

# Russia

## The Classic Stamps

### 1858-1875

by Benito Carobene

As we have seen, Russia took an immediate interest in the British postal reform. Nevertheless, there was a notable delay before the first postage stamps were issued. The most likely explanation is that the Russian postal administration maintained, for many years, that the system of allowing advance payment of postal charges only with the use of pre-paid envelopes was perfectly adequate. In 1852, however, there were contacts with the postal administration of Prussia (which handled mail exchange between Russia and other Western European States) from which it emerged that it would be worthwhile to allow advanced payment also on correspondence addressed abroad. A particular supporter of this idea was the Director of the Railway Department of the Russian Postal Service, Alexiej Prokhorovich Charukoskij, who presented a report in 1855 in which he declared himself in favour of issuing stamps. The proposal was accepted and the necessary procedures were immediately set in motion to bring stamps into existence.

It has to be said at once that this phase was taken very seriously by the Russians. Numerous studies were made, great care was taken over choice of the design of the exemplars to be issued, possible face values were examined, all possible anticounterfeit systems were analyzed and particular attention was paid to cancellation. At the end, with the Tsar's approval, issue began. Tests and studies exist from this long preparatory period which, on account of their rarity, are now considered authentic gems in the country's collection. In conclusion, with an Imperial Decree of 20th November 1857, it was decided to proceed with the issue of three exemplars with facial values of 10, 20 and 30 kopecks. It is worth remarking that these stamps were originally issued only for use on correspondence within the Empire. More precisely, 10 kopeck adhesives were to be used on letters weighing up to one lot (just under 13 grams), those of 20 kopecks for two lots and, lastly 30 kopecks for three lots. Registered letters and those addressed abroad, on the other hand, were still to be paid for in cash as they were



handed in to the Post Office. The chosen design was prepared by the Gottlieb Haase and Sons company of Prague and realized by the engraver Franz Kepler of the Russian State Printing Institute. The stamps were to reproduce the coat-of-arms of the Imperial Post (a twoheaded eagle and a posthorn) in white relief, on a blue background within an oval. These were inserted within an imperial mantle surmounted by a crown. The figures showing the face value appeared at the four corners while a few words in Cyrillic letters appeared below the oval. Turning to the watermark, it was decided to make one (obtained by thickening the paper) which would vary according to the value. More precisely, each exemplar had as its watermark a figure showing the tens of kopecks the stamp was worth. That is to say, the 10 kopecks adhesive had a watermark of 1, that of 20 a 2 and that of 30 a 3. It should be remarked that the chosen design, apart from a few exceptions which will be mentioned below, remained substantially unchanged till the fall of the Tsars. It was decided from the



beginning that the stamps should be perforated. However, the perforation machine ordered from abroad had not yet arrived when the first printing of 10 kopecks values was ready, so the Administration decided to proceed with distribution of these stamps without perforation. Thus came about the first issue which therefore consisted of a single non-perforated exemplar with a value of 10 kopecks.

This was sold throughout European Russia and Poland from 1st January 1858 and subsequently, from 1st March, in Siberia, the Caucasus and the Transcaucasus. The perforating machine finally became operative and, as from 10th January 1858, all three exemplars (of 10, 20 and 30 kopecks) were issued with 14 1/2 x 15 perforation. It may be interesting to add something about the system of cancellation. Until 28th February stamps were cancelled by pen. From March a handstamp bearing the name of the city had to be added to the pen cancellation. Post offices were also authorized to use the postmarks already used

Center: the Franz Kepler's sketch of the first stamp of Russia, handpainted in white, blue and brown, executed on thick cardboard (34 x 43 mm.). This exquisite work was prepared by Gottlieb Haase & Sons of Prague as a proposal to the postal administration of St. Petersburg. This proof was a personal gift from the Tsar Nicholas II to Agathon Fabergé. (Ex Epstein, Fabergé and Mertens. - Investphila Auction, May 30, 2008, lot n. 2082, est. euro 25.000)

The Faberges, of French origin, migrated to Russia during the 17th century. From a small goldsmith's shop established in St. Petersburg by Gustav Faberge, the family became the most famous jewelers of Imperial Russia. Agathon Faberge was the grandson of the founder and second son of Karl Gustavovich Fabergé. His appreciation for objects d'art extended to rugs, china, jade, vases, engravings, goblets and stamps. He became a well-known specialist on revenue stamps and his collection is world-famous. Agathon died in Helsinki in 1982

1858, 10 k. brown and blue in mixed franking with second issue 20 k. blue and orange, both tied to cover from Reval (Estonia) to Port Kunda by framed "Revel/ 20 Apr. 1858", each example additionally cancelled with pen cross. The only recorded combination cover of Russian first and third stamps (Ex Mikulski, Investphila Auction, June 1st, 2008, lot n. 2143, est. euro 150.000)

Lettera da Reval (Estonia) del 20 aprile 1858 per Port Kunda, affrancata con 10 kopeki N°1, con 20 kopeki della seconda emissione, annullati a penna e col bollo in cartella di Reval. È l'unica combinazione nota formata dal primo e dal terzo esemplare su lettera.



in the pre-philatelic period. Lastly, from May, numeral cancellations were introduced. In October of the same year, 1858, the third issue was made. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that in July 1863 a 5 kopecks stamp was issued for use on local correspondence in the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Later, however, the same adhesive was also used for the local correspondence of Kazan and Astrakhan, and later still, for letters sent both within the Empire and abroad.

A new series issued in 1864 included new values necessary for sending printed matters, manuscripts and newspapers. The design remained substantially the same, but the imperial mantle was no longer present. Altogether three types were issued with face values of 1, 3 and 5 kopecks. The perforation of these stamps, which had no watermark, was of 12 1/2. There was a new issue (the fifth) exactly a year later. In June 1865, in fact, a new series came out with features identical to the previous exemplars, but with 14 1/2 x 15 perforation. On this occasion stamps came out with all six



face-values issued previously: 1, 3, 5, 10, 20 and 30 kopecks. For the sixth issue in September 1866 the paper was completely changed. As well as having a watermark consisting of wavy lines with letters inserted between them, it was also horizontally laid. The exemplars had the same six face-values as before, but in 1875 a 2 kopecks adhesive was added. These same stamps came out again between 1868 and 1875, but with the paper vertically laid. The eighth issue, beginning 19th June 1875, coincided with Russia's entry into the UPU and the introduction of new postal rates. In 1875, in fact, the first letter rate was reduced from 10 to 8 kopecks and it was further reduced to 7 kopecks from 1st April 1879. A postal empire on the scale of the Russian one might be expected to give rise to numerous important specialist collections. In point of fact, the chances of achieving significant results are slender, and this both for the paucity of the material which could theoretically still exist and for the rarity of such as has survived to the present day.



Left: 1869, July 25. Cover from St. Petersburg initially sent to Liverpool, bearing two 1866 3 k. and 30 k., tied by dotted oval "S.P.B." matching St. Petersburg cds at right, alongside with Prussian "P.D.", manuscript "5" Sgr. credited to Prussia and endorsement "City of London" added to denote the steamer from Liverpool to the United States. From Liverpool the letter was forwarded to Boston with application of 1869 8 d. (pl. 8) tied by Liverpool duplex, paid at single rate, with Boston Paid cds on front. (Investphila, lot 2354, est. euro 1.500)

A sinistra: Lettera da San Pietroburgo per Liverpool affrancata con due esemplari del 3 kopeki e uno da 30 K., annullati col bollo "S.P.B." a punti, recante a lato il circolare a data di San Pietroburgo. Transitata per la Prussia ove fu tassata per 5 silbergroschen (in rosso), giunta a Liverpool fu affrancata dal forwarder Brown & Shipley con 6 pence annullato col numerale "466" per pagare il porto dall'Inghilterra agli USA. La lettera fu imbarcata il 12 agosto a bordo del vapore "City of London" della Inman Line (non segnalato il viaggio da Hubbard & Winter) che giunse a New York il 22 e a Boston il 24 agosto.