

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist

After the destitution of **Othon Ist**, the first King of Greece since 1832, following a popular revolution in 1862, the son of **Christian IX**, King of Denmark, **William of Denmark** ascended the throne at the age of 17 years (born on December 24th, 1845) under the name of **George Ist**, and reigned as King of the Hellenes from March 30th, 1863 until his assassination in **Thessaloniki** on March 18th, 1913. Born in the **Oldenburg** dynasty, he was the founder of the royal family of Greece.

All collectors of Greek stamps are aware of the vignettes of the effigy of King **George Ist**, printed in more than 20 different colours. Philatelists commonly call these vignettes "essays" or even "unaccepted projects" or "unofficial issues" because they were never used for postal service and & unknown cancelled or on letter.

As early as April 1863, the emerging philatelic press (**Jean-Baptiste Moens** in his journal, "*Le Timbre-poste*") hypothesized on the creation of new Greek stamps at the effigy of the new King. That probably gave idea to some and on May 1864, the same famous Belgian philatelic journalist in the same paper as well as the British philatelic journal "*Stamp Collector's*" report the creation in **Paris** of a stamp project with the effigy of the young King in front of the Parthenon. The Belgian chronicle was illustrated with a picture of the Type 1 engraved vignette (printed in "recess" - "Taille douce"). We don't know if this "essay" has been created to be proposed to the Greek postal authorities and if it has been presented to them as not any official document mentioning it has been discovered so far, or if the intention of its unknown creator was to make money on the backs of philatelists...



Type 1 vignettes

A second vignette with a new design, but almost identical to the Type 1 one (the medallion is larger, the effigy is drawn differently...) arrived later (probably in the 1880/90's). It was printed in lithography on regular paper (Type 2c). It also exists about a dozen of this Type with large margins, printed in intaglio on different papers (coated matte & multi-layer, called "*Bristol*") which are probably final die-proofs (Type 2b).



Type 2b (Final die-proof)



Type 2c vignettes

According to **N.S. Nicolaïdes**, philatelic writer in **Paris** in the early 20th century, the philatelic market was flooded, around the year 1898, by "reprints" vignettes of the same Type (Type 2d), printed in lithography.



Type 2d vignettes

The Type 2a, probably the mock-up the Type 2 vignettes, is without legend & value as it was reported in the philatelic literature up to the beginning of the 20th century but has not been seen since then...

All the Types 1 & 2 vignettes have a unique facial value: 20 lepta and have been, for each Type, printed in about ten to twenty different colours/shades depending of the Type.

On June 1864, "*Le Timbre-poste*", followed the month after by "*Stamp Collector's*" report the arrival of a new vignette of the effigy of George Ist. That time, both journalists refer to a Milanese artist as creator, probably the famous Italian engraver/printer: **Luigi Ronchi**. These stamps, printed in lithography, are presented as a triptych of three values: 20, 5 & 40 lepta in that order (Type 3b). It exists very few items of this Type printed in typography (Type 3a) on different high quality thick papers (coated, glossy & dull). The quality of the printing of the Type 3a is absolutely exceptional and they are more probably final die-proofs of the Type 3. The triptychs of the Type 3a exists in about a dozen colours and the Type 3b in about fifteen.



Type 3a (Final die-proof)



Type 3b vignette

Plan:

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 - Type 3b
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Picture of the young King of the Hellenes, **George Ist**, which served as model for the engravers.

Bibliography:

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The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 1

This is a presentation of a set of the Type 1 vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist as it was mounted by Sir Daniel Cooper (1821/1902), one of the founders and first president of the *Philatelic Society of London*, the actual *Royal Philatelic Society of London (RPSL)*. This presentation was acquired by Judge Frederick Philbrick (1835/1910), another founder of the *Philatelic Society of London*. It was then sold to the most famous collector of the philatelic history, Philip Ferrari de La Renotière (1850/1917). In 1925, Walter Dorning Beckton (1866/1931), president of the RPSL from 1929 to 1931, bought it from a Birmingham stamp dealer, W. T. Wilson. Walter Dorning Beckton was a member of the famous "*Manchester school of philately*", as well as Percival Loines Pemberton (1875/1949) and both, with Thomas Theodore Groom (1863/1943), have set the foundations of the advanced study of the "*large Hermes head*" of Greece at the beginning of the 20th century.

This sheetlet was sold as lot No. 1 of "*The "Dorning Beckton" collection of the postage stamps of Greece*" by H. R. Harmer of London on November 18th, 1935.

On this sheetlet we can see eight of the ten colours/shades of the "*engraved*" (printed in "*taille douce*") Type 1 of the vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist.



Ex Dorning Beckton Collection

Essays.

Original Essays engraved.

Note the drawing of the head which differs in the next lithographed series.

Ex Sir Daniel Cooper's Collection and mounted on his original pages.

W. T. Wilson,

18 Livingstone Road, Handsworth,

BIRMINGHAM.

Partners { W. T. Wilson.
F. E. Wilson.

England.

Expert and Specialist in Stamps ...

... High-Class Stamps ... Opinions ...

Telegraphic Address:
"Philately, Birmingham."

... Special Albums and Appliances.

Dictated by

WTW/RGL.

December 4th. 1925.

W. Dorning Beckton Esq.,

Manchester.

Dear Mr. Beckton,

My Brother had the Sir Daniel Cooper Proofs. I enclose 4 lots which may interest you, also Roumania 5b. Beard with Retouched value, for your kind opinion.

Hoping you are well and with kind regards,

Yours faithfully,

W. T. Wilson

Sir Daniel Cooper was Governor of New South Wales, and the first President of the London Philatelic Society 7th Oct 1870. He died 1909. M. Ferrari bought Sir Daniels collection from Judge Philbrick 7/25

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 1

The Type 1 vignette of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist** is representing the new young King of the Hellenes in an oval surrounded by pearls and in front of the west façade of the most prestigious Greek antic temple: the Parthenon. It was printed in intaglio printing ("*taille douce*") and exists in a ten of colours with various shades, all with the same facial value of 20 lepta and is unperforated. It has probably been printed individually as not any multiple, even a pair, is known. The philatelic literature mentioned it for the first time in May 1864, stating that it has been done by a French engraver in **Paris**.



Type 1 vignettes in fifteen various shades.

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 2b

A second design, almost identical to the Type 1 one, arrived later, probably in the years 1880's or even later in the century as the first apparition of an illustration of this new design, in the philatelic literature, is dated on 1896 with the book of **Arthur E. Glasewald**, "*Die Postwerthzeichen von Griechenland*".

The design differs from the Type 1 one mainly as:

- The central medallion is broader and less high,
- The effigy of the King has been redesigned with better proportions and
- The columns are enlarged more regularly toward the base, giving the building a much better foundation.

Many other differences exist in particular with the letters & numbers.

It exists several impressions of this new design (Type 2):

- The first one (Type 2a) is illustrating the cover of the **N.S. Nicolaïdes'** book "*Histoire de la création du timbre grec et description complète de toutes les émissions*" published in **Paris** on 1923. It has the same design as the Type 2b one but without any legend nor value. The author is stating that this unique item was printed in black on "*Bristol*" cardboard. The "*Kohl Briefmarken Handbuch*" of **Alex G. Argyropulos** & **Dr. Herbert Munk** of 1929 is also mentioning it. So, it was probably the mock-up or a progressive die-proof of the Type 2. This piece has never been seen since then...
- The second one (Type 2b) is described on this page.
- The following ones (Type 2c & 2d) will be described in the following pages.

The Type 2b exists on two different thick papers: coated matte and multi-layer (called "*Bristol*") with very large margins. They have been printed in intaglio printing ("*taille douce*") in a ten of different colours/shades and are all with 20 lepta facial value. The impression is remarkably fine & well executed and it only exists less than twenty samples of them in all colours and papers.

They are probably final die-proofs printed directly from the stone of the Type 2.



Five items printed on multi-layer (called "*Bristol*") paper.

No more than ten pieces are recorded as of today.



Six items printed on coated matte paper.

No more than ten pieces are recorded as of today.

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 2c

The Type 2c vignette of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist**, like the Types 2a & 2b, arrived on the market in the 1880's/1890's. It has been printed in lithography on white medium thickness paper. It has been printed from multiple items printing plate and are all with 20 lepta facial value. We do not know, as of today, the exact size of the printing plate... The largest multiples I have seen, so far, are two marginal blocks of six, presented below on this page.

It exists in about twenty different colours/shades, already referenced by **Percival Loines Pemberton** in his study "*The stamps of Greece*" in 1911.



Two marginal blocks of six of the **Type 2c** vignettes.

The largest multiples known today.



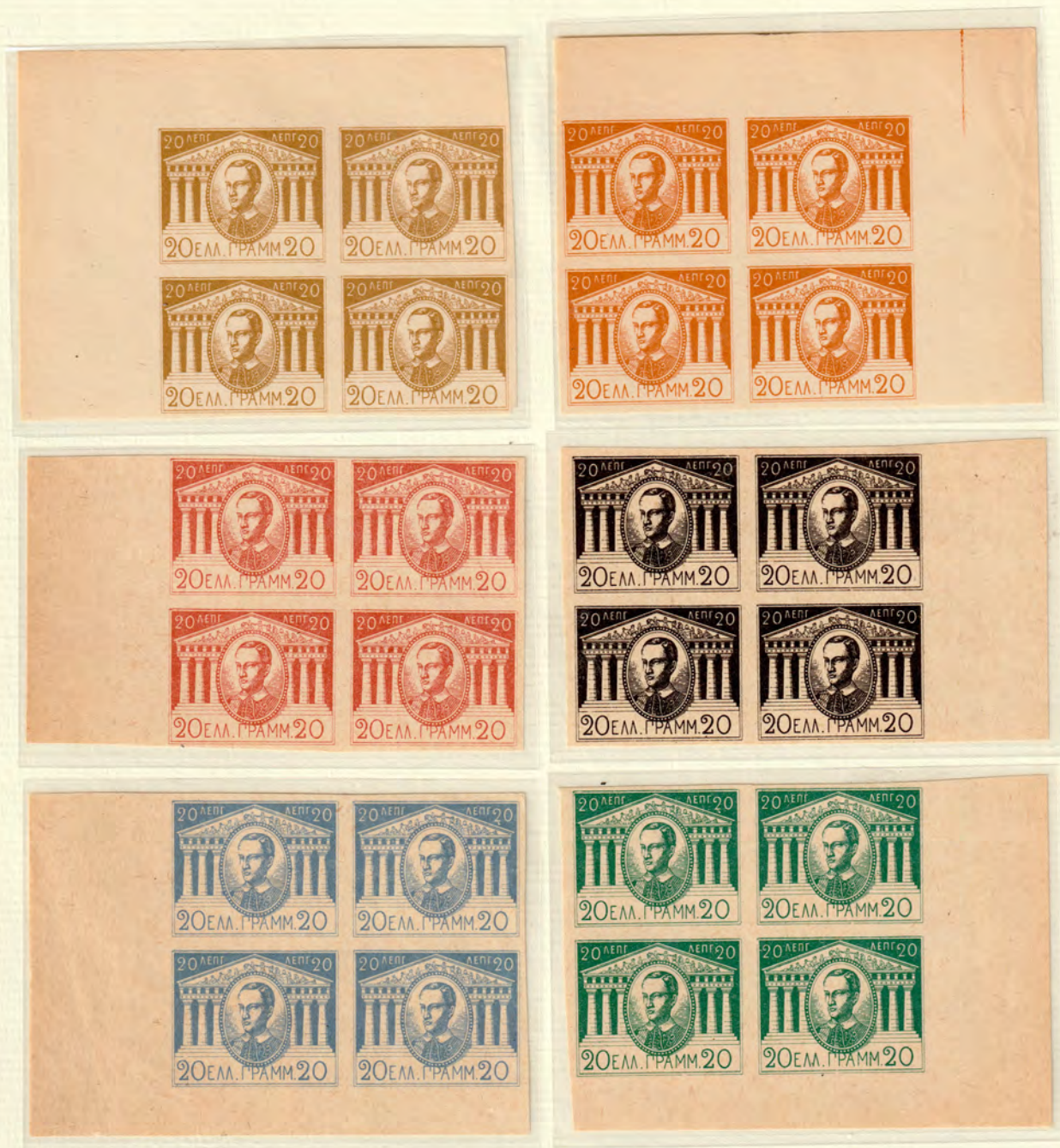
Type 2c vignettes in fifteen various colours/shades.

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 2d

The Type 2d vignette of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist**, has been printed in lithography or phototyping from a plate of one hundred & ten (11 X 10), see the following page. According to **N.S. Nicolaïdes**, the philatelic market has been flooded by these "*reprints*" in 1898. It exists an enormous quantity of these "*reprints*" in single & various multiples in about twenty shades. The design differs from the Type 2c one mainly as:

- The small vertical bar of the "Γ" of "ΓΡΑΜΜ" descends further,
- The "Ε" of "ΕΛΛ." is broader & the bottom horizontal line touches the point which disappears,
- The two "Μ" of "ΓΡΑΜΜ." are much wider and
- Les pearls surrounding the oval are smaller...

Many other differences exist both on the drawing and the letters & numbers.



Six blocks of four of the **Type 2d** vignettes in various colours/shades.

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 2d



Complete sheet of 110 vignettes (11 X 10) of the Type 2d, mauve.

Comparisons between Types 1 & 2c and between Types 2c & 2d

1. The comparison between the Type 1 vignette and the Types 2c & 2d ones is obvious as first, the Type 1 is "engraved", printed in "taille douce" when the two other ones are printed in lithography.
2. Many other visual differences are existing between Type 1 and Type 2c:
 - The central medallion is broader and less high,
 - The effigy of the King has been redesigned with better proportions and
 - The columns are enlarged more regularly toward the base, giving the building a much better foundation.
 - Many other differences exist in particular with the letters & numbers.



Comparison between **Type 1** (left) & **Type 2c** (right) vignettes.

3. The comparison between the Type 2c vignette and the Types 2d one is also very easy as several visual differences are existing:
 - The small vertical bar of the "Γ" of "ΓΡΑΜΜ" descends further,
 - The "Ε" of "ΕΛΛ." is broader & the bottom horizontal line touches the point which disappears,
 - The two "Μ" of "ΓΡΑΜΜ." are much wider and
 - Les pearls surrounding the oval are smaller...



Comparison between **Type 2c** (left) & **Type 2d** (right) vignettes.

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 3a

The Type 3 vignette of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist** is presented in the form of a triptych of three values: 20, 5 & 40 lepta in that order. Compare to the Type 1 & 2 vignettes, there is still the effigy of the **King George Ist** in an oval (5 & 40 lepta) or a rectangle (20 lepta) in the middle, but the Parthenon has disappeared and is replaced by various geometrical ornaments.

The Type 3a is printed in typography on papers of excellent qualities of medium thickness: coated, "golden" and multi-layered called "*Bristol*". The rendering is absolutely remarkable as the printing is almost perfect. It has been announced by the philatelic press as soon as June 1864, so just one month after the Type 1. No more than about fifteen, each on a different shade, are referenced as of today. These Type 3a vignettes are most probably final die-proofs and have been created by the famous Italian engraver/printer **Luigi Ronchi** from **Milano** as recently discovered by **Joost Meijer** from *The Hellenic Philatelic Society of the Netherlands*.



Three triptych of the **Type 3a** vignettes in various colours/shades.

No more than about fifteen are referenced as of today.



Five individual samples, cut from the triptych, of the **Type 3a** vignettes in various colours/shades.

No more than about fifteen are referenced as of today.

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, George Ist - Type 3b

The Type 3b vignette of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist**, as the Type 3a, is presented in the form of a triptych of three values: 20, 5 & 40 lepta in that order. It has been printed on a medium thickness paper by lithography but the rendering is coarse or even very coarse for some of them (no comparison with the Type 3a). They are known in about fifteen different colours/shades. As for the Type 3a, it exists singles and pairs which have, unfortunately, been cut from the original triptych.



Nine triptychs of the **Type 3b** vignettes in various colours/shades.



Four individual samples & one pair, cut from the triptych, of the **Type 3b** vignettes in other colours/shades.

Imitations and conclusion

The vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist** have been counterfeited even if they are not at all, official postal stamps and if, for some types, real forgeries... These are some examples of these forgeries. We do not know anything about the forgers who have created them...



Type 3d vignette
falsely perforated.

Type 1 forgeries.

Type 3b forgery.

In conclusion, the vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist** are part of the first Greek stamps history and have interested a number philatelists since their creation, including some of the most famous ones: **Sir Daniel Cooper**, **Judge Frederick Philbrick**, **Philip Ferrari de La Renotière** or **Walter Dorning Beckton** (see pages 3/4), only to mention few of them.

Some of these vignettes (Types 2b & 3a) are very well executed and their rendering is almost perfect as created for one of them (Type 3a) by one of the most competent and talented European engraver/printer of this period, **Luigi Ronchi** from **Milano**.

Some of them (Types 1 & 3) have been probably created to be proposed to the Greek postal authorities, as they have appeared as soon as May/June 1864, to replace the "large *Hermes head*" in use at that time, in order to celebrate the new King's accession to the throne. As of today, not any single document has been found from the Greek postal administration, proving that one or both of these vignettes has/have been proposed officially to its services... So, these two Types (1 & 3) can only be called "*unofficial issues*"... If any proof is found in the future, from the Greek postal administration, attesting that they have been officially presented, they would then, become "*unadopted projects*"...

Some of them (all Type 2) which arrived late in the 19th century, the beginning of the "*golden age*" of the philately, have been done only to make money on the back of the philatelists and are simply forgeries. The enormous quantities of the Type 2d (the "*reprints*"), which have flooded the philatelic market in 1898, have totally shadowed, in the eyes of many philatelists, the great philatelic interest of the Types 1 & 3.

If you want to know more about the vignettes of the effigy of the King of the Hellenes, **George Ist**, you can consult the study I have published in *Documents Philatéliques* No. 204 of the 2nd quarter 2010: "*Les vignettes à l'effigie du roi des Hellènes George I^{er}*" and read the recent remarkable article written by **Joost Meijer** from *The Hellenic Philatelic Society of the Netherlands (HPSNL)* which enhance and complete my study. This last article is available, in English, on the web site of the *HPSNL* (<https://pvgriekenland.nl/publications/16-essay-george-uk.pdf>).