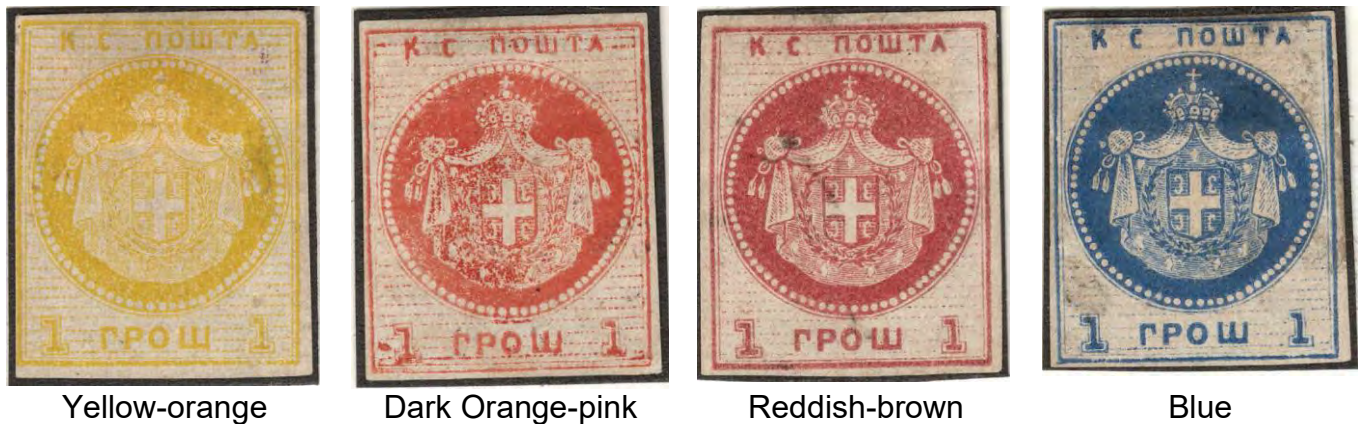


# The first Serbian Postage Stamps 1866

by Svetislav D. Jelić and Vladimir Milić

## The Essays

Four of the essays in question were discovered by Mr Edwin Müller in 1959 when the A. Weiss essay collection was auctioned in the US. The letter referred to above from the State Printers in Belgrade was subsequently found in the Serbian State Archive in that city in 1971. This letter fully legitimized the essays already known twelve years before its discovery.



*The only known set of essays, discovered by Mr Edwin Müller at the auction of the A. Weiss assay collection in the US in 1959.*

The four essays produced by the State Printers in Belgrade in August or September 1865 were produced by very fine lithography. The colours are Yellow-orange, Dark Orange-pink, Reddish-brown and Blue. The essays are fine lithographic work created from etched metal plates. This is clear from the fine detail of the etching and the number of white pearls in the national coat of arms. There are 79, instead of 77 as on the newspaper stamps subsequently issued.

The essay shows the Serbian Coat of Arms on a round, coloured medallion surrounded by the pearls in question. At the top appears the legend "K. C. ПОШТА" (Princely Serbian Posts) and at the bottom the value designation 1 ГРОШ 1 (Grosh). This value designation shows that the assays were intended for all values, of postage stamps as well. As we shall see in due course, only the assays for the one para and two para newspaper stamps were approved.

The Minister of Finance noted on the back of the letter mentioned above from the State Printers: "Wait for the new Posts Act and instructions from the Minister of Internal Affairs". This takes us to a step further towards the issue of Postage stamps.

## Design description

The original dies and blocks for these stamps were produced by the State Printers in Belgrade in April 1866. The original die was cut in wood and 12 blocks each per value were cast in type metal by the stereotype process. The stamps were then printed in letter press in small Sheets of 12, with three horizontal rows of four stamps each.

The stamps take the form of a tall oblong 17½ x 22 mm in size. The motif is the Serbian coat-of-arms on a coloured background in circular form. The whole is surrounded with a wreath of 77 white pearls. The legend at the top reads "K. C. ПОШТА" (Princely Serbian Post) and the value appears at the bottom "1 ПАРА 1" or "2 ПАРЕ 2". The background consists of 24 horizontal broken lines,

11 in the upper half of the stamp and 13 in the lower. The image as a whole is framed in two continuous lines of which the outer is the thicker.

The broken horizontal lines of the background have been discussed at great length in philatelic literature because certain researchers doubted whether these lines were originally broken. The reason for the entire debate was apparently that the writers had too little material at their disposal, lacking whole original sheets in particular. An examination of over 50 whole original sheets of the various printings and countless individual items clearly reveals that the lines on the original die were cut in broken form, i.e. dotted.

The coalescence of the dotted lines is attributable to over-inking of the printing plates and the use of an ink mix that was not of the best quality. Added to this is the fact that each of the 12 blocks of each value was produced by very simple methods, so that not all blocks took exactly the same form. Amongst the various stamps in the same original sheet we can therefore see both finely printed and also blurred impressions, on all printings of both values.

## **The Newspaper Stamps with Coat-of-Arms Design: A Comprehensive Historical Overview**

The rediscovery of documentation in 1971 related to the first issue of Serbian postage stamps marked a pivotal milestone in the study of philately in Serbia. The meticulous efforts of Serbian philatelist Miodrag Vuković were instrumental in this revelation. Vuković devoted countless hours to investigating and studying the documents he unearthed in Serbian archives, which shed new light on the production processes and classifications of these significant stamps.

The evidence uncovered indicates that there were actually four distinct printings of the newspaper stamps featuring the coat-of-arms design, challenging the previously accepted classification that recognized only three printings. This article presents a detailed chronological account of these four printings, highlighting the historical context, production processes, and distribution of the stamps.

### **Different First Serbian Postage Stamps Printings**

#### **The First Printing**

##### **Date of Order:**

The initial order for the newspaper stamps was placed on 8 April 1866. Stevan Rajčević, the head of the State Printers in Belgrade, traveled to Vienna seeking to procure letter and newspaper stamps.

##### **Challenges Faced:**

Rajčević encountered several obstacles, including bureaucratic delays imposed by the Austrian authorities. As it became increasingly clear that the Vienna-produced stamps would not arrive in time for the projected issue date of 1 May 1866, the Serbian government sought alternative solutions.

##### **Local Production Initiative:**

To ensure that newspaper stamps would be available by the target date, the Minister of Finance took swift action, ordering the stamps to be produced locally at the State Printers in Belgrade. At

the time, the printers only possessed basic assay materials, meaning that the original die and blocks had to be produced hastily.

### **Final Order Confirmation:**

By a letter dated 25 April 1866, the Minister of Finance finalized the order and communicated with the Internal Affairs Minister regarding the impending production. Consequently, a circular was issued to all post offices, stating that the letter post stamps were not yet ready, and cash would need to be collected for letter postage.

### **Production Details:**

The Committee responsible for overseeing the printing confirmed the completion of the initial printing run, which included:

- 1,944 stamps of 2 para in a dull green color on dove-blue paper.
- 2,040 stamps of 1 para in a yellowish-green color on bright pink paper.



*1 PARA (1<sup>st</sup> Printing) - known only as singles*



*2 PARA - Only sheet reconstruction extant shades (known only as singles)*

#### **Distribution:**

The distribution of these stamps was conducted swiftly

- Belgrade Post Office received 1,500 of the 1 para stamps and 1,404 of the 2 para stamps.
- The border post offices of Kladovo and Aleksinac also received limited quantities.

#### **Market Availability:**

The newspaper stamps were officially made available for use on 1 May 1866, allowing the postal service to function despite the initial setbacks.

### **The Second Printing**

#### **Request for Additional Production:**

On 11 May 1866, due to the rapid depletion of the initial stock, the Minister of Internal Affairs reported a shortage and requested the printing of an additional 18,000 stamps of both denominations.

#### **Production Commencement:**



The second printing commenced promptly at 8 a.m. on 13 May 1866, under the supervision of the appointed Committee.

**Print Details:**

This second run produced:

- 18,360 stamps of 1 para
- 18,300 stamps of 2 para.



*1 PARA (2<sup>nd</sup> Printing) – light bronze-green complete original sheet*



*2 PARA (2<sup>nd</sup> Printing) – red-brown/lavender complete original sheet*

#### **Distribution:**

Once completed, the stamps were immediately distributed as follows:

- Belgrade Post Office: 17,300 of the 1 para and 17,340 of the 2 para stamps.
- Aleksinac Post Office: 1,000 of the 1 para and 1,020 of the 2 para stamps.
- Kladovo Post Office: Did not receive any stamps during this printing.

#### **Availability:**

Both values of the second printing were confirmed to be on sale by 22 May 1866, ensuring that public demand was promptly met.

### **The Third Printing**

#### **New Order:**

By mid-July 1866, the Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered another printing of newspaper stamps due to continuing high demand.

#### **Production Period:**

This third printing occurred between 21 July and 12 August 1866, featuring a new design that showcased the portrait of Prince Michael III Obrenović.



## Change in Regulations:



*1 PARA (3<sup>rd</sup> Printing) – dark-green on pale rose reconstructed of 4x3 sheet*



*2 PARA (3<sup>rd</sup> Printing) – chocolate-brown on violet-grey complete original sheet*



The release of these new stamps was postponed due to the Posts Act, which required that any change in stamp design be announced three months in advance. To comply with these regulations, the Ministry ordered a further printing of the original coat-of-arms design:

- 6,000 stamps of 1 para
- 10,000 stamps of 2 para.

### **Completion Report:**

The printing was completed on 14 November 1866, adhering to the original design and color scheme used in the first and second printings.

### **The Fourth Printing**

#### **Further Demand:**

A report from the State Printers, dated 5 December 1866, indicated the need for a further 10,000 stamps of 1 para in the old style. This request was approved immediately by the Minister of Internal Affairs.

#### **Production Completion:**

The fourth printing was completed on 14 December 1866 under the supervision of the same Committee responsible for the third printing.



*1 PARA (4<sup>th</sup> Printing) – Deep Green on Rose-violet paper complete sheet*



## Availability and Historical Debate:

While it is generally assumed that these stamps were issued immediately after production, some philatelic scholars have questioned whether the stamps from this printing were ever officially released. Despite the absence of definitive documentary proof, no substantial evidence exists to refute their issuance.

## Transition to the Prince Michael III Obrenović Design

The next series of newspaper stamps, featuring the portrait of Prince Michael III Obrenović, was printed between July and August 1866. However, due to the regulatory requirement for advance notice, these new stamps were not placed on sale until 11 March 1867—three months after the completion of the fourth printing of the coat-of-arms design.

## Conclusion

The discovery of new documentation in 1971, driven by the research of Miodrag Vuković, revolutionized the understanding of early Serbian newspaper stamps. This comprehensive account confirms four separate printings of the coat-of-arms design between April and December 1866, reshaping the historical narrative and enriching the legacy of Serbian philately.

- 
- Text prepared by Svetislav D. Jelić and Vladimir Milić, based on Miodrag R. Vuković, Mirko R. Rašić and Dr. Velizar M. Kardosch articles
  - Pictures used form Predrag Antić collection