

The Kavalla overprints and forgeries with the help of the post¹

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(Digitally edited reissue on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Hermes, Journal of the Hellenic Philatelic Society of The Netherlands)

August 2019

The late dr. H.J. van Wiechen wrote two articles in *Philatelie* in 1967/68.² In these articles he described everything that was known at the time about the stamps of Kavalla with the overprint and he formulated many remaining questions. *Syllektikos Kosmos* of August 1987³ contains a Greek translation of an article by George Bartoli with the incorrectly translated title "The stamps of Bulgaria with the imprint "Kavalla". This article contains the image of a document that sheds a revealing light on the philatelic practices of the time and answers questions from Van Wiechen.

First a summary of the situation: in the first Balkan War the allied Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians had expelled the Turks from Macedonia and Thrace and Kavalla was assigned to Bulgaria as a seaport. The Bulgarians, however, turned against their former allies at the end of June 1913 (Second Balkan War), on which the Greek navy occupied Kavalla without any opposition on 26 June / 9 July 1913.

A committee of citizens with a secretary (the local merchant George Asteriadis) appointed by the fleet commander had to organize the civilian post.⁴ The various foreign offices hardly worked anymore and the Bulgarians had taken their stamps with them. The committee therefore collected 987 stamps from traders and banks on 28 June, then another 1794 on 30 June. They were overprinted in pairs at the local printing company Hermes, owned by a certain Michael Tocco, by order of the committee. This is where the first difficulty begins: Tocco says that he had overprinted and delivered all 2781 stamps,⁵ Vlastos accepts this. However, Kohl states that the postmaster (Ioannis Proestakis) only purchased 1555 stamps. Kohl probably refers to a "statement" by George Asteriadis, dated July 2, 1913, in which he declared that he had handed over 1515 stamps to the postmaster.⁶ Van Wiechen assumes that the difference of 1226/1266 stamps were the so-called Tocco-stamps, printed with the same plate, which does not result in any substantial differences.⁷ However, it is more likely that Tocco simply withheld a number of stamps "for his own use".⁸ In that sense, there is no question of reprints, but of a "non-distributed" extra stock of stamps at the printer. Which, incidentally, does not entirely exclude that Tocco later made some reprints as well.

A copper canceller was made, with loose letters all around: ΕΛΛΗΝΕ. ΤΑΧΥΔΡΟΜΕΙΟΝ ΚΑΒΑΛΛΑΣ (The E after ΕΛΛΗΝ of a very small format) and a horizontal date bar, in which the month with Roman numerals was



¹ This article was previously published in *Hermes*, Journal of the Hellenic Philatelic Society of The Netherlands, no. 68 (1990), pp.22-24, with some additions and illustrations by J. Meyer;

² H.J. van Wiechen, "Thracie" in *Philatelie* (November 1967 pp. 623-626, December 1967 pp. 695- 696, January 1968 pp. 14-15, re-printed in *Hermes*, Journal of the Hellenic Philatelic Society of The Netherlands, nrs.33-37 and "De postale geschiedenis van Kavalla" in: *Philatelie* (November 1968 pp. 636-638 and December 1968 pp. 710-712, re-printed in *Hermes*, Journal of the Hellenic Philatelic Society of The Netherlands, nr.7);

³ George Bartoli, "The stamps of Bulgaria with the imprint "Kavalla" in *Syllektikos Kosmos* no. 81 of August 1987, pp.548-50, re-printed from "Timbrescopie" (Feb. 1985, no. 11, pp.72-73) "Les timbres de Bulgarie surchargés Cavalle";

⁴ Whether or not at the suggestion of an Athenian stamp dealer, indicated by the letter "G"; see W. Liberman, "The 1911 Bulgarian stamps overprinted and surcharged in Cavalla in 1913: Fact or fancy?" *HPSA News Bulletin* (1969, nrs.5-6), pp.10-11;

⁵ Tocco has published extensively about the issue of these stamps (or "advertised" the stamps), see the 3 articles in the reference list at the end of this article;

⁶ Joseph Kroger in *Illustriertes Briefmarken-Journal* (1913) pp.567-568; The mention of 1555 pieces is probably caused by an incorrect copy of the numbers;

⁷ Feenstra makes the same assumption, again with a little difference in the numbers, see: R.M. Feenstra, "Greece – A collection of forgeries" *PvG Publikatie* nr.4 (Amsterdam 1997 (2), p.92;

⁸ In that sense also: A. Cronin, "The riddle of the Cavalla surcharge of 1913" in *Fakes, Forgeries, Experts*, (2002, nr.5), p.124;

indicated in both calendars in use, so 1/14 VII 13 (first day of issue). The basic characteristic of this real cancel is a slightly lowered letter “T”.

Due to the loose setting of the cancel, it underwent constant changes of shape, so that Van Wiechen even assumed that there were two separate cancels, partly because he thought that the bottom date bar of the first cancel was broken.

Specific characteristics of the first shape of the cancel are an angular spot behind the 13, a large drop of the letters MEION due to the loose setting and a decentralized K. I call this cancel variant I, stage I.

The aforementioned little E soon disappeared completely after becoming a stain, and when the next date was installed the spot behind 13 disappeared and the K was put upright. This is variant I, stage II. This variant was last used at the post office on 7/20 VII 1913.

Variant I, Stage III appears sporadically as a philatelic “cancel for the occasion” (with dates 11/24 and 14/27 VII), recognizable by a spot that looks like a “nail head” behind KΑΒΑΛΛΑΣ, which is also moving downwards.

A separate variant that also occurs frequently has the month in letters: 1/14 IOYΛIOY 13, where the first O on the right side is poorly printed, but among other things the / between 1 and 14 is at the correct height. The “nail head” spot behind KΑΒΑΛΛΑΣ is just merely a point. This version can be found in the following document. I call this variant II, stage I.

Furthermore, there exists the common variant II, stage II, where the / between 1 and 14 is remarkably moved downwards, the point after KΑΒΑΛΛΑΣ has disappeared, but a new round point appears high above 13.

Finally, there is variant II, stage III, dated 16 IOYΛIOY 13 (the Gregorian calendar indicator has disappeared). All of these variations are essential to assess the “authenticity” of a stamp.

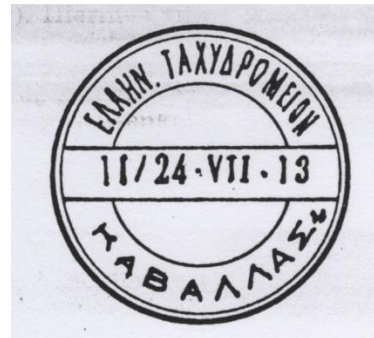
It is significant that Tocco in his article in Philotelia states that variant II (the one with the month in full Greek letters) was introduced on 15/28 July.⁹ This would mean all stamps cancelled with the cancel dated 1/14 IOYΛIOY 13 would be cancelled with the date turned backwards.



Variant I, Stage I



Variant I, Stage II



Variant I, Stage III



Variant II, Stage I



Variant II, Stage II



Variant II, Stage III

⁹ M.D. Tocco, “Histoire et description des timbre-poste de Cavalla 1913 surchargés sur timbre Bulgares in Philotelia (Jan/Feb 1927) , p.91;

Feenstra has a registered commercial letter, (also shown in his book "Greece a Collection of Forgeries"),¹⁰ franked with an overprinted stamp, cancelled 3/16 VII 13 (variety I, stage I), together with a 25 lepta blue Greek Hermes & Iris stamp with the overprint ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΟΙΚΗΣΙΣ. The official Greek stamps therefore were already available in Kavalla on this day!

With the first shipment – which departed on July 6, passage Thessaloniki on July 8 - a number of registered letters were sent to "Monsieur Charles Sponty, Marienbad (Poste Restante)".¹¹ Of course they were not collected in this bohemian seaside resort, but returned to Kavalla with a corresponding label. This Charles Sponty was honorary chancellor of the Austrian consulate in Kavalla.¹²

Apart from the afore mentioned philatelic Sponty letters and the Feenstra letter, a few other letters and a postcard that actually went through the mail are known, dated 3/16, 5/18 and 7/20 VII.¹³

The (partial) document published in *Syllektikos Kosmos* shows that half a year later - on 9 February 1914 - the postmaster of Kavalla in Thessaloniki sold large numbers of stamps to a trader. The stamps are affixed to Bulgarian Telegraph-forms, made from - now brownish - fairly sturdy paper, in which textile threads are incorporated. There are 4 horizontal dotted lines, 17.5 mm apart, with the exception of the lower one for date and place name, which is 26 mm away. On the published form a red 50 l./10 stamp is affixed to the top left (VI.nr.8) with cancel variant II, stage I: 1/14 ΙΟΥΛΙΟΥ 13. At the top right there is a hand stamped French text, in which the following is stated:

"I, the undersigned Jean Proestakis, director of the Greek postal service of Cavalla, declare that I have sold to Mr. A.S. Nahmias p/a the Bank of Thessaloniki, Bulgarian stamps printed in Cavalla by our authorities, placed here alongside and cancelled with the cancel bearing the date 1/14 ΙΟΥΛΙΟΣ (Sic instead of ΙΟΥΛΙΟΥ) 13, date of signature of the official Protocol with regard to these stamps, for the sum of frs. ... (not filled in). I guarantee the ABSOLUTE GENUINNESS of these stamps and undertake, willingly to provide all information related to this subject, to every buyer who asks me for it. Salonique ... 9 fevrier (handwritten) ... 1914. "

This text is pompously signed and is followed by a statement from the French vice-consul that the signature of J.P. is genuine and is stamped by the consulate.

There are at least two other complete documents and another fragment with the same hand stamped text.¹⁴ See the illustration on the next page.

The editors of *Syllektikos Kosmos* conclude that we now not only have an authentic 50.l/ 10 stamp, but also an authentic illustration of the cancel of 1/14 July 1913, and therefore fall into the same trap as some of the philatelic experts of the old days.

The postmaster merely declares that the stamps are genuine and that the cancel bears the date of the protocol, which may apply to any cancel.

From the fact that the statement is marked with the hand stamped text and there are at least three more of such documents, it can be deduced that a considerable number of stamps have been transferred and I am thinking first of all of the above-mentioned surplus stock of 1226/1266 stamps, which are indeed genuine. Although we do not know when J.P. commenced his job, it is likely that cancel and stamps were not simply handed over, as Van Wiechen still had to assume.

This statement of guarantee was of course of great value to the following buyers and as a result, stamps cut out from the Telegraph-forms quite generally contained the markings of renowned experts. I began to have my doubts when 10 of my 15 stamps also are marked by "SF", the infamous Spetsiotis Freres. Exactly as in the document I have the 50 l./10 st. with variant II, stage I on a piece of a Telegraph-form, approved by S.F., Thier and another illegible third party. It appears that the rare 1 dr./50 st. (VI.nr. 11, 60 copies) has been glued to the same form in addition to the 50 l./10 pcs., verifiable by the scissor cut and the continuous dotted lines, and

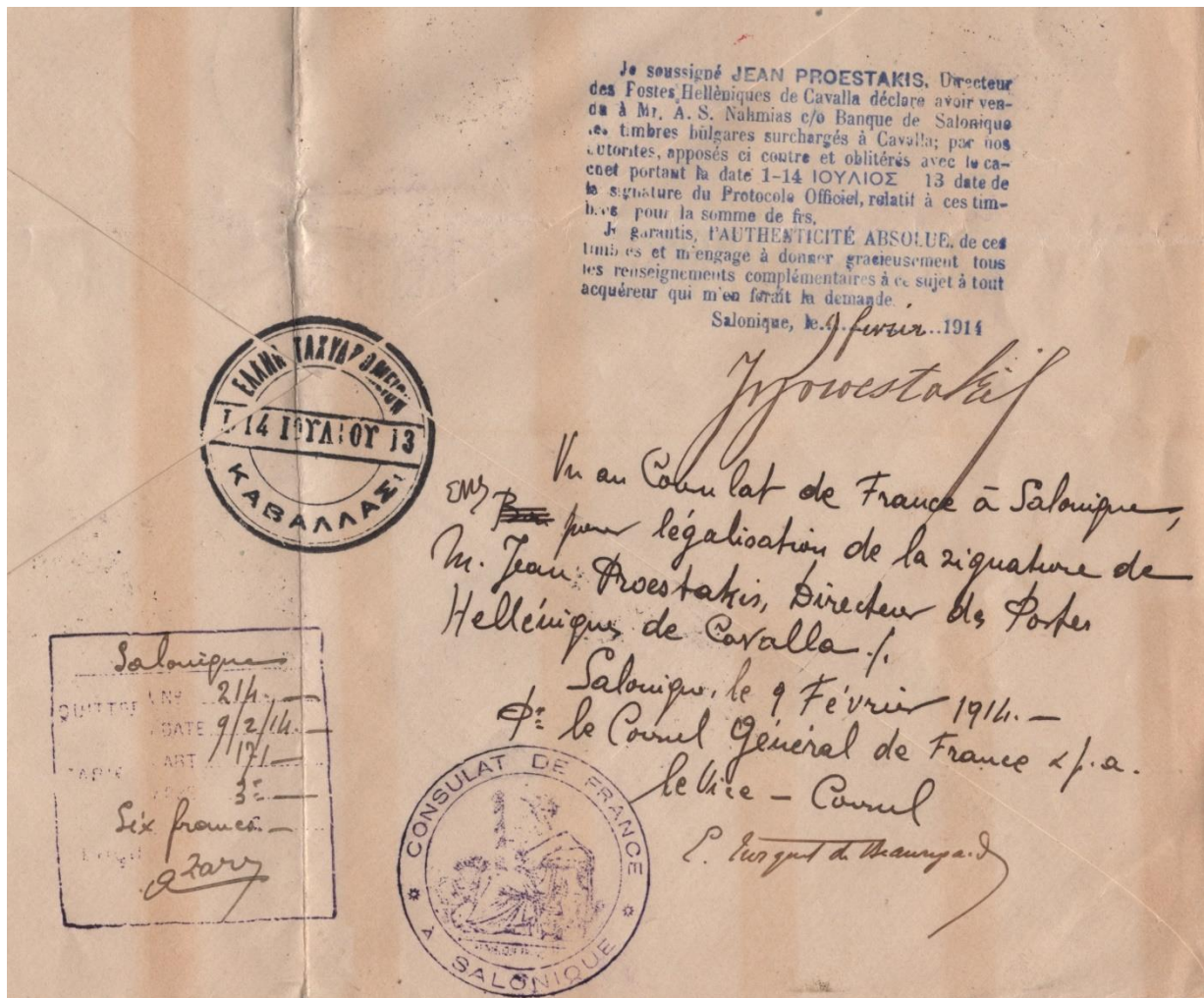
¹⁰ See Feenstra, p.92;

¹¹ Liberman in his study mentions 5 copies, see p.9;

¹² See Liberman, pp.17-18;

¹³ For an overview, see Liberman, p.9 and for some illustrations Cronin, pp.127-129;

¹⁴ See Cronin, pp.125-127;



especially by the cut textile fibres, which "fit" exactly. And now the trick: this rare stamp is not cancelled with variant II, stage I, but variant II, stage II. In other words: a well-executed, fake cancel was affixed to an open space on the form, a cancel of variant II, stage II with 1/14 of July added, and with that it was guaranteed to be genuine, including the stamp. The afore mentioned 1 dr./50 pcs. bears the same three expert markings as the real 50 l./10 st. On coherent pieces of envelopes with Bulgarian text and cancel variant II, stage II, S.F. and Thier declare also a 1 dr./15 st. and 1 dr./30 pcs. for real, S.F. only a 25 l./ 25 pcs. and Krüger only a 20 l./ 3 pcs. Furthermore, in my collection only VI.nr. 1 to 8 are not cancelled; these have - no wonder - all S.F. markings, and also no. 1 Their, the rare no. 2 (12 ex.) A. Diena, who declares on a separate paper "surcharge originale", no. 3 Keizer, no. 4 two illegible others, no. 6 Keiser. No. 5 only has S.F. and no. 8a only a Their marking. Because with these stamps, characteristics of a forgery cannot be covered by a cancel, I have a little more confidence them being genuine.

Anyway, the above mentioned stamps are probably "original" stamps, only they were never available at the counter of the post office but they came from the remaining stocks of the printer, Tocco and they were cancelled (afterwards) with the cancel, variant II.

In addition, a false cancel was also used. This cancel is most easily recognized by the fact that the "T" of TAXYΔPOMEION which is slightly "lowered" with the original cancel is in line with the rest of the word in the false cancel. Moreover, the two "O" s are relatively large.

This false cancel is known with the dates 3/16 VII, 7/20 VII and 1/14 IOYΛIOY. With the latter cancel the "3" of the year designation "13" is often noticeably larger than the original version. See the illustrations on the next page.

The fake cancel is often used to cancel stamps with a fake overprint.

With a genuine left stamp of the overprinted pairs, the I of NIKH on the topside must show a sort of subsidence of the top left corner, making it look like the number “1”. In the case of the right-hand stamp, the K must have a vertical stroke from below, slightly curved to the right, so that the Y-shaped opening tends to fill up. The I is normal.

False overprints can have a width other than 14 mm. (first line) and 15 mm (second line) and may have a darker red colour than the required orange-like red. Other features: No.:1 the top of the curve of the 5 should almost touch the (equally wide) horizontal flag; No.2: the 0 of 10 is sometimes 3 mm. Instead of 3.5 mm. wide; also with nrs. 3 and 4 the 0 is higher than wide, so too narrow; nr.5 the flag of the 1 of 15 is bent, too thin and points downwards too much; no.7: the value bar is more than 16.5 mm. Instead of at most 16.25 mm.



Forgery 3/16



Forgery 7/20



Forgery 1/14

Bartoli qualifies the series as commemorative stamps, like we do not much better these days with the cancelling of first-day envelopes, cancelled series purchased at the counter of the Post Office and many “special” issues of which almost everything goes to collectors. Only nowadays the proceeds will not go to the post director or printing company in foreign currency, but to the shareholders.

My conclusion: only stamps with a real cancel, variant I, stages I and II, dated from 1 to 7 July 1913, could have really went through the mail, the rest has been cancelled for the occasion. Given the fact that regular Greek stamps were already available on 3 July and the role of the printer with regard to surplus stocks, the postal nature of the stamps remains very dubious. In addition to the original stamps, there are also a relatively large number of stamps with a false cancel and stamps with a false overprint.

Literature:

Dr. J.H. Koopmans used for his article:

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2. Munk, H., "Kohl-Briefmarken Handbuch" (11th printing (1931), vol. III, pp. 368-370 and 1016-17;
3. Vlastos catalogue;
4. Wiechen, H.J. van, "Thracië" (November 1967 pp. 623 t/m 626, December 1967 pp. 695 and 696, January 1968 pp. 14 and 15, re-printed in Hermes, Journal of the Hellenic Philatelic Society of The Netherlands, nrs.33 t/m 37;5.
5. idem, "Postale geschiedenis van Kavalla" (November 1968 pp. 636-638 and December 1968 pp. 710-712, re-printed in Hermes, Journal of the Hellenic Philatelic Society of The Netherlands, nr.7.

Additional consulted literature:

- Hellas catalogue 2018, Part III;
- Cronin, A., "The Riddle of the Cavalla Surcharge of 1913" in Fakes, Forgeries, Experts, (2002, No. 5) pp. 123-132;
- Feenstra, R. M., "Greece - A collection of forgeries" PvG Publication No. 4 (Amsterdam 1997 (2)), pp. 92-93;
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- M.D. Tocco, "Les timbres Provisoires de la Guerre; Les Timbre-Poste de Cavalla 1913 (surcharges sur Timbres bulgares) in Le Timbre-Poste (Apr 1919), pp. 117-120;
- idem, The stamps of Cavalla - a Historical Study written by Michael D. Tocco and approved by G.D. Asteriades, Secretary to the Military Governor, Who ordered the Surcharges printed "in: The American Philatelist (Oct 1920, pp. 3-5);
- idem "Histoire et description des timbre-poste de Cavalla 1913 surchargés sur timbre Bulgares" in Philotelia (Sept / Oct 1926, p.50, Nov / Dec 1926, p.67, Jan / Feb 1927, p.90-92, Mar. / Apr 1927, p.119, May / Jun 1927, p.15-16.