forgers of the philatelic history. During his life he has produced more than 566 different types of false stamps, die-proofs & plate-proofs from more than 100 countries. He was using the photolithography technic, so the false stamps produced were an exact reproduction of the genuine ones, so very difficult to distinguish...

Despite he was claiming that he was selling his reproductions as such, **Jean de Sperati** has been suited several times in France and Italy. In the early 1950's, his material and forgeries stock have been bought by the *British Philatelic Association* (BPA) which organised an exhibition on 1954 and published on 1955, a complete study on his work: *The work of Jean de Sperati*.

Jean de Sperati has realized forgeries of the "large Hermes head" only on the **1 lepton** value: one black numbered die-proof and one of the **Paris** emission stamp in brown, with three different type I diamond postmarks of the towns of **Patras** ("9"), **Tripoli** ("18") & **Sparta** ("32").



Numbered black die-proof of the **1 lepton**, with **Jean de Sperati** signature.



Paris issue stamp of the **1 lepton**, brown, with type I diamond postmarks of **Tripoli** ("18") and **Sparta** ("32"). It also exists a third type I diamond postmark of **Patras** ("9").

The so-called "poor sad Hermes" fakes of the "large Hermes head" of Greece

These imitations are probably the first forgeries of the "large Hermes head" ever produced in the early 1860's. They have been printed using the lithographic method by sheet of 15 (5 X 3) or 25 (5 X 5). They are not known mint and are not wearing any "control number" on their back. Both the design and the printing are very coarse so they are almost immediately detectable. There is an on-going debate between philatelic forgeries specialists of this period on the paternity of these imitations were they, or nor, sold by **Philip Spiro** of the **Spiro Brothers** company based in **Hamburg**, which was selling imitations not to deceive philatelists but to help them to fill the missing cases of their albums. These imitations were sold at such in the catalogues and adverts of this company during its period of existence (1864/1880).



Sheetlet of twenty-five of the 5 lepta.



Sheetlet of fifteen of the 20 lepta with the first row inverted.



Sheetlet of fifteen of the 40 lepta.



Sheetlet of twenty-five of the 10 lepta.

Fake stamps of the “large Hermes head” of Greece by Spiro Brothers

Philip Spiro was leading a well-established lithographic company, **Spiro Brothers** based in **Hamburg**. The company was producing many printing items from visiting cards to labels for groceries or beer cans... As in these days, making imitation of expired postal stamps was not against the law and the sale of these vignettes to the emerging philatelic market was legitimate, the company decided, in 1864, to sell facsimiles of postal stamps, sold as such, and was really successful as, in the late 1870's, its facsimiles catalogue was proposing more than 400 different references. **Spiro Brothers** has been the first company successful on the emerging “*space fillers*” philatelic market. The company stopped this facsimiles activity in the years 1879/1880.

The “*large Hermes head*” forgeries of **Spiro Brothers** were printed in lithography. They were proposed only cancelled and are not known mint. They were also sold with or without “*control numbers*” and with or without watermark (!).



The seven values of the **Spiro Brother** forgeries of the “*large Hermes head*” with control numbers for the 5, 10, 20, 40 & 80 lepta.

Fake stamps of the “large Hermes head” of Greece by Alisaffi

A. Alisaffi was a stamp dealer in **Constantinople** at the turn of the 19th & 20th centuries. In 1902, he was doing business in **Paris** reselling the large & small Hermes heads of his own creation by photolithographic printing process, as genuine or reprint stamps. After his denunciation by another stamp dealer in **Athens**, he got an official licence to sell his forgeries as “*simple images*”... He has created 12 different types of forgeries of the 9 values of the “large Hermes head” and some of them are almost perfect even showing the first wavy line of the north-west spandrel broken! The **Alisaffi** “large Hermes head” fakes were sold without gum and cancellation even if some have been gummed or cancelled later on.



Block of four of the 10 lepta.



Pair “tête-bêche” of the 30 lepta blue.



Height of the nine values of the “large Hermes head” of the 1861 & 1876 emissions.

Fake die-proofs & stamps of the "large Hermes head" of Greece by Fournier

As we have seen on the previous pages of this presentation, the "large Hermes head" forgeries are not only coming from forgers, who were creating philatelic material to deceive the collectors, but also, and very often, from established companies which were making imitations, sold as such at a small fraction of the catalogue value of the genuine stamp, to help the philatelists to fill the empty cases of their albums...

At the turn of the 19th & 20th centuries, the "golden age" of the philately, this kind of business was flourishing. The largest company ever, in terms of both quantities produced and revenues, has been the one managed by **François Fournier** (1846/1917) from **Geneva**. He started his operations in 1903 by selling facsimile reproductions of old obsolete stamps of Switzerland and other countries. In 1904, he bought the 1892 founded facsimiles company of **Louis-Henri Mercier** (**Henri Goegg**) and started his worldwide expansion. The last "Facsimiles of Obsolete Postage Stamps" **Fournier** catalogue of 1914 was proposing 3671 different facsimiles from more than 120 countries! **Fournier** company had a street name and has been awarded many times at official international philatelic exhibits during this period...



On top of his facsimiles business, **Fournier** develop a not less prosperous activity: a "philatelic clinic" to repair the defective genuine stamps. After his death, one of his employees, **Charles Hirschburger** (1880/1927) continued the activities but quite unsuccessfully. In 1928, l'Union Philatélique de **Genève** bought, from **Hirschburger**'s widow, the entire material and stocks of the company in order to prevent the huge **Fournier** facsimiles stocks to fall in unscrupulous hands... All the manufacturing material was donated to the **Geneva** Museum of History and after having identified the facsimiles vignettes with a "FAUX" overprint on the recto and a "FAC-SIMILE" mark on the verso, l'Union Philatélique de **Genève** edited 480 albums with the complete collection of the **Fournier** facsimiles and sold them to other philatelic organisations over the world for 25 \$ each.

The "large Hermes head" forgeries of **Fournier** were printed in lithography. They were proposed mint & cancelled and with or without "control numbers".



Various values of the "large Hermes head" **Fournier** facsimiles.

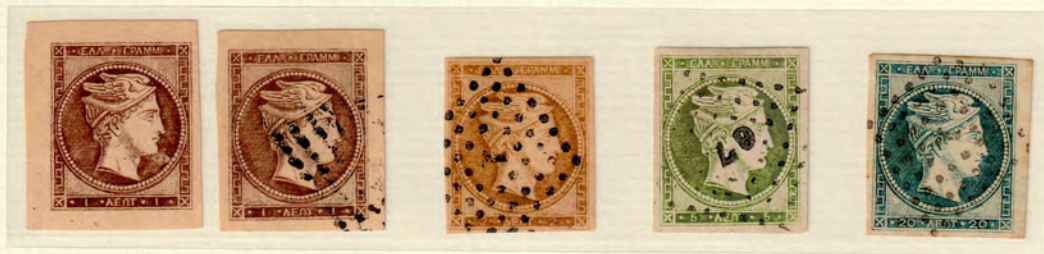
Die-proofs, stamps, "control numbers" and postmarks of Greece created by **François Fournier**. ---->



Fake stamps of the “*large Hermes head*” of Greece by Oneglia

Erasmus Onelia (1853/1934) first philatelic activities started on 1892 as he was advertising to exchange stamps. Starting 1894 he was established as stamp dealer in **Torino** and was offering on his catalogues, imitations of postal stamps of various countries beside Italy and ancient duchies. He was arrested in 1897, in **London**, when offering to the British stamp dealer, Stanley-Gibbons, forgeries as such. He was fined 20 shillings only but all his stock was confiscated. **Oneglia** retired on 1921.

The “*large Hermes head*” forgeries of **Oneglia** were printed in typography. They were intended to replace the nine values of the **Paris** printing of 1861 & 1876, so only the 10 lepta is wearing large size “*control numbers*” “10” on the verso. They were proposed only cancelled on his catalogues/adverts but some mint items have survived and are very rare. Only one type of cancellation is existing: the type 1 diamond postmark of **Athens** (“1”). Not any multiple is known, so the printing plate was made of one single stamp only.



The seven values of the **Oneglia** forgeries of the “*large Hermes head*” of the **Paris** printing of 1861 with control numbers for the 10 lepta.



The two values of the **Oneglia** forgeries of the “*large Hermes head*” of the **Paris** printing of 1876 (30 & 60 lepta).

Fake stamps of the "large Hermes head" of Greece by Imperato

Nino Imperato (about 1890/?) was established in **Genoa** in the 1920's. We do not know much about him. He advertised his facsimiles resell activities between 1920 & 1922 through a publication named "*Il-Fac-simile*". He was selling his own creations as well as other forgers' material like the ones of **Erasmus Oneglia** to whom he bought the left stock when he retired.

The "*large Hermes head*" forgeries of **Imperato** were printed in lithography. They were intended to replace the two values of the **Paris** printing of 1876: the 30 & 60 lepta. They were proposed both mint & cancelled and the postmark used were like the circular dated one (type II). These **Imperato** forgeries are also known as the "*faux de Gênes*". They are remarkably well executed and printed but fortunately the first & tenth wavy lines of the north-west spandrel are not broken...



Plate-proof of the 30 lepta, black on carton.



Block of four of the 30 lepta, brown.



Block of four of the 30 lepta, green.



Block of four of the 60 lepta, green.



Strip of five of the 60 lepta, green, bottom of the sheet, cancelled with type II postmark of **Nafplio** ("15").



Complete sheet of twenty-five of the 60 lepta, green.

Fake stamps of the "large Hermes head" of Greece from unidentified forgers

It exists many other counterfeits types of the "large Hermes head" designed and printed by unidentified authors. This is a presentation of some of them:



Plate-proofs of the **1 lepton** in black.



Plate-proof of the **20 lepta** recto-verso.
Photo of the recto on the right.



The only postal forgery known, **20 lepta** created in 1881, to deceive the post-office.
The forger tried to sell these forgeries in **Syros** and **Aghia Anna** but
was arrested and his stock (about 200 stamps) confiscated...



A set of very poorly made counterfeits with very defective design and printing.



A set of counterfeits of various values with more "acceptable" design and printing.

Recently appeared counterfeits of the "large Hermes head" of Greece

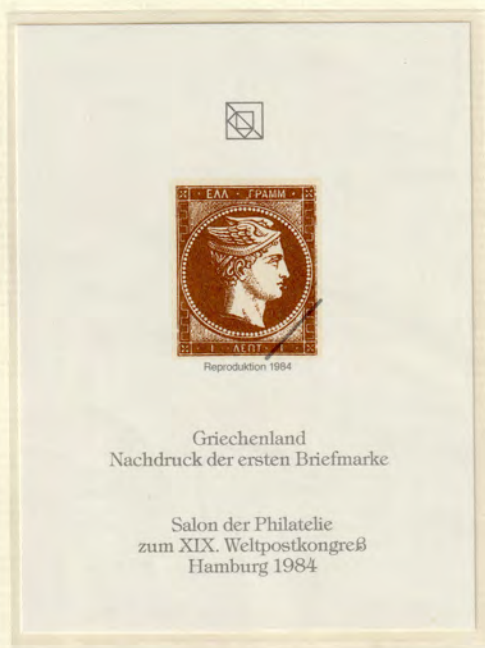
If all the fakes presented so far in this presentation have been made in the 19th century and during the half part of the 20th one, some new counterfeits appeared more recently, these are some of them:



These forgeries appeared in the market at the beginning of this century, coming from Italy. I have seen 7 values of the "large Hermes head" of 1861 & 1876 but without the 2 & 30 lepta.



Two examples of the counterfeits of the seven values cut from the Hellenic post set issued for the one hundred years anniversary of the introduction of the "large Hermes head" in 1961.



Commemorative sheetlet of an exhibition in **Hamburg** in 1984.



Marginal of the **60 lepta** in brown!