1856 - Diligencia - 80 c. green - Type 5

1856 - Diligencia - 80 c. green - Type 5

Type: The vertical stroke of the 3rd key of the right keys, coming upwards, is very thick.

Sperati: The left half of the horizontal stroke of the G consists of a separate white dot.
The horizontal stroke of A of GENCIA does not nearly reach the left leg of the letter and ends in a blot.
Upper outer frame line interrupted over and between I and G of DILIGENCIA.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1856 - Diligencia - 80 c. green - Type 14

1856 - Diligencia - 80 c. green - Type 14

Type: The ray from the chin is very large and slopes to the left.

Sperati: E of CENT joined to the inner frame line by a vertical stroke.
Colored blot on the right outer frame line, level with the eyes of the sun.
Small dot at the right of the top of the sun's ray which points towards GE of DILIGENCIA.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1856 - Diligencia - 1 real vermilion - Type 13

1856 - Diligencia - 1 real vermilion - Type 13

Type: Lower inner frame line very thick between and over 1 and R. Part of lower outer frame line, missing under 1.

Sperati: To the left of the top of D, several white spots. The lower right side of D bulges towards the center. The sun's ray which points towards the S.W. corner of the stamp ends in a separate dot.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1856 - Diligencia - 1 real vermilion - Type 23

1856 - Diligencia - 1 real vermilion - Type 23

Type: White dot in front of the top of D.

Sperati: The white dash between 1 and R should be straight and not curved.
The sun's ray which points towards the A of REAL should end straight and not twisted.
Several white dots on both sides of the lower frame line over REAL.

Sperati

Sperati

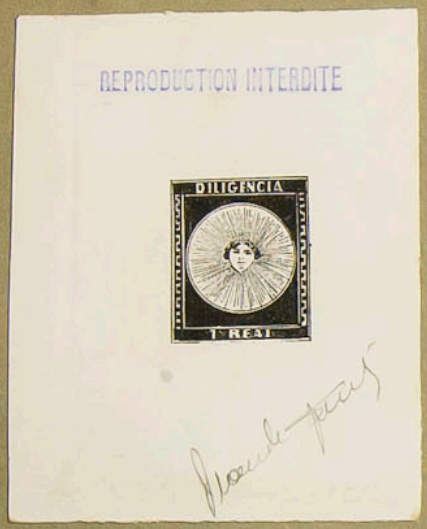
Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

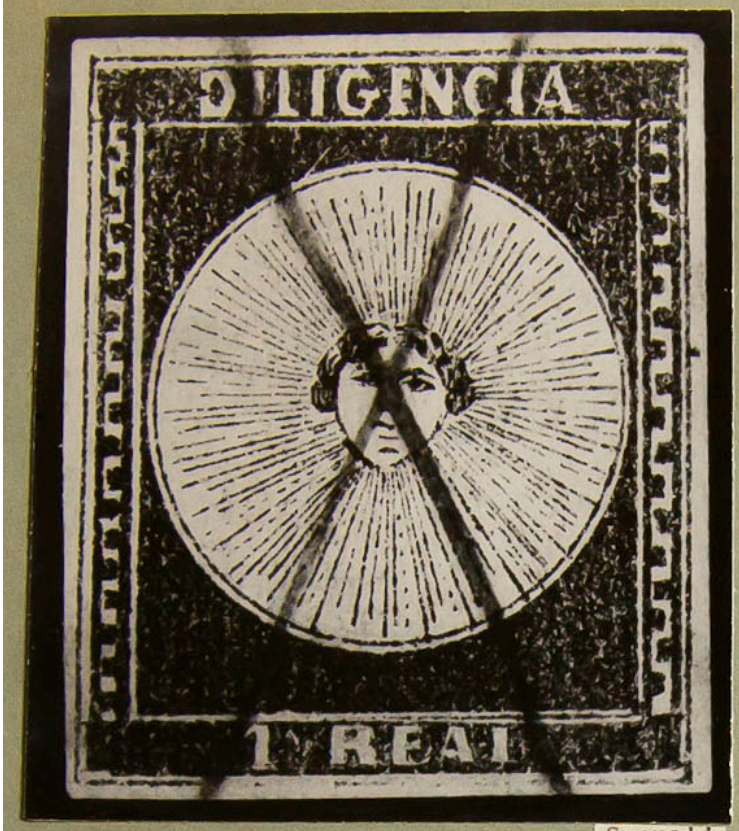
1856 - Diligencia - 1 real vermilion - Type 26



1856 - Diligencia - 1 real vermilion - Type 26

Type: Frame line of circle interrupted over R of REAL.

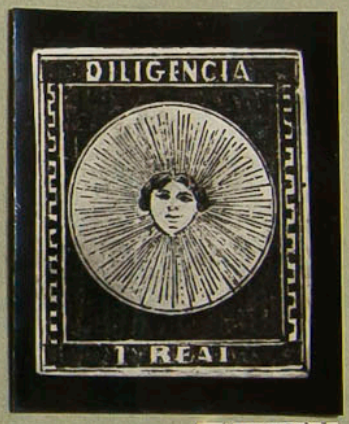
Sperati: G joined to the white frame line above by a vertical dash.
The bottom stroke of E of REAL is thin and turns irregular upwards.
The curved line which enters the head of the sun at its right lower corner is irregular and ends in a separate dot.



Sperati

Sperati

Sperati



Sperati

Genuine

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 120 c. blue - Type 6

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 120 c. blue - Type 6

Type: Oblique line under and a little to the right of T of CENT which crosses the lower frame line and penetrates into the white margin. Dots inside of the outer frame line under right 20. Thick colored spot in the left sun's rays, level with R of left COR.

Sperati: Dot under left 12 in the white border line. Dot in the lower center of left C. Dot between right CORREO and the left circle that follows.

Sperati

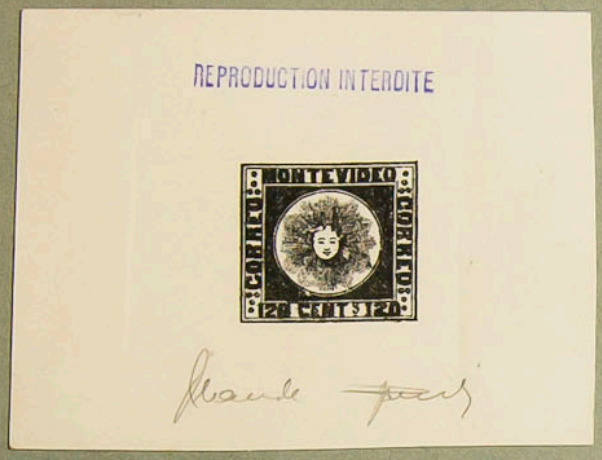
Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 120 c. blue - Type 24



1858 - Repeated Numerals - 120 c. blue - Type 24

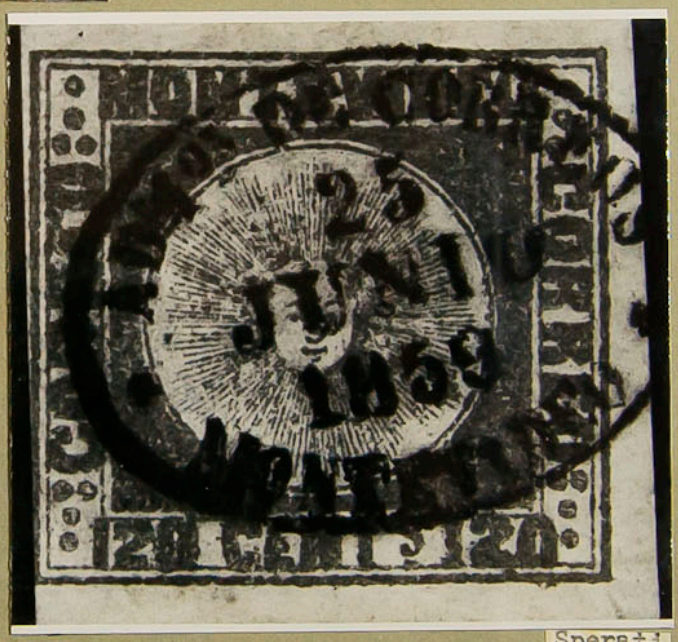
Type: 2 and 0 of right 120, united below.
A horizontal line crosses the right frame line, level with the 3rd S. E. circle.
2 of right 120 joined to the lower frame line.

Sperati: Dot in front of C of CENT.
Inner upper frame line interrupted over first N.E. circle.
The lines below MONTEVIDEO and right CORREO do not join at the N.E. angle.
A dot left of the top of the 1 of left 120.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati



Sperati

Genuine

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 180 c. green - Type 3

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 180 c. green - Type 3

Type: Right frame line very thin from the second R upwards.
The 4th S.W. circle represented by an enormous blot.

Sperati: Colored spot on the right side of the S.
The line which unites the two left R's below is irregular and curved and should be straight.
Vertical dash at the right of the last circle S.W.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

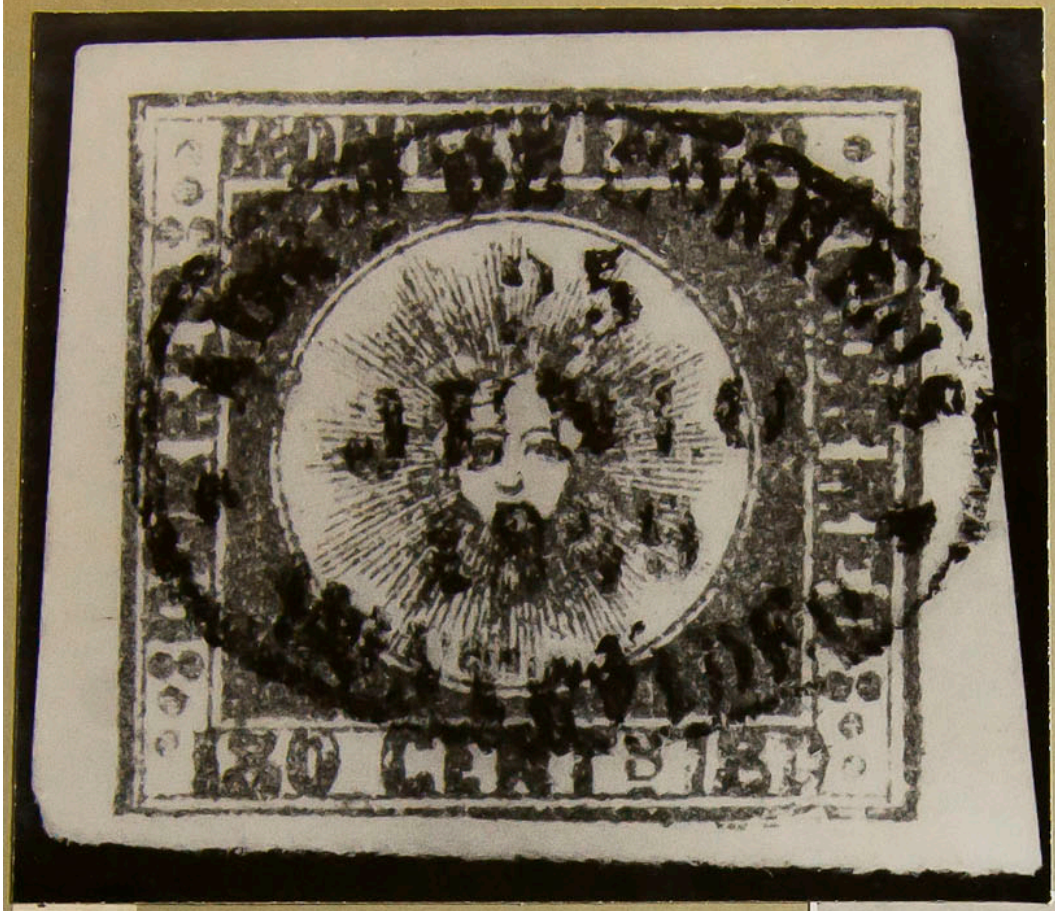
Genuine

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 180 c. green - Type 25

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 180 c. green - Type 25

Type: Large break in lower frame line near S.E. angle.
Spot on inner frame line of circle level with left RR.
Dot between fourth S.W. circle and inner lower frame line.

Sperati: A white depression of the right frame line near the N.E. angle is missing.
The 3rd and 4th upper right circles are heavily joined. They should be separated from each other.
The line under MONTEVIDEO is too long, passes the vertical line under right CORREO and turns downwards at the end.



Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Subtype 5-A
Position 71

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Subtype 5-A - Position 71

Type: Left C joined to solid ground.
Two dots in the white ground of the circle, left of E of right REO.

Subtype 5-A: The left lower part of the M is broken.

Sperati: The line above right 240 does not reach the O.
The eye at the right should be considerably smaller and not of the same shape and size as the other eye.
A white blot in the solid ground near the S.E. angle.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Pos.70 Genuine Pos.71

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 4

Position 70

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 4 - Position 70

Type: Large colored spot on white ground of circle level with O of left REO and N of MONT.
V of VIDEO joined to the upper frame line.
Small colored dot on white ground of circle level with C of left COR.

Position: Lower inner frame line interrupted in front of the foot of C of CENT.
Left inner frame line interrupted left of the lower side of the third circle.

Sperati: On the white border line of the circle, a colored diagonal spot under E of MONTE.
The two lower frame lines are joined by a vertical dash under the last S.E. circle.
A spot on the outside of the left outer frame line, very near the S.W. angle.

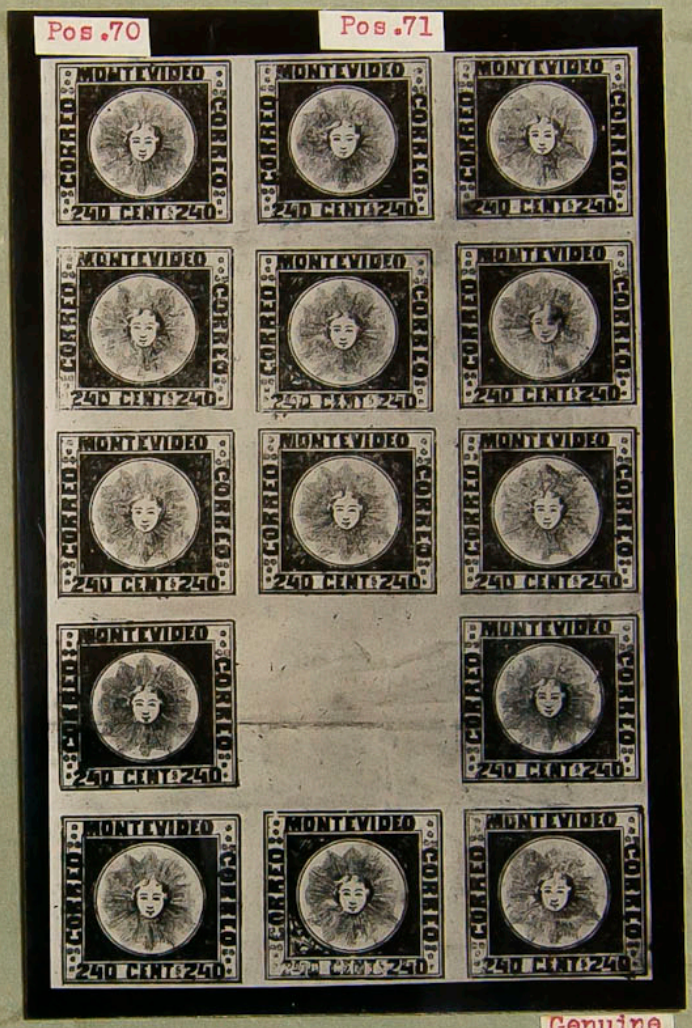
Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Pos .70 Pos .71



Genuine

Pos .70 Genuine Pos .71

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 11
Position 143

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 11 - Position 143

Type: Spots in lower margin under 2 of left 240.
Dot on the outside of the right frame line over R of REO.

Position: Both lower frame lines interrupted near the S.E. angle.

Sperati: Several colored spots in the lower margin under 2 of left 240 are missing.
Dot in the upper margin over the first stroke of M of MONTE is missing.
A vertical dash on the lower right side of the O of left 240 is missing.
Oblique spot in the upper white line over first stroke of the N of MONTE.

Sperati

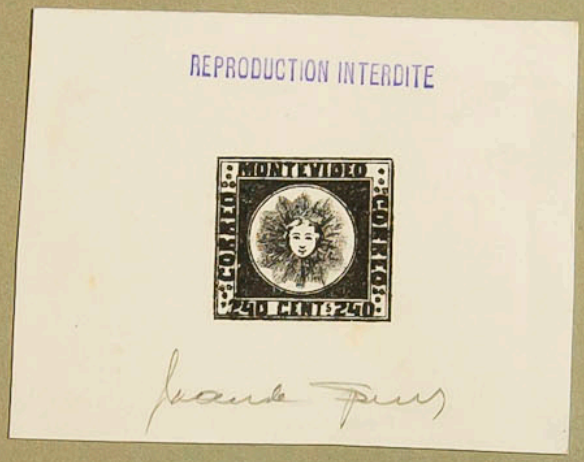
Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 25

Position 55



1858 - Repeated Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 25 - Position 55

Type: Small dot in right margin over O of COR.
Dot inside of the O of right REO.
The first of the four S.E. circles has a dot joined to its upper left corner.

Position: The inner upper frame line with a thickening over the first N.W. circle.
The lower inner frame line interrupted near the S.E. angle.

Sperati: The line above the right 240 does not reach the O.
A nick in the head of the right 4.
The line below left CO is interrupted.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 60 c. lilac, etc.- Subtype unplated

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine - Original imitated by Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

1859 - Thin Numerals - 60 c. lilac, bluish grey, greenish grey, etc. (unplated)

Subtype: Instead of the second upper pear, two parallel slanting lines, one shorter than the other.
S.W. portion of the N.E. ornament is missing.

Sperati: The top of the left lower pear is flat and not roundish.
A colored oblique line projects from the solid ground into the white space of the circle, at the right of R of left COR.
Upper half of E of CENT, very thick.

Genuine
Original stamp

Sperati

1859 - Thin Numerals - 80 c. yellow - Type 13

Position 203

1859 - Thin Numerals - 80 c. yellow - Type 13 - Position 203

Type: Slight cut into the solid ground under left E.

Position: First left R broken giving the impression of a large P with a dot.
In the upper margin a curved line with a dot over N of MONTE.
In the left margin an irregular line left of the top of the lower left pear.
In the lower margin a vertical dash below N of CENT.

Sperati: First horizontal stroke of E of MONTE very irregular and curved instead of straight.
Two dots over the right E.
Dot on the inside of the lower frame line under the S.E. ornament.

The 80 c. and 180 c. were made from the same plate.
Types and Subtypes are identical.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

Position 203

Genuine
Type 13

Sperati

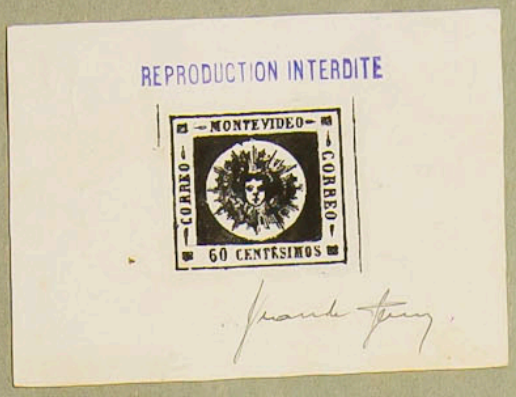
Sperati

Genuine
Original stamp

Genuine
(dif.stamp)

1859 - Thin Numerals - 60 c. lilac, etc.- Subtype unplated

Sperati



Genuine - Original imitated by Sperati as color sample only

Very rare shade

Genuine - Original imitated by Sperati

Sperati

Genuine Original stamp

1859 - Thin Numerals - 60 c. lilac, bluish grey, greenish grey, etc. (unplated)

Subtype: A diagonal colored line projects from the solid ground into the white space of the circle under N of MONTE.

Sperati: A dot on the outside of the lower frame line under the right side of 60.
Small cut into the solid ground under and between N.E. pear and the right C.
The foot of E of CENT is broken.
A small white cut into the solid ground over O of MOS.

1859 - Thin Numerals - 80 c. yellow - Subtype 17-A

Position 107

1859 - Thin Numerals - 80 c. yellow - Subtype 17-A - Position 107

Type:	Spot on the inside of the right frame line, level with the top of the S.E. ornament. Tiny dot in outer margin close to the left frame line, level with left EO.
Subtype 17-A:	Heavy spot on the left frame line over the left side of R of COR.
Sperati:	T and E of MONTE united by a diagonal line. Upper stroke of E of MONTE curved instead of straight. Upper half of R of left REO almost solid.

The 80 c. and 180 c. were made from the same plate.
Types and Subtypes are identical.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine
Type 17

Genuine

Pos.107

Genuine

Pos.107

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Type 10

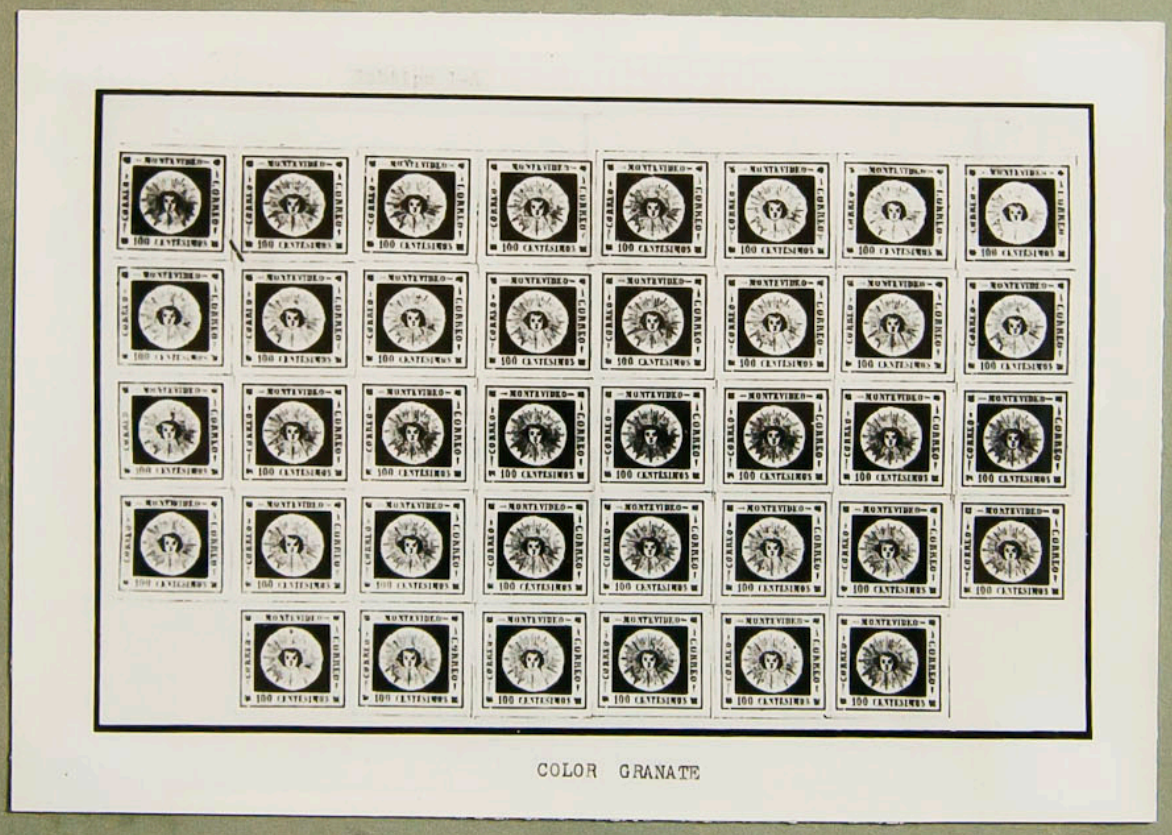
1859 - Thin Numerals - 1oo c. red-brown - Type 1o

Type: Small dot or vertical dash on the lower frame line under left side of the S.E. ornament.
Small dot in the outer margin left of the left frame line near the S.W. angle.

Sperati: The stamp has in the lower left corner the larger part of a static round fancy cancellation which gives it away at-once as a Sperati product.
Left side of the second right O, very irregular.
Several dashes and dots on the left side of the vertical stroke of E of VIDEO.
The middle and bottom strokes of E of TESIMOS are joined.
The middle and bottom strokes of right E are joined.

Sperati

Sperati



COLOR GRANATE

1- 2- 1- 2- 1- 2- 1- 2
3- 4- 3- 4- 3- 4- 3- 4
5- 6- 5- 6- 5- 6- 5- 6
7- 8- 7- 8- 7- 8- 7- 8
10- 9-10- 9-10- 9

3- 4- 5- 6- 7- 8- 9-10
15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22
27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34
39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46
52-53-54-55-56-57

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Subtype 5-A

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Subtype 5-A

Type: Dot in lower margin near S.W. angle.

Subtype 5-A: Heavy spot on the right frame line near the S.E. angle.

Sperati: The upper half of the right vertical stroke of N of MONTE is twisted and not straight.
The interruption of the lower frame line under the S.W. ornament, missing.
The large sun's ray which points towards 100, broken at the end.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

Subtype 5-A

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Type 8

Position 44

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Position 44 - Type 8

Type: A cut on the inside or a total break of the lower frame line under the 2nd O of 100.

Position: The middle and bottom stroke of the second E of CENTESIMOS are joined by a vertical dash.

Sperati: The large and thick sun's ray pointing towards M of MOS, broken near the end.
A colored dash on the inside of the right stroke of the second left R.
Small white cut into the outer edge of the top stroke of T of MONTE.
The cut into the lower frame line under the second O, missing.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Type 12

1859 - Thin Numerals - 100 c. red-brown - Type 12

Type: Break in top of O of MONT.

Sperati: The upper stroke of right E is curved and not straight.
Lower frame line broken under S of CENTES.
The accent over the second E of CENTESIMOS represented by several dots of different sizes.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 120 c. blue - Type 6

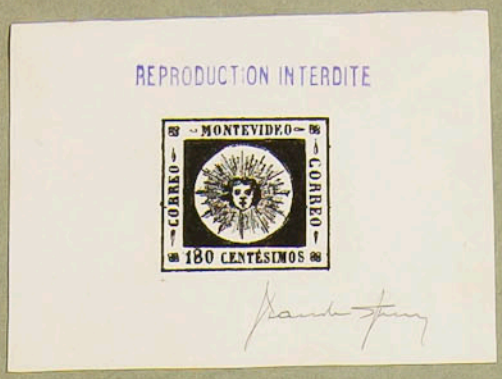
1859 - Thin Numerals - 120 c. blue - Type 6

Type: Two dots in lower Margin near the S.W. angle.

Speratis: 0 of 120, broken below.
First stroke of M of MONTE, broken in the lower part.
Left frame interrupted over and between the pear and ornament in the S.W. corner.
The bottom stroke of right E, extremely thin.

1859 - Thin Numerals - 180 c. green - Subtype 17-A

Sperati



Genuine.-
Original stamp
imitated by
Jean de Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 180 c. green - Subtype 17-A - Position 107

Type: Spot on the inside of the right frame line, level with the top of the S.W. ornament.
Tiny dot in outer margin close to the left frame line, level with left EO.

Subtype 17-A: Heavy spot on the left frame line over the left side of R of COR.
Dot on the solid ground under right RE.
Dot on the outside of the right frame line, at the right of the 1st right pear.

Sperati: Small dot left of the first stroke of the 1 (inspite of retouch, always visible).
A diagonal dash on the white space of the circle, at the right of R of left REO.
A very small colored dot in the white space of the circle, level right side of O of 180 and the top of the S.W. pear.
A small projection (s6metimes only a separate dot) from the end of the upper part of C of CENT.
and others.

Some of these caracteristics have been sometimes more or less successfully retouched.

An extremely rare stamp in the dark shade and very thick paper.
Both well imitated by Sperati.

Sperati

Genuine

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 9

1859 - Thin Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 9

Type: Small colored dot in the left margin close to the frame line, level with the lower side of the N.W. ornament.
White dot in solid ground near the circle and under EO of VIDEO.

Sperati: Spot on the solid ground almost at the S.W. corner.
Upper half of the last stroke of N of MONTE, twisted.
Round white spot in the solid ground, at the right of the left R.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 11

1859 - Thin Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - Type 11

Type: Slanting colored line in the lower Margin under 40.
Lower frame line interrupted under S of CENTES.
Several spots and dashes in the upper margin over M of MONTE.

Speratii: 4 and 0 of 240 joined by a horizontal line.
An oblique and almost horizontal line projects from the top of the last stroke of N of MONTE to the left.
The three large and thick sun's rays at the left should not touch the circle line.
Spots on the upper right part of the 0 of 240.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine

1859 - Thin Numerals - 240 c. vermilion - unplated

1859 - Thin Numerals - 240 c. vermilion (unplated)

Sperati: Lower part of ES of CENTES joined by a horizontal line.
Dot on the inside of the left side of O of right COR.
Dot on the solid ground under the bottom stroke of the right E.
Middle stroke of the E of MONTE points upwards.
Spot on the solid ground under left side of the first upper pear.
The upper part of the right C is irregular.

Sperati

Sperati

1860 - Thick Numerals - 60 c. brown - Type 3

1860 - Thick Numerals - 60 c. pale brown, dark brown, etc. - Sharp impression - Type 3

Type: Dot on the outside of the right lower corner of O of right REO.

Sperati: Upper frame line irregular and thick over NT of MONTE.
Under the S.E. angle of the frame line are two dots instead of one.
Small interruption of the lower frame line under and between O and C of 60 and CENTESIMOS.
The small dash projecting from the upper right end of the S of MOS should point upwards and not straight to the right.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuines.-
Original stamp
imitated by
Jean de Sperati

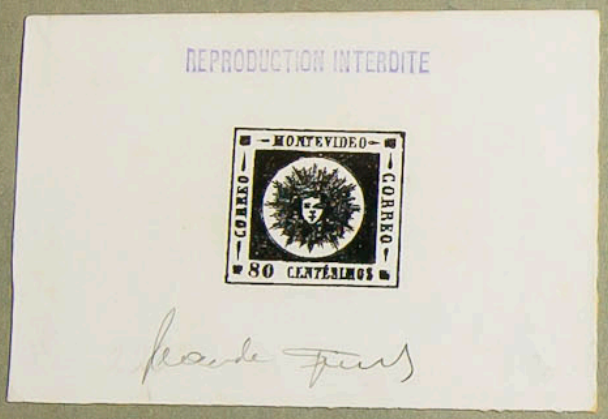
By imitating a used stamp, contrary to his normal practice, Sperati eradicated the cancellation and retouched and repaired the various breaks in the design. This can easily be noticed in an irregularity of the upper frame line over NT of MONTEVIDEO.

Original stamp
imitated by Sperati

The extremely rare shade was selected for imitation to test Sperati's ability of copying odd and rare shades, same as in the 60 c. of 1859

1861 - Thick Numerals - 80 c. yellow - Type 8

Position 86



1861 - Thick Numerals - 80 c. yellow - Type 8 - Position 86

Type: Slight cut into the inner side of the right frame line, at the right of the bottom of the N.E. ornament.
Vertical line between S of MOS and the solid ground.
Dot on the right side of the O of right REO.

Position: Vertical white dash projects from the circle into the solid ground under E of MONTE.
Dot between the top parts of I and D of VIDEO.

Sperati: A white dot between E of MONTE and the circle instead of the white dash projecting from the circle towards the E of MONTE.
White center of O of 80, very irregular.
The M and the upper part of N of MONTE are very heavily printed and almost solid.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine Pos .86

Genuine Pos .86

1861 - Thick Numerals - 100 c. carmine - Type 11

1861 - Thick Numerals - 100 c. carmine - Type 11

Type: From the lower right corner of N of CENT projects a small and sometimes hardly visible line pointing upwards, sometimes represented by only a separate dot.

Position: A small vertical line crosses the upper frame line with a dot in the upper margin above it.
Clear break of the outer line in the N.W. corner of the S.W. ornament.
First leg of the M of MONTE broken at the top.
In the solid ground, a small white dot very near the S.E. corner and another below O of VIDEO.

Sperati: A dot in front of the foot of M of MONTE.
The white dot inside the 1 should be longish and not round.
The first stroke of the 1 should be straight and not curved.
The lower part of the E and the 1st leg of the N of CENT are most irregular.
The ornament inside of the S.W. pear should be curved and not straight.

Sperati

Sperati

461

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine
Original position

Sperati

1861 - Thick Numerals - 120 c. blue - Subtype 9-A

Position 45 in a pane

1861 - Thick Numerals - 120 c. blue - Subtype 9-A - Position 45 in a pane

Type: Spot over right top corner of the S.W. ornament.
Dot between tops of O and 120 and C of CENT.

Subtype 9-A: Foot of the 1 joined to the S.E. corner of the S.W. ornament by an irregular and curved line.
An interrupted vertical line cuts through the head of the sun from the eye of the left side downwards.
The N.E. corner of the solid ground is broken off with a tiny dot in front of the break.

Position 45: Only the beginning of the curved line which joins the 1 with the S.W. ornament, leaving the h, is visible.

Sperati: A white spot inside the left foot of N of CENT.
A notch in the right side of the second right O.
The second E of CENTESIMOS has a cut in its S.W. corner

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine
Subtype 9-A
Position 45
in a pane.

Sperati

Genuine

Sperati

Genuine

Subtype 9-A
Position 45
in a pane

1861 - Thick Numerals - 180 c. green - Type 2

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Genuine (Subtype 2)

1861 - Thick Numerals - 180 c. green - Type 2

Type: Colored spot in the left margin level with bottom line of the N.W. pear.
Lower frame line interrupted under N of CENT.

Position: Colored spot between the lower part of the N.W. pear and the left frame line.

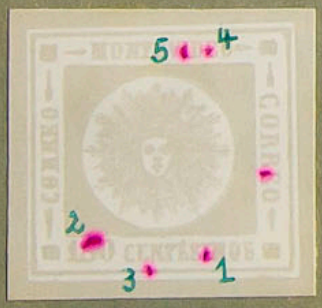
Sperati: Break of the lower frame line under IM. (not always, sometimes retouched).
The D of VIDEO ends in a thick straight line.
the middle stroke of right E should not unite with the stroke above.
The spot between the lower part of the N.W. pear and the left frame line should not touch the frame line.
E of MONTE, most irregular.

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati

Sperati



Genuine

1864 - Escuditos - 06 c. vermilion - Type 6

Sperati

Genuine

1864 - Escuditos - 06 c. vermilion - Type 6

Type: Small cut into the solid ground over OS of SIMOS.
The dividing line between types 6 and 7 has several breaks, a large one at the right of S of MOS.

Sperati: L of LICA heavily curved on the left side instead of being straight.
L and I of LICA almost joined below instead of being well separated.
The right side of the horizontal bottom stroke of the I of LICA, almost missing.

Some of Sperati's cancellations

1864 - Escuditos - 08 c. green - Type 3

Sperati

Genuine

1864 - Escuditos - 08 c. green - Type 3

Type: White flaw in the solid ground over OS of SIMOS.
Small cut into the solid ground under R of REPUBLICA.

Sperati: A heavy dot inside the left leg of the U.
I of SIMOS roundish and not square at the bottom.
The outer edge of the horizontal stroke of T of ORIENTAL, irregular.
A break of the inner circle under E of ORIENTAL.

He fooled the Experts by Dean Jennings. (Saturday Evening Post, April 30, 1949)

Philately, or stamp collecting, is generally considered a pursuit of a cloistered nature, conducted to the soft rustle of catalogue leaves and with no occupational hazards except an occasional case of eye strain. But at the moment the philatelic world is full of excitement, thanks to Jean de Sperati, a gaunt and crotchety French engraver who modestly calls himself the "philatelic atom Bomb".

The florid title de Sperati has given himself isn't all hyperbole. As European experts recently discovered with a profound shock, sixty-four-year-old Jean de Sperati, to whom I talked recently at his home in Aix-les-Bains, seems to have successfully, and with malice aforethought, forged more than 300 of the world's rarest stamps. Moreover, it appears that these fraudulent masterpieces, which he claims cannot be detected by any known tests and which these same experts unwittingly endorsed as genuine, may one day flood the stamp world and thus endanger the value of fine collections. De Sperati has already achieved fairly heavy production, and recently he offered some of his purported forgeries in wholesale lots at reduced prices. One such bargain was a group of early American stamps which are worth about $4000 when genuine; he was offering them for $115 a set. De Sperati says he ground out this particular set over a week end, and would need even less time to make a dozen copies of the famed Swedish three-skilling "orange error", a stamp owned by ex-King Carol and valued at $30,000 because it is the only known one in existence.

De Sperati regards his own virtuosity with a childlike awe, and greets each new batch of his stamps with cries of delight. "Ah-ha", he will say. "Again I have opened the eyes of the blind - the so-called experts. In the history of philately there has never been a man like me. I baffle everybody. Counterfeiter I may be, but I am an artistic counterfeiter".

Unhappily, the French philatelic experts do not have the same aesthetic perspective, and Jean de Sperati is looked upon as a villain who should be, and may be, tossed into the bastille; an unethical scoundrel comparable, for instance, to Hans van Meegeren, the Dutch painter who duped Hermann Goering and others with six fake Vermeer paintings. The only difference between the two, one philatelist suggested, is that van Meegeren is dead, whereas de Sperati is not only very much alive but envisions a day when all collectors, especially those who can't afford genuine rarities, will fill the blank spaces in their stamp albums with his "reproductions".

De Sperati himself demonstrated the possibilities of this idea when I asked him for some samples just before leaving France a few months ago.

"Just name the stamps," he said obligingly, "and I will make them for you."

"How about some of the first American stamps?", I asked.

He said that would be agreeable.

Two days later he gave me an 1845 New York five-cent, known as a "postmaster provisional"; an 1847 George Washington ten-cent; and an 1863 Jefferson Davis ten-cent Confederate States. Originals of these three stamps are considered rare, with a total catalogue value of from $200 to $400, and de Sperati said he was sorry that he could not give them away. "I am a modest artist with large expenses," he said, "so I have to ask for a few dollars. Perhaps you can sell them in America and make a nice profit. In fact, I can make any amount of stamps you want."

A week later I took the three stamps to one of New York City's foremost philatelic dealers, pretended they came from my grandmother and asked if they had any value.

"Of course," he said, "but first we'll give them a check-up."

He dipped the tiny bits of paper in benzine to bring out the watermarks. He examined them under a large magnifying glass, searching for evidence of repairing, retouching or bleaching, and then measured them with a micrometer. "They're in very good condition," he said finally. "I'll buy them myself or you can leave them on consignment and perhaps get a little more for them."

He named a price that was ten times what I had paid to de Sperati.

"Are you sure they might not be counterfeits?" I asked.

"Counterfeits?" he said scornfully. "Look; I specialize in forged stamps. I even collect them. I'll stake my reputation that these are genuine."

Then I told him.

He stared hypnotically at the stamps like a man who has just been sentenced to die. "They're perfect," he said listlessly. "They are so good they make me ill. What will happen to my business? These stamps would fool anybody. Good Lord, you could have clipped me!"

He asked if he could keep the stamps for a few days to show to his competitors, and when I left, he was toying aimlessly with some tweezers and still gaping at de Sperati's work.

The remarkable de Sperati affair, which is already a nightmare to European dealers and which in time could affect the endeavors of an estimated 15,000,000 collectors around the world, came to light in a postal-control station on the Spanish border one morning during the war. A French censor, making a routine check on outgoing mail, came across a fat envelope containing eighteen canceled postage stamps, each carefully enclosed in a small envelope. The stamps were addressed to a well-known expert in Lisbon, and the sender's name and address - Jean de Sperati, Aix-les-Bains, Savoie - was legibly rubber-stamped on the envelope. The censor summoned customs appraisers, and the eighteen rare stamps were given a preliminary evaluation of more than 300,000 francs, or about $7500 at that time. The customs office seized the shipment and ordered de Sperati's arrest on a charge of illegally exporting capital in the form of rare postage stamps.

At the time, no one suspected a plant or saw anything odd in the fact that the envelope was plainly addressed to a well-known Portuguese stamp dealer and just as plainly marked with the sender's name. Everyone in France was presumed to know that mail was being censored, and de Sperati was merely considered stupid for trying to get away with slipping something through.

Presently, the cadaverous engraver found himself in court at Chambéry impatiently listening to the charge of the public prosecutor - to wit, disloyalty to the republic in attempting to smuggle valuable stamps out of the country during wartime. De Sperati, who is as unpredictable as a Mexican jumping bean, bounced out of his seat without waiting for his attorney to speak. "I am not guilty", he said. "These so-called valuable stamps are worth nothing. I made them all myself, at home."

The judge was only mildly surprised, and he clearly missed the enormity of de Sperati's remark. The prosecutor also reacted with a polite shrug that suggested tolerance for an ingenious alibi. De Sperati might just as well have announced that he was Napoleon. The court wearily postponed the case, and as a matter of routine the stamps were sent to Prof. Edmond Locard, of Lyon, a distinguished philatelist and author of a standard work on the subject. Months later Doctor Locard submitted a voluminous report, in part as follows:

1.- Even if it were possible to imitate any stamp perfectly, there would inevitably be some discernible difference in dimension. The stamps submitted were places in a comparison microscope with genuine originals and there was not even one tenth of a millimeter difference in size.

2.- It is impossible to duplicate colors so that they show the exact shade and give off the same fluorescence in the spectroscope. The stamps submitted were compared with genuine originals in the spectroscope and there was not the slightest difference in shade or fluorescence.

3.- False stamps, no matter how carefully made, can never exactly match the original paper. All the stamps submitted were on different paper, and most would be difficult to reproduce, notably the 1 Kreuzer of Bavaria and the 2 Reales of Spain. The paper of each stamp perfectly matched the paper of the genuine originals.

4.- Among the stamps examined, many had watermarks, such as the CC (Crown Colony) on the Hong Kong stamps and the CA (Crown Agent) on those of Lagos. Exact imitation of watermarks is almost impossible. In the specimens submitted all watermarks exactly matched the originals in every way.

5.- Most of the stamps submitted were gummed. Each of those had the gum characteristic of the country from which it came, and some of the gum had aged naturally. The hypothesis that these original gums could be imitated is untenable.

6.- Several of the stamps had perforated edges, such as the 17 Oere of Sweden, the 5 Francs of Belgium and the 1878 10 pesetas of Spain. Perforations are always the stumbling block of the forger, since hand cutting can never exactly duplicate the work of the original machine cut and imitations can be spotted immediately. But each of the stamps submitted had its proper and characteristic perforations.

7.- Finally, in addition to the nature and consistency of the paper, one must also consider the thickness. There was not so much as a thousandth of a millimeter difference in the thickness between the stamps submitted and the genuine originals.

In short, Doctor Locard's summary daid flatly, the eighteen stamps were all genuine and could not have been forged. De Sperati was brought back to court, found guilty and fined 300,000 francs. He stomped out in a fury, muttering that he didn't have that kind of money, and he cussed Doctor Locard in particular and all stamp experts in general.

His attorneys filed an appeal, and de Sperati disappeared into his laboratory. The morning he came out may de remembered by some as the darkest hour in the history of philately, for de Sperati brought with him three more sets of the same eighteen stamps already held as evidence by the court. Stamp for stamp they were identical with those pronounced genuine by Doctor Locard, and de Sperati suggested acidly that since the noted expert was so sold on the first batch, he might like to look at these too. The Chambéry authorities, to cover their embarrassment, hastily ordered another postponement, meanwhile sending the stamps out for re-examination by Doctor Locard and two other experts - Brun, of Paris, and LaFlize, of Lyon.

De Sperati sulked for days, gloomily predicting the case would be stalled indefinitely, and then plunged back into his work. Some weeks later, three additional experts, two in Marseille and one in Paris, received registered letters from a Mlle. Anne Corne. In each letter were some fifteen rare stamps on which she asked their professional opinion. All three promptly offered to buy the stamps, but Madmoiselle Corne explained they belonged to her personal collection and were not for sale. The experts reluctantly returned the stamps, after authenticating each one with their signature and a formal certificate, but continued corresponding with the lady. Finally she relented, and sent each one a rare stamp for which they paid the regular catalogue price. Shortly thereafter, the three experts happened to be in Paris at the same time and got together for lunch. They were discussing their newest philatelic treasures when the Paris dealer casually mentioned that he had just acquired an Oldenburg No.5. The stamp was a rarity issued by Oldenburg, a former German state, and there were only ten known copies in the whole of Europe, each worth about $300.

"But I've also found an Oldenburg," the second man said.

"Me, too!" cried the third.

The three dealers looked at one another popeyed and there was a moment of grim silence while each fished in his wallet and pulled out a stamp. Laid side by side, the three Oldenburgs were exactly alike. Even the cancellation marks were in the same position, a coincidence challenging all the laws of chance, even if the stamp itself were not rare.

The three men hurried to the Chambre Syndicale Des Négociants en Timbres-Poste, an organization of stamp dealers, and filed an anguished complaint with the director, Monsieur Leon Miro. In no time at all Mademoiselle Corne was identified as de Sperati's sister-in-law, and the caustic engraver soon claimed he had master-minded the plot and made the Oldenburg stamps to demonstrate, once again, that all stamp experts are "betes", a word which, roughly translated, means "dopes". M. Miro, or "the wily Leon", as he is known in the trade, blew a Gallic gasket and filed a criminal-fraud suit against de Sperati, demanding 1,000,000 francs damages and destruction of all the forged stamps he had made.

The bad news, which until then had been confindd to the hinterlands, hit the front pages in Paris, and there was consternation in the stamp world. Dealers in Paris, London, Stockholm, Madrid, Brussels and other cities frantically pored over their prize stamps, wondering wether they had acquired and de Sperati "originals" through some third person such as Mademoiselle Corne. Experts all over Europe recalled with a pang that they had authenticated rare stamps for de Sperati. Warning bulletins were rushed into the mails by philatelic societies and worried stamp brokers.

The publicity meanwhile turned on de Sperati like an X ray, and bit by bit the hidden parts of his story came into focus. Jean de Sperati was brought up in Aix-les-Bains, a French mountain-resort city known for the thermal springs. His grandfather, Trofimo Arnulfi, had been a general and his father, Henri de Sperati, was a Colonel in the Italian Army. Like many another youngster, Jean had a hobby, stamp collecting, but he never had enough money to buy what he wanted. Once, after saving his centimes for months, he says he bought a valuable French colonial stamp which the dealer had assured him was genuine. Months later he discovered he had been duped; the stamp was not only a counterfeit but a poor one.

De Sperati says the incident embittered him; actually it became an obsession that squeezed out nearly all other interests in his life and started him on a forty-year trail of revenge. Even to-day, despite the restraining dampness of his attorneys, he still

sizzles when he talks about stamp experts.

"Quacks! Charlatans! Bunglers!" he snaps. "They would like to get rid of me. They think I am a public danger. Perhaps I am to them. I have proved that they don't know anything. I determined to fight them years ago, when I discovered anyone could be an expert without the slightest scientific knowledge."

De Sperati learned the printing and engraving trade as a youth and, with his brother, eventually became owner of a post-card factory. In his spare time he haunted the libraries and read everything he could find on philately, including Gerber-Levrault's rare work of 1867. In this book, which appeared only twenty-seven years after the first postage stamp, he found technical details on printing, engraving, paper and watermarks, and other information on early issues.

Any other collector might have been satisfied with the fundamentals, but de Sperati explains that he was consumed by a cause. He knew, for example, that he would not be the first man to attempt forgeries of rare stamps, for the literature was rich in plots that failed. He studied each case and learned, for instance, that one stamp was exposed because of faulty color; another had a microscopic error in the perforations; still another used paper that was too thin. He was intrigued, he recalls, by the fact that all the experts commenting on these affairs were unanimous in stating that no one could ever successfully forge a rare stamp. De Sperati concluded that these earlier forgers were not only careless but had only a rudimentary knowledge of their subject.

Presently, using the profits from his business, de Sperati bobbed up at auctions all over Europe and picked up bargains in rare stamps that were not in perfect condition, but which could be analyzed for color, type of printing or other characteristics. He invested in expensive equipment - quartz lamps, spectroscopes, cameras, microscopes. Meanwhile he was engaged in a staggering research project - the mastery of all the processes and materials involved in the making of a stamp, such as papers, colors, inks, gums, engraving, lithography, design, perforation and others. His studies on color alone covered thousands of shades, and he remarks now with some asperity that a standard philatelic color guide shows only about 200 colors. He analyzed the color on each stamp he bought and learned what chemicals were used to make that color in the country from which it came, and then gave it its proper spectroscopic classification. He has in his laboratory now, for example, more than 100 shades of green alone. Thus, if he is forging a green stamp, he chooses the shade which gives off the exact fluorescence of the genuine stamp.

De Sperati's researches on stamp inks were equally exhaustive and he reports that he was able to build, after years of effort, a copper furnace which yielded black ink exactly like that used 100 years ago. He analyzed stamp gums, and experimented with their ingredients - agar-agar, albumin, gelatin, flour, bone, fish offal, and so on. He studied asafetida, myrrh, mimosa and other plants which yield gums, because he knew they supplied the adhesive for stamps issued by certain Asiatic countries. Now he insists he can make, among others, a stamp gum which in a few hours develops a crackled surface indistinguishable from the aged original.

De Sperati spent years on paper alone, and he says that by painstaking handwork he can duplicate any paper ever used for stamps, complete with watermarks. This almost impossible feat, the secret of which de Sperati says he will "take to the grave", has earned him the grudging admiration of the Parisian syndicate which wants him kept in jail.

"We don't know how he does it," says M. Maurice Garcon, attorney and spokesman for the dealers, "but it is wonderful work. No one can tell the difference between his paper and the original, no matter how old it is or wether it comes from India or France."

De Sperati gracefully acknowledges the compliments and adds, impishly, that he can even imitate burelage, a protective network of dots pressed into some stamps to prevent forgery.

No one, except de Sperati himself, knows when de Sperati made his first complete counterfeit stamp. He admits only that he practically lived in his laboratory for years, laboriously working by hand and rejecting sample after sample because it did not meet his rigorous standards. Though de Sperati does not make a point of it himself, others have observed that some of his first and most successful forgeries were stamps on which other counterfeiters failed miserably - such as the Oldenburg No.5, the 1878 5 franc of Belgium, the 1849 1 Kreuzer of Bavaria, and the Naples issue of 1858. When these imitations passed his own exhaustive tests, de Sperati retired from the post-card business and devoted all his time to his homework in stamps.

He began sending forgeries to the experts, one or teo at a time, and he admits that he was nervous as a bride with her first biscuits. But they all came back duly endorsed as genuine, accompanied in most instances by an offer to buy. Thus encouraged, de Sperati coveted copies of the Matterhorns of Philately, those unattainable rarities over which men fought and spent fortunes. Among these were a Mauritius one-penny orange and two-penny blue, stamps issued to satisfy a lady's whim, and now priceless; the controversical 1851 dos reales of Spain, the scarlet Austrian newspaper stamp of 1856, worth $2500; the 1850 Saxony black on blue; the 3 skilling of Sweden; Newfoundland's 2-cent vermilion of 1857; the 9-pence lilac brown of Ceylon and many others now reposing in fabulous collections such as those of King George VI, former Secretary Ickes, the late President Roosevelt, ex-King Carol of Rumania, the late Arthur Hind and others.

Where did de Sperati get the genuine stamps to copy? He has never told the whole story, but he has admitted that he bought hundreds of so-called "seconds" - stamps which are damaged in one way or another and which, though rare and genuine, are worth only from 3 to 10 per cent of their normal value. Furthermore, as all philatelists know, photographic reproductions of rare stamps in color are available to dealers, known collectors and others when sales or trades are discussed. Moreover, since de Sperati was also a well-known collector, he was among those privileged to examine, and even photograph, rare stamps in the famous collections of Europe. In many instances de Sperati was protected by the fact that some stamps were so rare that they were almost never taken out of their vaults, and even the experts weren't sure what they looked like.

For more than fifteen years de Sperati kept his imitations flowing through philatelic channels, some 300 separate issues in all, and with from three to six copies of each. All these stamps, which now repose in what he calls his "gold book of philately," bear the signatures of great names in the stamp world. His forgeries have also been certified as genuine by the Royal Philatelic Society, of London, the Philatelic Academy, of Paris, and the London Philatelic Association.

To those who suspect that he sold huge quantities of forged stamps in all the countries of Europe and thus made a fortune, de Sperati gives a sad smile. "Ah, yes, I could have made millions," he says. "The originals of the stamps in my gold book have a total catalogue value of more than nine million francs, and I could have sold all the imitations because they were given the seal of authenticity by men whose names apparently mean something to buyers. How many times these experts tried to buy these stamps from me!"

De Sperati still lives in Aix-les-Bains, but he is no longer obscure, and the parade of the curious has convinced the town elders that in him they have a much hotter attraction than the mud baths and thermal springs. The master forger lives in a square, faded yellow house high on a hill overlooking Lake Bourget, immortalized by the love lyrics of the Poet Lamartine. De Sperati contributes to the romantic surroundings by calling his house La Villa Clair de Lune, but its creaking floors, dusty halls and sagging furniture are convincing evidence that stamp forging doesn't pay. De Sperati is as suspicious as a mountain moonshiner, and keeps snoopers away from his private mint with an enormous black police dog and a ten-foot moat between the street and the front door.

De Sperati himself looks like someone you might find in a cave or a damp cellar lit by candlelight. He is tall, bony and toothless, with thick gray hair and Svengali eyes, and he ~~uses with a curious chopping effect~~ has a jaw like a meat ax, which he uses with a curious chopping effect as he talks. Restless and intense, he goes through an eighteen-hour day in ceaseless gestures and jerks, and usually exhausts his attorneys, relatives and friends. "I can't ever make him sit still," his placid wife Marie says wistfully. "He is always nervous and excited."

"These so-called forgeries of mine," de Sperati frequently complains, "are no more forgeries, for example, than some of the furniture reproductions sold everywhere today. Painters go into the Louvre Museum, too, and copy the Mona Lisa or some other famous painting. Are they forgers? Is a man who makes artificial silk a forger? I don't want to be considered a clever crook or commit crimes with my stamps. I want to be consideres an artist, because my stamps are works of art. Genuine rarities cost a fortune and only a lucky few can buy them. What about all the nice young people who love stamp collecting? Should they be allowed to have good copies of these famous stamps? I say they should. I intend to continue with my reproductions, and will sell them, not at prices based on the catalogue value of the genuine stamp, but at a price which would give me only a small profit. Of course, if some unscrupulous collector should resell them as genuine, it would not be my fault."

While de Sperati is frank enough in discussing his motives, only a few confidants have seen all the steps in the actual "forging" process. He keeps casual visitors out of the laboratory on the second floor of his house, and talks only in cryptic generalities about his methods. It is known that he uses glass photographic plates, and the finished cuts are inked with a small hand roller, but no other details are available.

Unfortunately for de Sperati's self-claimed altruism, his future at the moment looks very dark indeed. He was brought to trial on the Paris fraud charge some months ago, convicted and sentenced to a year in prison and fined 10,000 francs. Attorney Georges Jacob's defense was simple: de Sperati had deliberately sold the three Oldenburgs to bring his thesis before the public and shame the experts. Yes, he had accepted money for the stamps, but had already refunded it to the victims.

The stamp dealers countered that de Sperati was a dangerous rogue who was ruining the philatelic profession. They even suggested, slyly, that since de Sperati had taken money for his counterfeits in the known instance, he had probably peddled them all over Europe.

Evidently the court agr3ed, and the verdict quickly dissipated one hypothesis suggested by neutral observers - namely, that de Sperati was selling genuine stamps acquired in some mysterious manner. The judges ruled that the stamps were forgeries, that de Sperati was guilty, and that he had deliberately hurt an honorable business. He was fined 10,000 francs and sentenced to a year in jail and, in addition, was ordered to pay the stamp-dealers' syndicate 300,000 francs damages. He did save his stamps, however, for the court was unwilling to order them destroyed.

His attorney filed an appeal, and de Sperati went home to wait for the final outcome. While there, busily rolling out new specimens of his art, he won a moral victory in the Chambéry case when the court reduced the original fine to 5000 francs - a token punishment for disturbing the normal routine of the customs service - and dismissed the capital-export charge.

The case against him there blew up when the two experts who were asked to join Doctor Locard refused to have any part of de Sperati's stamps, and in desperation the Chambéry court turned them over to Leon Dubus, a Parisian authority. Dubus, by coincidence, had also been hired by the dealers' syndicate, and declared in both cases, naturally, that the stamps were fakes.

Dubus said he was surprised that anyone could be fooled by the stamps, and testified that he needed only a small magnifying glass to spot them as forgeries.

"Now do you see why I do this?" de Sperati crackled when Dubus testified. "Doctor Locard in Chambéry declares my stamps are genuine, and his colleague Dubus in Paris says they are false. They are cutting each other's throats, and thus prove that experts are not experts at all."

There are many philatelists in France today who strongly doubt that Jean de Sperati will actually spend a year behind bars. He found an unexpected friend in Le Journal de Timbre, the French philatelic magazine, and many a prominent collector is supporting him behind the scenes. The French press, which views de Sperati as a schemer with a Machiavellian sense of humor, has had trouble repressing giggles in reprting the case, and Georges Jacob is confident that his fiery client will go free.

De Sperati. meanwhile, is feverishly working on his chef-d'oeuvre, a huge volume entitled, Confidentially - for the Experts. The book, which he says will cost $600 a copy, will summarize his studies and methods, with full-color photographs, as well as samples of all his forged stamps. His first book, sarcastically called Philately Without Experts, was limited to 300 authographed copies, and is already a collectors' item. "The experts bought them all right," he says with a rare grin," but they keep them out of sight. I think they would like to do the same to me."