

In the Study Group of our Society, in recent month we have made an inventory of the plate numbers of the printing plates supplied to the Greek printing house Aspiotis by the firm Thomas de la Rue & Company from London. This article is a report of our findings. In the Annex, you can find the results of our research so far.

Introduction

From 1911 onwards, more and more Greek stamps were printed by a Greek printer, the Brothers G. Aspiotis (later: Aspiotis-ELKA) from Corfu. Two printing techniques were used, surface printing and (copper) gravure printing. Lithography was used as the method in the surface printing process. The printer had complete control over that process. Both the fabrication of the printing stones and the actual printing were done in Corfu. That was different with the (copper) gravure printing. The Engraving of the stamp design and the making of the gravure plates for the printing cylinders was a specialized process, for which assistance from abroad was required. The Hermes & Iris issue of 1911 (Hellas 203-218) was created with the help of the Thomas MacDonald company from London, who engraved the stamps and made the plates (and also supplied printing presses).

When the Greek post decided in 1923 to have a new series of definitive stamps printed to replace the long-term Hermes & Iris issue, they first made use again of the services of Thomas MacDonald. The British firm supplied the plates for this series, the “Landscapes” (Hellas 467-480). The stamps were then printed again in Corfu. The stamps were issued in 1927. The Greek Post quickly ran out of stock and it was decided to reprint the stamps for a number of values. To this end, some new plates also had to be manufactured. The problem, however, was that Thomas MacDonald had since died and his firm had ceased to exist. That is why the Greek Post had to look for a new manufacturer of the gravure plates. In the end they contracted not one but three firms. In addition to the Polish PWPW and the British Perkins, Bacon & Co, Thomas de la Rue & Company from London was hired. It was the start of a collaboration between Aspiotis-ELKA and the London printer that would last for over 40 years.



Thomas de la Rue was a company with a great deal of experience when it came to the printing of postage stamps. The old man Thomas, originally from the island of Guernsey, had settled in London in 1821 where he specialized in printing playing cards. In 1855, (English) stamps were printed for the first time and not much later also banknotes (fig. 1). When the Greeks knocked on De la Rue's door in 1930, the company already had a long track record. Incidentally, they still exist (and in the meantime have bought many of their former British competitors).

General remarks on the plate numbers

We first give the general characteristics of the plate numbers of De la Rue, followed by a few specific cases.

The plate numbers generally consist of a number and a letter (for example 3A) (fig. 2). Most stamps (from 1936) involve a plate 1A and 1B, which probably means that a printing press was used with two cylinders (and two printing plates). If the total numbers of the stamps printed became too high, the worn plate had to be replaced by a new one, which then received number 2A etc. This is the case with a number of stamps.

The plate numbers are usually located at the bottom of the edge of the sheets, sometimes above or to the side.

In the pre-WWII issues, the edges of the sheet were often cut off by the postal service, so that the plate number remains only partially visible (or was completely cut away) (fig.3b).

Stamps printed in two colors used two separate printing plates per stamp. This is visible on the edges of the sheet with two unique plate numbers, usually one at the top and one at the bottom of the sheet (fig.3a and b).

The design of the plate numbers is characteristic of De la Rue and more or less the same throughout the period. Other printers (for example Aspiotis and Perkins & Bacon) also used plate numbers, but they have a different



¹ Version 01-04-2025

appearance.

In total, in the period 1930-1973 De la Rue made printing plates for 25 series of Greek stamps, 5 series of airmail stamps and two postage due stamps.

Findings on various issues

After the general remarks, we will now make some remarks on some peculiarities that we noticed with the various issues.

1. *Landscapes, Republic and Mystras (1933-1935) (Hellas 516-518, 520, 522-525 and 527)*

The first contact between Aspiotis-ELKA and De la Rue seems to have originated in 1930. In that year De la Rue makes proofs for the 50 lepta value (Corinth Canal) of the “Landscapes” stamps. Ultimately, two times four plates of these stamps will be supplied (probably still based on the printing press previously used by Aspiotis for



the Thomas MacDonald plates). As indicated above, after the 1935 issues it is likely the printer switched to another more modern press with two-plate cylinders. Proofs of the other values that De la Rue produced (1, 2, 10 and 25 Drachmas) were made in 1932, after which the plates were delivered to Aspiotis the following year.



The 1 and 2 Drachma values were printed in two colors and thus consist of two printing plates. The edges of the sheets of the printed stamps show one plate with number / letter designation (1A etc.) and the other plate with only a number, with or without a dot (1 and 1.) (fig.3a and b). The two-color 10 and 25 drachmas also have plate numbers (1A, 1B).

Proofs were submitted to the Greek government in 1932 for the stamps of the “Republic” issue (actually intended as high values for the “Landscapes”) as well. And these stamps would also be printed in 1933. With these two-color stamps, the two plates (per stamp) only have a number (with and without a dot). Simultaneously with the reprints of the stamps of the “Landscapes”, an additional stamp of 4 Drachma (Mystras) was ordered that would complement the series (originally ordered in the value of 1.50 Drachmas). Proofs were made by De la Rue in 1934, and the stamp was eventually issued in 1935. This is probably the last stamp of which four printing plates were delivered at the same time.

2. *The King Constantine I mourning Issue (Hellas 533-534)*

These stamps are the only stamps printed from (copper) gravure plates of De la Rue on which no plate number can be found. This probably has to do with the haste with which the stamps had to be printed. The order arrived at De la Rue on October 13, 1936 and a month later, on November 18, 1936, the stamps were already issued (!). The grey-black mourning border, added on request of the officials at the last moment, was printed in lithography over the stamp image.

3. *The Historical Issue (1937) (Hellas 540-553)*

The low values of these stamps, 5 lepta - 80 lepta, were printed in lithography, the other values in (copper) gravure. De la Rue supplied the printing plates for both types of stamps. As far as is known, it is the only time that De la Rue supplied lithographic plates to Aspiotis (with the exception of the above-mentioned mourning edges). In contrast to the (copper) gravure stamps, these lithograph stamps do not have plate numbers.

4. *Victory issue (1946-47) (Hellas 670-678, except 676)*

These stamps are the only series where not only the printing plates were manufactured in London, but also the actual printing was done there. They are therefore unique as they not only have plate numbers, but also the text “Thomas de la Rue & Company, London” can be found at the bottom of the sheet (fig.4).



5. *Royal Family I and II (1956-57) (Hellas 760-773 and 777-790)*

The delivery of the plates for this issue did not succeed without problems. Some of the printing plates were defective and had to be replaced immediately. This is visible in the deviating numbering of the 50 lepta and the 1 drachma plates with Roman numerals (fig. 5). The total issue was not made in one print run, but in two separate print runs. Partly because the colours of the first issue did not appeal to the public, the second issue was made using changed colours. For this second issue generally, the same plates were used as for the first edition, except for the values of 50 lepta and 2 Drachmas, whose printing numbers were apparently so high that new plates were necessary because the old ones had worn out. Based on the known circulation figures, one printing plate in the period 1950-1975 would have been good for a maximum of about 12,000,000 stamps. In the period before that,

the print capacity may have been somewhat smaller. Incidentally, de la Rue was famous for its patented way of making wear-resistant intaglio plates.

6. *Benefactors I (1973) (Hellas 1275-1279)*

With the arrival of the Colonels' regime in 1967, the bond between De la Rue and Aspiotis ELKA was temporarily broken. When this regime came to an end, De la Rue supplied printing plates to Aspiotis one more time, for the Benefactors series.

Conclusions

The collaboration between De la Rue and Aspiotis-ELKA has existed for over 40 years and has yielded some of the most beautiful stamps of Greece. They are all graphic artworks.

The plate numbers also prove to be a nice collection area in itself, which in turn provides the necessary information regarding the issued stamps.

Hopefully in the future we can do a similar study of the plate numbers of other printers of Greek stamps such as Aspiotis and Perkins & Bacon.

We'd like to thank the members of the Study Group for their enthusiastic contributions.

NB: If you have any additions to the existing list, please let us know (preferably with a scan). See the contact-information on our website!



Annex : Plate numbers Thomas de la Rue

Hellas	Year	Description	Value	Plates
516 (incl. C76, C77 and C78)	1931-1935	Landscapes (re-issue)	50 l	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D
517			1 Dr (*)	1A (blue,↓), 1B, IC, 2A, 2B -1(orange ↑), 1.(orange ↑)
518			2 Dr (*)	1A/1. (green/black ↓/↑), 1B (green ↓) , IC, 1., 2A/1(green/black ↓/↑), 2B.
520			10 Dr (*)	1A, 1B
522			25 Dr (*)	1A, 1B
523	1933	Republic	50 Dr (*)	1 (grey ↓), 1. (grey ↓)
524 (incl. 531)			75 Dr (*)	1 (grey ↓), 1. (grey ↓), 1 (violet↑), 1. (violet↑)
525 (incl. 532)			100 Dr (*)	1 (green ↑), 1. (brown ↓)
527	1935	Mystras	4 Dr	1A, 1B, 2C, 2D, 4A
533	1936	King Constantine I mourning	3 Dr	-
534			8 Dr	-
535 (incl. 661, 667, NE 149, SDD 4 and CF 1)	1937	King George II	1 Dr	1C, B1, 4A, 4C, 4D, 5D
536 (incl. 662, 668, C104, NE 151, SDD 6 and CF 2)			3 Dr	1B, 5D, 7C, 8B, 8C, A6, B6, C6, D6
537 (incl. 663, 669, C105, NE 155 and CF 3)			8 Dr	A1, B1, 3A, 3D, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D
538 (incl. 664 and CF 4)			100 Dr	B1
540	1937	Historical	5 l	(**)
541			10 l (Tyrinthos)	(**)
542			10 l (Tiryntos)	(**)
543			20 l	(**)
544			40 l	(**)
545			50 l	(**)
546			80 l	(**)
547 (incl. 624, NE 150 and CF 11)			2 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D, 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D
548 (incl. 625, NE 152 and CF 12)			5 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
549 (incl. 626, NE 153 and CF 13)			6 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
550 (incl. NE 154 and CF 14)			7 Dr	1B, 1C
551 (incl. NE 156, SDD 7 and CF 15)			10 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
552 (incl. NE 157, SDD 8 and CF 16)			15 Dr	A1, B1

553 (incl. NE 158 and CF 17)			25 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
554	1938	Royal Wedding	1 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
555			3 Dr	1A, 1B
556			8 Dr	1A, 1B, 1D
558 (incl. CF 18)	1938	Statue king Constantine I	1,50 Dr	1A
559 (incl. NE 159 and CF 19)			30 Dr	1A
560	1939	Ionian Islands	1 Dr	1A
561			4 Dr	1A, 1B
562			20 Dr (Karmijn)	1A, 1B
563			20 Dr (Blauw)	1A, 1B
564			20 Dr (Geel)	1A, 1B
672	1946	Victory	250 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
670	1947		50 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C, 1D
671			100 Dr	1A, 1C, 1D
673			500 Dr	1A, 1B
674			600 Dr	1A
675			1000 Dr	1B, 1C, 1D
677			2000 Dr	1D
678			5000 Dr	1C, 1D
706	1950	Battle of Crete	1000 Dr	1A, 1B
707		UPU	1000 Dr (*)	1A, 1B
708	1951	St Paul	700 Dr	1A
709			1600 Dr	
710			2600 Dr	1
711			10000 Dr	1A
712		Marshall plan	700 Dr	1B
713			800 Dr	1A, 1B
714			1300 Dr	1A, 1B
715			1600 Dr	1A, 1B
716			2600 Dr	1A, 1B
717			5000 Dr	1A, 1B
718	1952	Royal Birthday	200 Dr	1A, 1C
719			1000 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C
720			1400 Dr	1A, 1B, 1C
721			10000 Dr	1
722	1953	National Products	500 Dr (*)	1A, 1B
723			700 Dr (*)	1A, 1B/1B (yellow/brown, ↓/↓)
724			1000 Dr (*)	
725			1300 Dr (*)	1A/1A (purple/brown, ↓/↓), 1B (purple/brown ↓/↓)
726			2000 Dr (*)	
727			2600 Dr (*)	
728			5000 Dr (*)	
760	1956	Royal Family I	10 l	1A, 2B (←)
761			20 l	1A, 1B
762			30 l	1A, 1B
763			50 l	1A, 1B, IIB
764			70 l	1A
765			1 Dr	IIA, IIB
766			1,50 Dr	1B
767			2 Dr	1B, 2A, 2B

768			3 Dr	1B
769			3,50 Dr	1A, 1B
770			4 Dr	1A, 1B
771			5 Dr	
772			7,50 Dr	1A, 1B
773			10 Dr	1A, 1B (←)
777	1957	Royal Family II	10 l	1A, 2A (←)
778			20 l	1A, 1B
779			30 l	1A, 1B
780			50 l	IIA, IIB, 3A, 3B
781			70 l	1A, 1B
782			1 Dr	IIA, IIB
783			1,50 Dr	1A, 1B
784			2 Dr	3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B
785			3 Dr	1A, 1B
786			3,50 Dr	1A, 1B
787			4 Dr	1B
788			5 Dr	3A (←)
789			7,50 Dr	1A, 1B
790			10 Dr	1A (←)
864	1961	Tourism	10 l	1A, 1B
865			20 l	1A, 1B
866			50 l	1A, 1B
867			70 l	1A, 1B
868			80 l	1A, 1B
869			1 Dr	1A, 1B
870			1,50 Dr	1A, 1B, 3B
871			2,50 Dr	1A, 1B, 3A, 3B
872			3,50 Dr	1A, 1B
873			4 Dr	1A, 1B
874			4,5 Dr	1A, 1B
875			5 Dr	1A, 1B
876			6 Dr	1A, 1B (←)
877			7,50 Dr	1A, 1B
878			8 Dr	1A (←)
879			8,50 Dr	1A, 1B (←)
880			12,50 Dr	1A, 1B
918	1963	Royal Dynasty	50 l	1B
919			1,50 Dr	1A, 1B
920			2,50 Dr	1A
921			4,50 Dr	1A, 1B
922			6 Dr	1A, 1B
976	1964	Royal Wedding	1,50 Dr	1A, 1B
977			2,50 Dr	1A, 1B
978			4,50 Dr	1A, 1B
997	1965	Venizelos	1,50 Dr	1A, 1B
998			2 Dr	1A
999			2,50 Dr	1A, 1B
1018	1966	National Bank	1,50 Dr	1A, 1B
1019			2,50 Dr	1A, 1B
1020			4 Dr	1
1021			6 Dr	1
1049		Prinses Alexandra	2 Dr	1A, 1B
1050			2,50 Dr	1B
1051			3,50 Dr	1B
1275	1973	Benefactors I	1,50 Dr	1A, 1B (←)
1276			2 Dr	1A, 1B (←)

1277			2,50 Dr	1A, 1B (←)
1278			4 Dr	1A, 1B (←)
1279			6,50 Dr	1A, 1B (←)

Airmail

Hellas	Year	Description	Value	Plate numbers
A15	1933	Government's issue	50 l	1
A16			1 Dr	
A17			2 Dr	
A18			5 Dr	
A19			10 Dr	1
A20			25 Dr	1
A21			50 Dr	1
A22 (incl. CF 20)	1935	Mythology	1 Dr	
A23 (incl. CF 21)			2 Dr	
A24 (incl. CF 22)			5 Dr	
A25 (incl. CF 23)			7 Dr	
A26 (incl. CF 24)			10 Dr	1 (↓)
A27 (incl. CF 26)			25 Dr	1 (↑)
A28 (incl. CF 27)			30 Dr	1 (↓)
A29 (incl. CF 28)			50 Dr	1 (↑)
A30 (incl. CF 29)			100 Dr	1
A31	1937/39	Idem (re-issue)	1 Dr	1
A32			2 Dr	1
A33			5 Dr	1 (↑)
A34			7 Dr	1 (↑)
A35 (incl. CF 25)			10 Dr	1 (↑)
A67	1952	Grammos-Vitsi	1000 Dr	1
A68			1700 Dr	1
A69			2700 Dr	1
A70			7000 Dr	1
A71	1954	NATO	1200 Dr	1A, 1B
A72			2400 Dr	1A, 1B
A73			4000 Dr	1A, 1B

Postage Due

Hellas	Year	Description	Value	Plate number
D107 (incl. A 44 and CF 44)	1935	"Engraved"	50 Dr	2
D108 (incl. CF 45)			100 Dr	2

Legend

(*) Two separate printing plates for each stamp

(**) Lithography, no plate number

NB: NE=North-Epirus, SDD=Greek Dodecanese, CF=Corfu 1941 (stamps of Ithaka, Kefalonia, Argostoli and Zante have not been included)

(←) The arrows indicate the position of the plate number on the sheet in relation to the stamp picture (for instance (←) means “on the left side of the sheet”. No arrow means the plate numbers are on the lower edge of the sheet.

(*IA*) A plate number in *Italic* means the number has not been verified by the Study Group, but was mentioned by Chr. Naltsas in his book “Είδικός κατάλογος ελληνικών γραμματώσεων” (Thessaloniki 1965).