



Plácido Ramón de Torres From Foundling to Master Forger

Gerhard Lang-Valchs



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CIEZA, 2020

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Part I

Tracing a Forger's Footprints

To the Gentle and Interested Reader

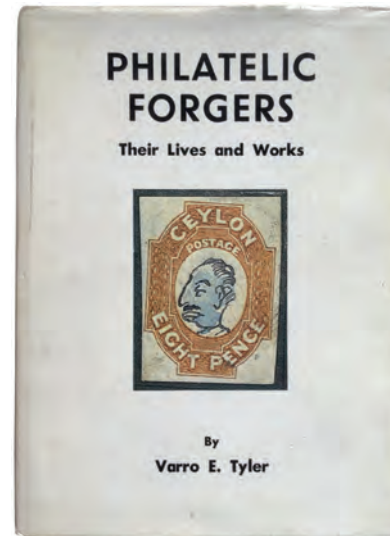
My first encounters with Plácido Ramón de Torres years ago were really deceiving. A manual of Spanish philatelic forgeries presented, among many others, a dozen of fakes he had made, nothing more. And the great American expert in stamp forgers, Varro Tyler, dedicated in his book *Philatelic Forgers* only about 20 lines to his life and work confirming, seemingly, the mediocrity and reduced importance of this widely unknown stamp dealer.

Some years later, when preparing my doctoral thesis about aspects of the modern history of Andorra, I came across once again with him. A recommendation letter to the chief of the local Andorran administration suggesting to relay on his services to organize a not yet existing postal administration, signed by an ancient Spanish minister, was a surprise and made me wonder. But as this initiative did not come to a happy ending, it was of no further interest to follow his footprints.

The third approach was, finally, more successful. I found photos of the two first editions of his world-catalogue published in Italy. Looking at the different stamps depicted on

the front-page of his catalogue, I began to suspect, that the illustrations of three of them could represent forgeries. So, my interest was finally awoken. Once convinced by further research, that I was on the right trail, I met with my late friend, Don Alfredo Navarro, an old fox and expert for Spanish stamp forgeries to consult him about Plácido, his work and my suspicions. I still remember very vividly the comments and laughter, when showing him a recently acquired sample of Torres' Spanish stamp album and catalogue, about the

weird and unconsciously emerged idea, the 29 images of its front- and rear-page could be all illustrations of his supposed forgeries. And the craziest thing was the suddenly rising freaky idea, the more than 1,000 illustrations of the interior pages might be fakes as well.



Frontpage

01. To the Gentle and Interested Reader

The answers to dozens of requests for help in the search for those fakes, sent to philatelic experts all over the world, were more than deceiving. My exposed hypothesis was in other careful words qualified as an absurd idea born in an insane mind.

Until I could not get, after months of research mostly on the internet, the first proofs, that some of the "insanely supposed" forged items really existed, I was not able to get but compassion. Now that I

can present hundreds of his forgeries, things have changed. It is, in my opinion, not yet hazardous to postulate and to be convinced, that the majority if not all of the album illustrations really exist or at least existed one day. And there are even more.

Those and a lot of other surprising results of the research will be presented in this book. I'll try to let the reader take part of the progress of the discoveries made hoping the tale is able to transmit part of the fascination I felt.

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Recommendation letter from ex-Spanish minister to the President of the General Council of Andorra



1873 Torres-catalogue



Torres-Album rear-page

To the Critical Reader

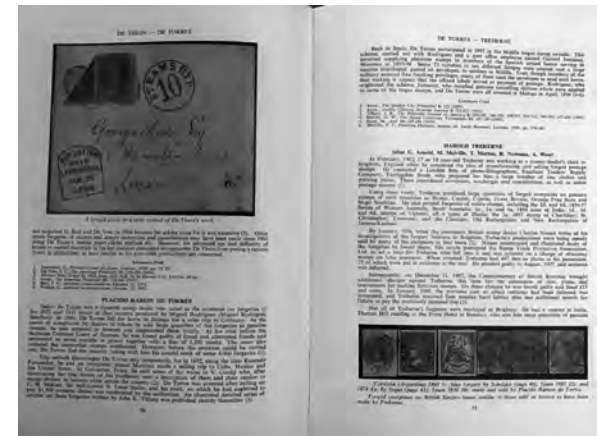
This book is the result of more than six years of research on its protagonist, his life and work. Although at the point of departure there were only very few documents available, I was lucky enough to discover a lot of surprising things. The initial intention to write a somewhat larger but rigorously researched article, completing the poor biographical notes and rectifying the not few errors of what had been previously published, felt short because of the scope and volume of Torres' activities I could trace.¹

The research was quite complicated. It supposed not only the consultation of many European libraries and archives and even some American ones, but as well the lecture of nearly all available European philatelic magazines of the 19th century. This would have been impossible to achieve without the precious help of two websites highly recommendable to all people interested in aspects of the early history of philately.² The main problem related to the search and detection of forgeries made by our protagonist was the great number of regions and countries affected, whose stamps I had never seen in my life, but which were important to create a database for evaluation and comparison.

(1) Varro E. Tyler: *Philatelic Forgers. Their lives and works*, London 1976. José Majó Tocabens, Andrés Majó Díaz: *Plácido Ramón de Torres, en Postas y Filatelia en Barcelona del XIX*, p. 98-107, Barcelona 1975.

(2) <http://memoires.timbologie.online.fr/> and <https://www.rpsl.org.uk/> [04.06.2020; 19.25].

(3) *Early British Stamp Experts and Spanish forgeries*, The London Philatelist, April 2017, vol. 126, 1444, p. 132-138.



Tyler: Torres-article

Partial results of the research have been meanwhile published in specialized magazines all over the world, including the prestigious *London Philatelist*.³ The fact that different editorial teams approved them and that even some articles were re-published and/or translated into other languages seems to confirm the consistency of the discoveries and conclusions.

What this book presents, is a kind of resumee that tries to approach the essential results through tale and images to the reader. It is however impossible to explain in this reduced space all the details of the discoveries, the way they were made and on which evidences my

02. To the Critical Reader

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5 Search Results								
Title	Edition (Language)	Author	Publisher	Pub Year (end)	Doc Type	BL Shelfmark	Notes	Doc (pages) (size)
Evora postal (Antonio Manuel Torres etc.)/ Evora postal	(Portuguese)		Antonio Manuel Torres etc. Portugal Evora	1895	Journal	Crawford 2593 (8)	(No pdf) No.1- (Apr. 1895-18??) From no.6. 1895 published by Antonio Manuel Torres and Angelo C. Pinto Bastos. No.1-12. Apr. 1895-Apr. 1896 no.1-4. Jun.-12 Jul. 1896	
Posta mondiale (P.R. de Torres)/ La posta mondiale. (Giornale per collezionisti di francobolli e marche)	(Italian)		P.R. de Torres Italy Livorno	1873 (1874)	Journal	Crawford 1861	[Size in MB = 8] No.1-12 (Jul. 1873-Jul. 1874)	PDF 1 (134 pages)
Torres, Plácido R. De: Catalogo descrittivo di tutti i francobolli/ Catalogo descrittivo di tutti i francobolli emessi dal 1840 al 1873. (Colle date di emissione loro valore e particolarità in vendita. (Prefazione, etc.))	(Italian)	Torres, P.R. De [Torres, Plácido R. De]	Italy Livorno	1873 (1873)	Catalogues and Trade Price Lists	Crawford 622	[Size in MB = 4] Crawford 622 Crawford 623	PDF 1 (65 pages)
Torres, Plácido R. De: Catalogo descrittivo di tutti i francobolli/ Catalogo descrittivo di tutti i francobolli emessi dal 1840 al 1873. (Colle date di emissione loro valore e particolarità in vendita. (Prefazione, etc.))	(Italian)	Torres, P.R. De [Torres, Plácido R. De]	Italy Livorno	1873 (1873)	Catalogues and Trade Price Lists	Crawford 623	[Size in MB = 4] Crawford 622 Crawford 623	PDF 1 (65 pages)
Torres, Plácido R. De: Catalogo descrittivo di tutti i francobolli/ Timbres postes et fiscaux, authentiques ... Prix courant pour marchands [Spain and colonies]	(French)	Torres, Plácido R. De [Torres, Plácido R. De]	Spain Barcelona	1875 (1875)	Catalogues and Trade Price Lists	Crawford 909 (18)	[Size in MB = 1]	PDF 1 (5 pages)

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Mémoires de la Timbrologie

Site dédié à l'histoire des collectionneurs de timbres-poste au 19e siècle, leurs revues, leurs catalogues, leurs albums, leurs grandes figures, leurs ouvrages, leurs sociétés, leurs événements, leurs débats... en français mais pas exclusivement.

... qui vous propose de découvrir (par exemple) :

Les articles de Natalis Rondot, 1862-1866

La bibliographie timbrologique de Philippe de Boissodon, 1876-1878

La biographie de Pierre Malit, (1833-1913)

La biographie de Justin Lafitte, (1823-1873)

The Monthly Advertiser, la première revue timbrologique, 1862

Le catalogue Potiquet, 1862

L'Exposition internationale de Timbres-poste de Paris, 1867

La Galerie de portraits du Philatéliste Rocard, 1879-1894

> ...et les nouveautés du site 121.09.2019

Ce site a reçu une médaille Grand Or à l'Exposition ITALIA 2018

French web-page

conclusions are based in every case. The critical reader should not misinterpret these lines as a poor excuse to avoid a critical verification. They want, on the contrary, to animate him to insist in his sceptics providing him a lot of bibliographic information at the end of the book, enabling him to check and evaluate the details on his own.

This book does not pretend either to publish the definitive truth of our forger's life and work nor to pronounce any moral judgement. The last chapter will show a listing of some of the problems or questions already to solve. Hopefully a future philatelic freak with a critical spirit will have the same or even more luck than I had in finding other pieces to complete the puzzling jigsaw, that was his life and work.



For the Monarch The Queen

THE JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL PHILATELIC SOCIETY LONDON

The London Philatelist

VOLUME 126 APRIL 2017 NUMBER 1444

PUBLISHED ON 1 APRIL 2017

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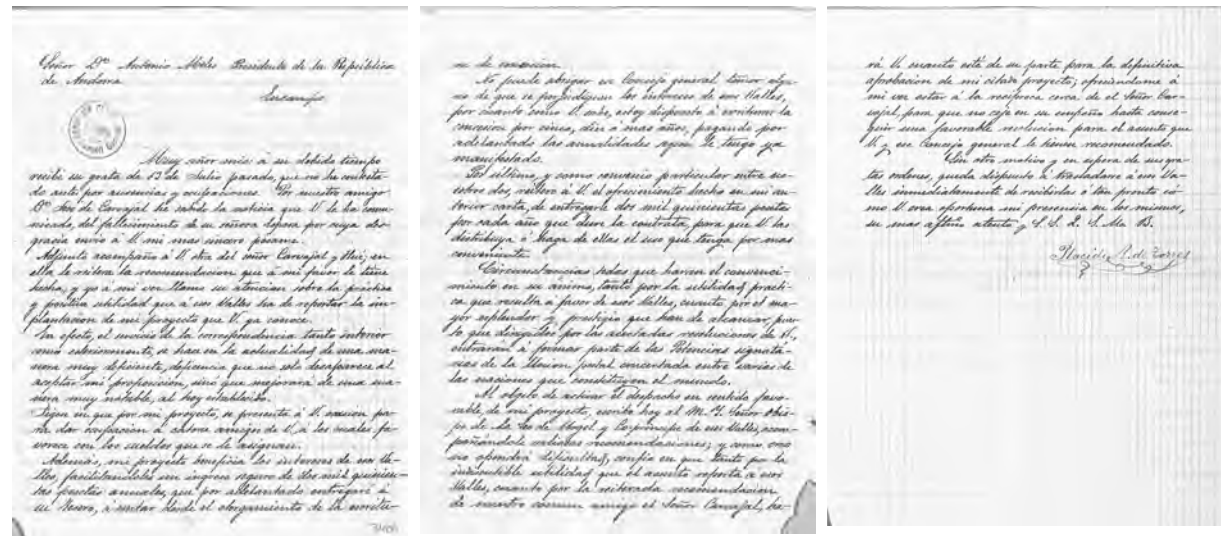
The London Philatelist

The Andorra-Stamp Affaire

As I've just told in the preface, my second encounter with Plácido was in the context of my research on the modern history of the tiny Pyrenees state of Andorra. This affaire and a second one, I'll tell in the following chapter, occur when our protagonist is already more than 40 years old. But the knowledge of the facts related and the evidence about his prowess and abilities will explain, why I could imagine that the few evidence known and published could rather

be more than a small insight of what the Spaniard really had made. In order to explain what happened in Andorra, I'll have to give a very short introduction to the political situation of the land at that time.

Andorra is a tiny state in the Eastern part of the chain of the Pyrenees-mountains that separate Spain from France. Before it became independent and got a modern and democratic constitution in 1993, guaranteed



Letter from Torres to the Syndic General of Andorra



Sheet with the proposed issue sent to the French Andorra Administration

by his Northern and Southern neighbour, it was a territory with a very particular medieval shaped “constitution” under the co-sovereignty of the president of the French Republic and the bishop of the Spanish border-town of Urgel. To resolve internal and administrative problems, both sovereigns created the *General Council*, an entirely Andorran assembly.



Andorran Essays

Far away from great cities and means of communication, isolated by the snow more than six months a year from France, the only regular and stable communication of its 4.000 inhabitants with the exterior was a narrow mule trade path along the Valira river that led to Urgel. The Spanish postal administration of Urgel maintained since the middle of the 18th century a postal service by mules.¹



The perforated issue

After the constitution of the *Universal Postal Union* Andorra was included in 1878 in its statutes as being served by Spain, because the country had no own postal administration and no own stamps. What other philatelists or stamp dealers like the German-American Nicholas Seebeck in Central America or the German Otto Bickel had made in Montenegro did or had done in other countries, Torres proposed

(1) *Historia postal (y filatélica) de Andorra*, en Estudios postales II, EL ECO, Madrid 2017, p. 199-235. *Andorra's First Stamps - Bogus, Fakes or Cinderellas?* Valira Torrent, n° 72, p. 26-27. *Otto Bickel i la seva iniciativa postal de 1893*, Papers de Recerca Històrica 6, p. 8-10. *Die Essays und nicht verausgabten Marken Andorras*, ANDORRA-Philatelie n° 79, (2012), pag. 3.009-3.018.



Bogus surcharges



Mail transported by mule

the Andorran *General Council* in 1890 the creation of an own postal administration and service. The attempt, however, failed. A second one two years later was not successful either, but the *Syndic General*, the chief of the local administration, borrowed the idea and Torres was ordered to present proofs with an appropriate design of what should have been the country's first own stamps.

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Torres designed the requested proofs and presented them on thick carton paper with a gold thread embroidery. They were slightly redesigned, following the suggestions of the Andorran clients and finally a series of 12 values in different colours was printed.

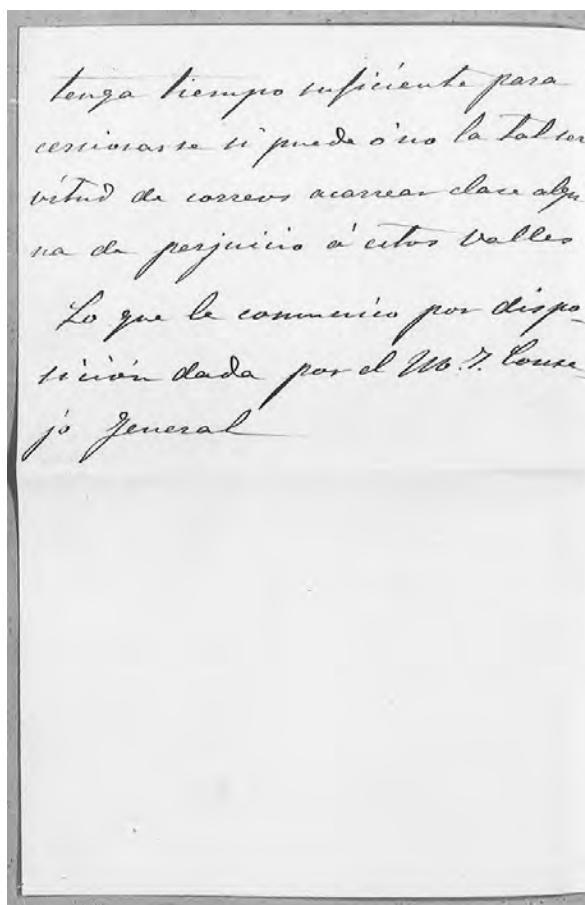
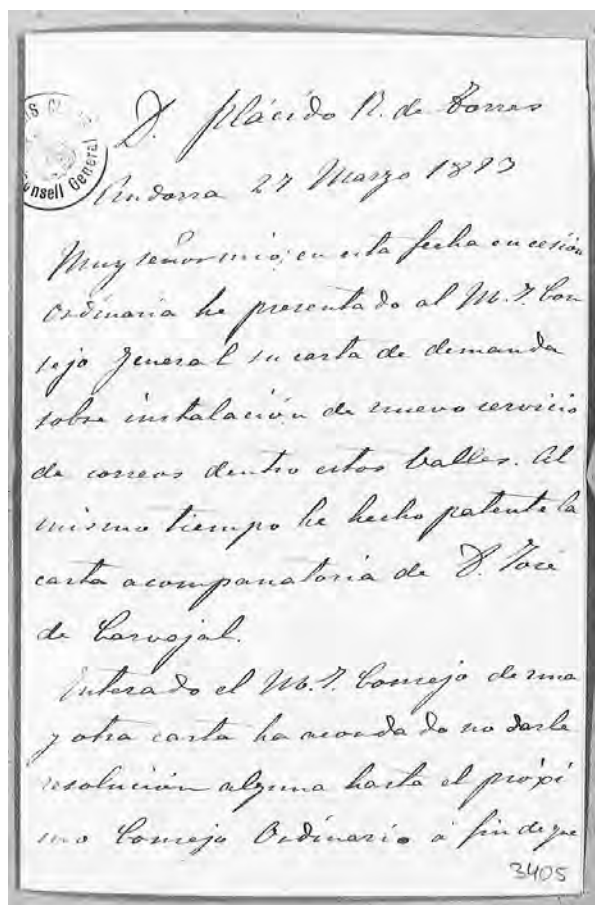
In 1896 the *Syndic General* finally presented together with an Andorran lawyer the project with the prepared stamps to the national assembly where it was now unanimously accepted. The French President's administration for Andorra, however, refused the project. So, the already printed stamps could not be issued. The French rejection converted them in what some experts call the Andorra-bogus.

Torres' deal with the Andorrans had failed. There was no way to commercialize those items and they ended up in the drawer. Only in the early 1920's, after the death of Torres, they appeared on the philatelic market. Some catalogues keep listing them erroneously as "Carlist stamps" issued in 1875, during the so-called *Carlist War* (1872-1876) in Spain. Others date them in 1890.

The watermarked stamps [RA, República de Andorra] exist gummed and un-gummed, perforated and imperforated, some sheets include odd and tête-bêche-samples, some others bizarre overprints like those in Spanish [SELLO DE SERVICIO] with an "error" [SERVICO rather than SERVICIO]

instead of "Segell de Servei" in Catalan, the official language of Andorra.

The rumors, Torres had used watermarked paper left over from his supposed forgeries of an early Argentine issue [RA = República Argentina], are fake.



Letter from the General Syndic to Torres

The “Melilla-bogus”

At the beginning of my research only a second “affaire” was known, in which Torres was involved: the printing and selling of the so-called “Melilla bogus”.

Melilla, nowadays a Spanish autonomous city, is located on the northwest coast of Africa, sharing a border with Morocco and almost opposite Malaga on the European continent. In 1497, five years after the conquest of Granada, the last Muslim remnant in Spain, the city was occupied by Spain and has been Spanish territory ever since. Its current limits were established by several treaties with Morocco, the last one just after the 1893 intervention we are about to now describe.

In 1893, the Rif Berbers, a native tribe living in the nearby mountains, launched a campaign to take back the city and its surrounding area.



Front-page book about military franchises



Letter to Plácido from Melilla

Spain sent 25.000 Spanish soldiers against them. On March 5th 1894, the conflict also known as the *Margallo War*, was finished with the treaty of Marrakech.

Plácido Torres planned to take advantage of the expected and planned military operations to defend the stronghold and proposed to the military commander that he could furnish specially designed postal franchise stamps to all soldiers for their correspondence with their families. But he promised and furnished not only stamps, but also sheets of paper and even envelopes to be distributed among the troops. The commander, pleased about the offer, accepted the patriotic donation without consulting the postal administration and conceded the corresponding permission.

04. The “Melilla-bogus”

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The philatelic part of this donation was a series of 51 stamps, representing all vessels, and regiments down to specialized companies deployed in and around the town in December 1893.¹ Plácido and his friends retained quite a lot of those stamps for the philatelic market and produced as well a lot of envelopes addressed to themselves, friends and contacts all over Spain.

But in February 1984, when the conflict was about to finish, the police arrested



Front-page separata-article

Plácido and his group when they went to pick up in the Central Post Office of Malaga a postal hand stamp they had ordered from a workshop at Madrid.² The printing stones of the stamps and other items were found and seized as well. The group were thrown into jail.

What most newspapers did not publish, was, that they were all released four days later, because Plácido could present a document, signed by the military commander of Melilla, that confirmed the allowance he



Genuine Melilla-cancel



Some of the Melilla stamps

(1) E. Auriolles: *España.Franquicias Militares*, Separata n° 2 de Actualidad Filatélica, Madrid 1968. Armando Fernández-Xesta: Estudio postal sobre el Ejército y las guerras de España, vol. II, Sociedad Filatélica La Coruña, 1985, p. 104-114.

(2) *La Unión Mercantil*, 15. 2. 1894, n°2840, año IX.



Forged Melilla- and Malaga-cancel applied on “Melilla-stamps”

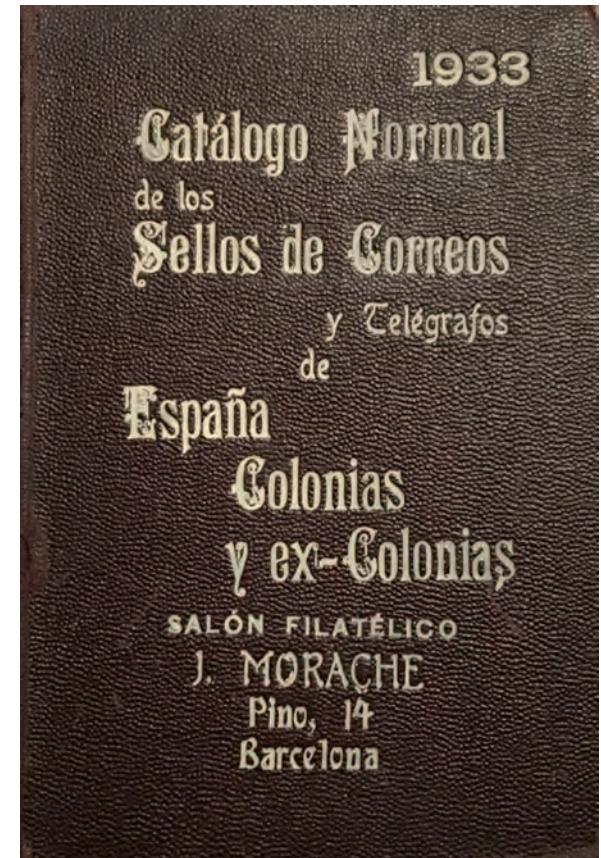


Sheet with all “Melilla-stamps”

had received to produce those stamps. The printing stones were given back and none of the group was ever brought to trial.

Plácido and his companions had put on a lot of envelopes their own address or had sent them to relatives, friends, neighbours in order to dispose of the stock. Plácido started selling these stamps and envelopes and even produced large sheets showing all the denominations and designs. Most Spanish stamp dealers, however, boycotted the selling of those commercial inventions and did not include them in their catalogues. It's

(3) Enrique Pérez Pérez: *El fondo de franquicias postales militares en el Museo del Ejército de Madrid*, *Revista de Historia Militar*, n° 90, 2001, p. 187-206.



Front-page Morache-catalogue

impossible to say whether the whole action was commercially successful.

The printing stones re-appeared about 60 years later in the stock of the stamp dealer Juan Morache. The buyer finally defaced them before a notary and donated them to the *Military Historical Archive of Madrid*.³

The Early Stamp Magazines and Catalogues

Before I was able to find out something about the origins of Plácido and his first 20 years of life, other lines of research, that had nothing to do with him, led me to the European stamp magazines and catalogues. I discovered the first illustrated publications about stamps and philately: the articles of French collector Natalis Rondot in the *Le Magazin Pittoresque* and the first illustrated stamp catalogue edited by the Belgian stamp dealer Jean-Baptiste Moens.

the lithographs in 1864 the British expert E. L. Pemberton had discovered seven parallel cases. Nearly all later illustrated publications all over Europe, Moens' magazine *Le Timbre Poste* and his later catalogues always seemed to include the same images of the same values, different from those of the first catalogue. Some defects or errors appeared time and time again. A really strange discovery.



Image Stanley-Gibbons-catalogue



Image Torres-catalogue



Image Stanley-Gibbons-catalogue



Image Torres-catalogue



Image Stanley-Gibbons-catalogue



Image Torres-catalogue



Image Stanley-Gibbons-catalogue



Image Torres-catalogue

The images that contained both works were of superior quality. This led me to discover that some images had been copied by the lithographers from fakes instead of genuine specimens.¹ But I was not the first. Just after the publication of

A closer look at them suggested, that all editors had used the same illustrations, a fact that I could verify with a detailed study. When I finally acquired a sample of Torres' 1879 illustrated album-catalogue, I realized that the illustrations covered again the same values

(1) Natalis Rondot, *les premières illustrations de timbres-postes et les faux*, Schweizer Briefmarken Zeitung [SBZ], 3/ 2019, p. 67-73.

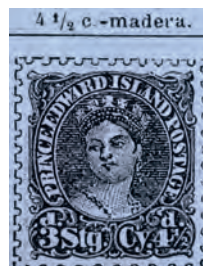
with identical designs even in the details. The problem was obvious. Why should Torres, whose skills and work as a lithographer I had been proved, use the illustrations from others for his own catalogue?

The suspicion was evident, but how to prove that all those illustrations of the magazines and catalogues were really his work? Most experts consulted pointed to Jean-Baptiste Moens, the Brussels antiquarian, stamp dealer and editor as the maker and distributor of those illustrations and their printing electrotypes. A comparison of the times when those illustrations appeared in the different European magazines could, however, demonstrate, that Moens was not the first in using them in his magazine.² He, as well as other editors, depended on a common maker and seller of those items that was finally named, although only in one and single occasion, in a footnote of the magazine *Le Timbre Fiscal*, at a time Plácido had left Italy and established a new shop at Barcelona.³

The magazines and catalogues of the German Senf brothers and Moschkau⁴, the French Maury and Roussin, the British catalogue of Gray⁵ and Stanley Gibbons⁶, all great editors used his copies. We find them as well on the other side of the ocean. The Seebeck and the early Scott catalogues showed a new “product-line” for American clients that wanted illustrations of values different from those of the European catalogues.⁷ The illustrations even appear in the early Australian catalogues.⁸



**Image American
Philatelic Journal**



**Image Torres-
catalogue**



**Lithograph Moens
1864- catalogue**



Genuine sample



Described forgery (see ribbon)

(2) Newfoundland Discovery: 1866 Torres forgeries that correct those misidentified Moens fakes, *Newfoundland Standard Stamp Catalogue*, 10^a edición, 2016, p. 675-679.

(3) *Die Lithographen des Jean-Baptiste Moens*, Schweizer Briefmarken Zeitung, 1-2, Januar/Februar 2020, 3/März 2020. (Revised version of a previously published Spanish and French version.)

(4) *Die falschen Fuffziger des Dr. Moschkau. Das kommt mir Spanish vor*, Deutsche Briefmarkenzeitung [DBZ] 2017, Nr. 3, p. 20-23 (Teil 1); Nr. 4, p. 26-27 (Teil 2).

(5) *Early British Stamp Experts and Spanish forgeries*, The London Philatelist, April 2017, vol. 126, 1444, p. 132-138.

(6) *The old Stanley-Gibbons Catalogues – Handbooks to Detect Forgeries?* Stamp Lover, vol. 112, n° 1, p. 12-15, Febr. 2020.

(7) *The Early Scott Catalogues and Their Illustrations. Discovering a Spanish Forger's Footprints*, Collectors Club Philatelist, n° 96, Nov.-Dec. 2017, p. 205-210.

(8) *The Australian Footprints of a European Stamp Forger*, Australian Journal of Philately, #147, march 2019, p. 5-9. [republished] Stamp Lover, vol. III, n° 3, June 2019, p. 78-80. <http://actualidadfilatelica.blogspot.com/search/label/AUSTRALIA> [04.06.2020; 19.25].

From Spain to Italy

Although Plácido Ramón de Torres claimed that he was born in Málaga in 1850, there is no evidence of his birth in that year and that place. In one of the documents generated by the German police, when he was arrested and put on trial during the 1880's, there was mentioned the town or village of Estepona, a coastal settlement in the province of Malaga, Southern Spain. The experience of the local archivist and a search of ecclesiastic documents in Estepona yielded a positive result, that he was probably born there, on an unknown summer day in 1847.

The only official document existing about Plácido's personal status is his inscription in the baptismal register of the Church of Santa María de los Remedios in Estepona. Astonishingly, this document does not reveal the day and place of his birth, nor the name of his parents. It shows, however, that the young boy it refers to, was a foundling, christened between September 9th and 28th 1847, the dates of the previous and the following register inscription.

Although we have no further documentary evidence, it seems obvious that the owner of the house at the central Estepona Square, Plaza



Map of Spain

de la Constitución, where the baby was found, Ramón Domingo de Torres, adopted him. He gave him his name and surname: Ramón Antonio Plácido de Torres. The location of the finding and another later document suggest that his adoptive father was well established and had no financial problems.

Some strange circumstances however arise from these facts and can be deduced from the document. The child got only one surname, the adoptive father's one, when Spaniards usually get two, their father's and mother's name. We could speculate that his wife was not very happy with the decision to adopt the abandoned child? Or even was there no wife? This would suppose a bizarre situation, difficult to imagine at that time: an adoption by an unmarried man.

A second thing sounds strange and is probably related to the first. When christened, the child received the father's name immediately, as if the adoption would have been already officially confirmed before his christening, strange circumstances that open the doors for speculations in various directions. Was his new father a very influential man in this small town? Had the boy already lived some months with his adoptive family? Had



Spanish coast from Gibraltar to Estepona

they waited to christen him until the official decision to concede the adoption was taken? So the child could have been born earlier that year or even the year before. However, my efforts to find out more failed.

From this point on we have a 20 year's gap without any direct information or document about our protagonist. Then he is located in Italy in 1871/72, now as Plácido Ramón de Torres, running a stationery shop in the harbour town of Livorno/Leghorn.



Picture of the Estepona coast 1850's (Museo Carmen Thyssen, Malaga)



View of Estepona 1950's



Estepona (Plaza de la Constitución)



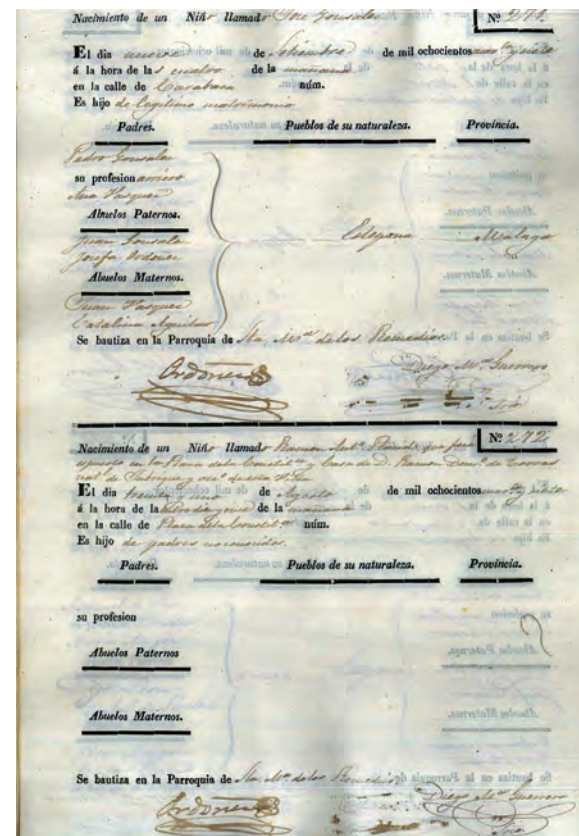
Map Italy



Map Tuscany with Florence and Leghorn/Livorno

So, sometime during the 1850's the family must have left Spain and moved to Italy. Plácido learned, spoke and wrote perfect Italian, as we can deduce from the articles he wrote, however he did not dominate his "mother tongue" in the same way, the Spanish vice-consul of Saint Louis stated in the 1890's.

Italy and Spain were both countries of emigration, so it is difficult to see the reasons why he and his family emigrated to Italy, a country that underwent huge own emigration of its own, mainly to Argentina. There is no mention of any kind of commercial relations with Italy, the only connection could have been a military campaign of a Spanish contingent in Italy in 1850/51, but this is pure speculation. As we don't know his adoptive father's profession either, the doors for speculation are open wide. And as we never



Extract baptismal register

hear anything about his family, we don't know whether his parents remained in Italy or returned to Spain, nor when they got back, if they did.

Why the change of his name? Changing the order of the names suggested to a Spaniard, that Ramón, not Plácido, could as well perfectly be his first surname, hiding his illegitimate origins. But why in Italy, when he never thought to go back to Spain? We'll probably never know for sure.

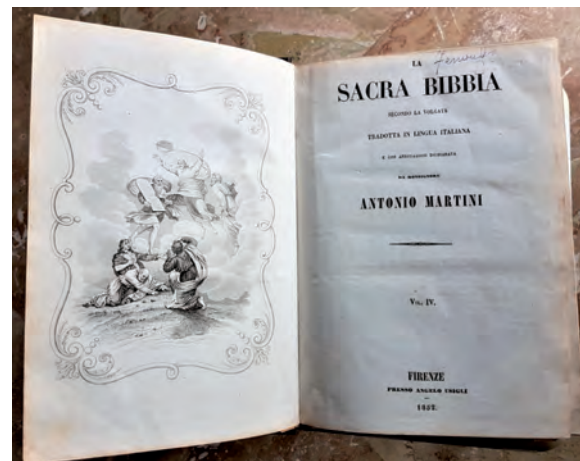
Torres and his Patron

We can't understand Plácido Ramón de Torres and his activities without the role his multifaceted patron played in his life. Elia Carlo Usigli (1812-1894) was the person who discovered his painting and engraving talent that was combined with a passion for stamp collecting.

E. C. Usigli was the son of Angelo Usigli who worked as an antiquarian and book editor in Florence, the world famous city in Tuscany that produced Michelangelo and the Medici. He probably assisted his father, but only in the early 1860's we find the first books published with his name as co-editor



Book, edited A. Usigli (1835)



The Bible, edited A. Usigli (1853)



Book about chess (1861)

or editor. His passion for chess brought him an international renown as the editor of one of the most widely read books on chess, analysing and commenting games of players of international standard. Together with his father and, after his father's death in 1864, alone, he edited nearly anything from Bible translations to educational writings about housekeeping. He donated many books to

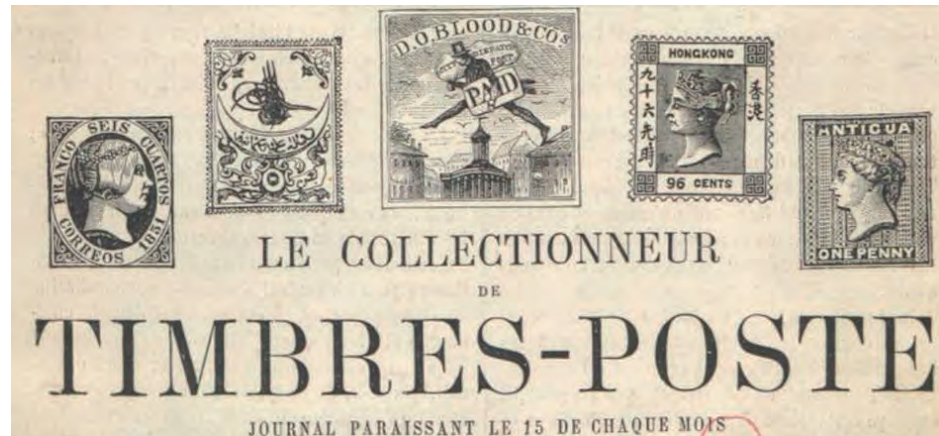
*Letter to Usigli*

public libraries on various occasions. He published or sponsored a scientific magazine and was later accepted as a member of the Florentine Freemasons' lodge.

But beside these and some more activities to which I will not refer, because it would lead us too far away from my main narrative, Usigli was one of the first Italian stamp dealers. During the early 1860's he met the

*1st Torres illustration published by Moens**Le Timbre-Poste*

young Torres in one of his visits to a printing works with which he conducted business as an editor. At the time Torres was an apprentice lithographer. Usigli was impressed by his talent and his interest in stamps. As stamp dealer he had in mind the first efforts of the young Belgian antiquarian and editor Jean-Baptiste Moens to publish a stamp catalogue of all already issued stamps together with lithographic sheets illustrating them, a completely new and

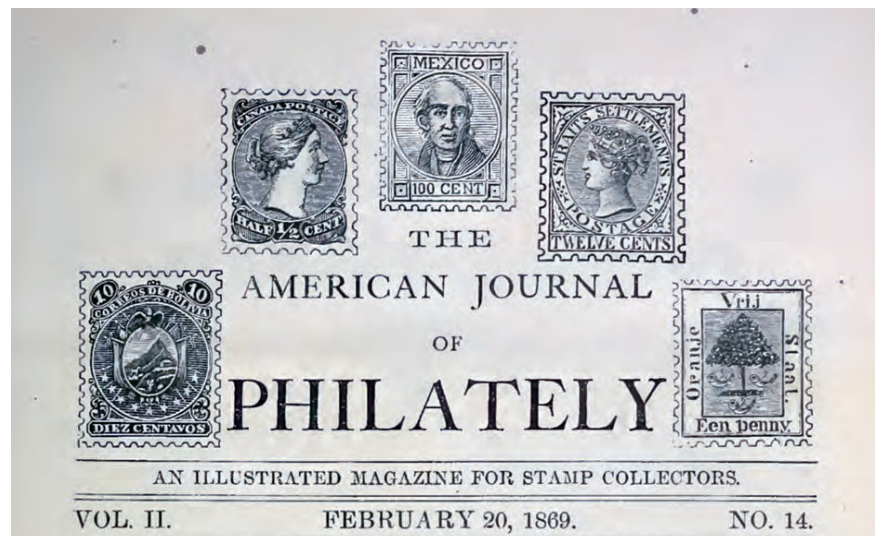


Torres-illustrations (front-page Le Collectionneur de Timbres-Poste)

promising idea. And Moens was about to apply this idea to his monthly philatelic magazine *Le Timbre Poste*, documenting the recently issued stamps.

Usigli's offer to supply regularly the required illustrations was obviously more attractive

for Moens than to continue the cooperation with the producers of the sheets that were completing his first catalogue, a job they had accepted because they had been temporarily unemployed. In 1863 appeared the first Torres illustrations in his magazine and when Moens



Torres-illustrations (front-page American Journal of Philately)



published all the sheets bound together as a part of the 1864 catalogue, ten of the recently issued stamps, that were not yet depicted in this work, illustrated by Torres, were included in the inner pages. The English translation of this work, made by the well-known British philatelist Charles Viner was printed half a year later and contained as well the newly issued stamps in the meantime.

Once established as Moens' supplier, Usigli could acquire more clients like the Parisian dealers Arthur Maury and Pierre Mahé and the London dealers Stafford Smith and Stanley Gibbons who used the illustrations as well for their magazines and later for their illustrated catalogues. The images even arrived at the other side of the ocean.

The Usigli-Torres Project

After some years of fruitful collaboration, Plácido felt the need to stand on his own two feet. Far from considering that this could be the end of the co-operation, Usigli took it as a chance to extend and diversify the stamp business and gave Plácido the opportunity to run a stationery shop in the Tuscany region's harbour town of Livorno/Leghorn. So he now enjoyed his own premises to continue his illustrating works and he started selling stamps without being a business competitor.

Usigli prepared a stamp album, the first Italian one and published it in 1872. It was not illustrated at all and contained a very idiosyncratic mix of contents. Only one of the four sections was reserved for stamps. The others were reserved for affixing crests and similar items in reserved spaces. It even contained a literary section: the tales of Monsieur Blague, a satirical description of the impressions of a Frenchman's voyage through Italy.

The crests and the other collectibles were, certainly, printed and sold by Usigli as well. The success of Usigli's crests was very limited, because they were sold all together as a whole package, whereas the since 1850



Frontpage Usigli-Album

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Index Usigli-Album

08. The Usigli-Torres Project

London sited Liebig's Extract Meat Company distributed their *Liebig-crests* together with their meat extracts all over Europe as a free gift. But even so in 1875 and 1880 a second and a third, now illustrated version was published.

But more promising was another idea, they started realizing. They planned to propose the introduction of municipal revenue stamps to a great number of Italian municipal administrations where such items were not yet in use. The stamps, showing the local coat of arms, would be furnished by them without any cost. The plan consisted in printing proofs, send them to the local authorities and offering free of charge production of those revenue stamps. The

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*Genuine Livorno/Leghorn
revenue-stamp samples*



Inner pages with stamps and crests



The Catania-elephant



Liebig crests

authors, however, wanted to reserve the right to commercialize those stamps on the philatelic market. This was a perfectly legal enterprise, a brilliant and promising idea with a minimum of financial risk.

Up to that date, only ten cities had made use of the possibility to issue revenue stamps. The Catania-elephant-issue would be a first attempt to check the market and to see how successful selling would be among the stamp

collectors. Plácido made a series of proofs in different colours and sent some samples to the municipal council of the Sicilian town of Catania. The vivid colours and the particular motive of the stamp, the municipal arms of the town with its elephant and the Goddess Hera, were undoubtedly quite attractive for collectors used to dull and pale colours and the boring effigies of their kings, queens or princes.

The Livorno Time and *La Posta Mondiale*



**Frontpage Torres' Italian
World catalogue**

Sometime between 1871 and 1872 Plácido opened his stationery shop at Maggi Street 6 in the harbour town of Livorno (Leghorn) with the help and support of his patron. The following weeks and months he started preparing his projects: a world stamp-catalogue as a complement to his patron's stamp album, a monthly philatelic review, a kind of philatelic meeting centre and the proofs of the first series of the planned revenue stamps for local administrations.

The catalogue was not yet illustrated except for the front-page. At the time most catalogues were little more than dealer price lists of stamps which the catalogue publishers offered and accompanied by descriptions of varying detail.



Upper part front-page *La Posta Mondiale*



Lithographic Sheet (*La Posta Mondiale*)

To make the book more attractive, beside some other stamp images, those of the three Livorno *segnatasse*, the city's administration's revenue stamps, were depicted at the centre of the front-page. The 1873 edition was a success and two more editions followed.



Torres-copy of a Customs' document

In July 1873 Placido started publishing the first issue of his philatelic magazine *La Posta Mondiale*, the first Italian revue dedicated to the new, each time more popular middle-class hobby of "timbrolology", as stamp collecting was still called at that time. On twelve pages Torres himself presented the recently issued stamps and also described the advantages of this new pastime in order to promote interest in this activity. The magazine served for advertising his catalogue and the sale of stamps. Each issue of the review had a lithographic sheet attached where some of the presented stamps were depicted with his own lithographs.

Plácido dedicated much space in his publication to all kind of fiscal and revenue stamps, which later became a marginal area in the world of philately collecting, although it has enjoyed a revival in recent years. More than half of the attached lithographs show those items.

In the first number of his review he announced, furthermore, the edition of a kind of almanac containing the coats of arms of all Italian cities and villages, and asking readers to cooperate in its composition furnishing images and samples. This would obviously be



Torres-ad in STAMP



Rear-page Torres-catalogue

All that glitters is not gold The Dark Side

Up to now I have presented only the bright side of Usigli's and Plácido's activities. But there is also a dark one. Both had entered the world of fake and forgery production. But while their later activities were partly discovered and described, all their common ventures until the middle of the 1870's remained more or less untold until now.

Plácido was introduced into this world by his patron, Usigli. When Plácido had finished one of his stamp illustrations, he produced some proofs to see whether the work was well executed or not. Usigli had the idea not to destroy those proofs, but to give them a use and put them together with other genuine ones into stamp packets, a practice Plácido

continued later when working on his own. This procedure converted those private copies into forgeries, but they provided a small additional income.

If such a practice could still be benevolently considered a peccadillo, their further actions have to be considered forgery, swindling and betrayal. They started producing imitations of the stamps of the old Italian States and later of a great number of the classic issues of countries world-wide, following the steps of the Spiro brothers who made or resold quite well executed imitations of the early stamp issues.¹ While the Hamburg brothers expressly identified and offered those stamps as "facsimiles", Plácido and Usigli sold them as supposedly genuine.

(1) The Spanish forger Plácido Ramón de Torres: his Catania and Livorno fakes and his Italian States forgeries, *fil-ITALIA*, vol. XLIV, n° 3, (whole number 177), Summer 2018, p. 107-118. *I falsi italiani di Usigli e Torres*. Parma, QuiFilatelia, 96, p. 16-20. *I falsi italiani di Usigli e Torres*. Toscana, QuiFilatelia, 97, p. 14-16.



Genuine



Torres-forgery



Genuine



Torres-forgery



Peruvian „Trencito“-
stamp, genuine



Torres-illustration



Actual Torres-
forgery



Buenos Aires
Steamship, genuine



Torres-illustration



Actual Torres-
forgery

Their activities had included as well the forging of all revenue stamps issued by the country's municipal administrations.² Since the middle of the 1860's some Italian regions allowed the creation of municipal revenue stamps. In 1873, ten of the most important Italian cities had issued this kind of stamps.

In order to put all those stamps on the market an infrastructure was needed. The count Cesare Bonasi, a decayed nobleman and friend of Usigli from the times of the Garibaldi uprising, joined the forger duo. Together with his wife Angela Candrini, they formed what I call the *Florentine gang*. The two newcomers organized selling trips through Italy and later throughout Central Europe, where they tried marketing the counterfeits.³

With the opening of his stationery shop Plácido's role had changed. He was now not only a mere employee who had to fulfil the orders of his patron, he could sell stamps on his own, was a member of the *Florentine gang* and could develop as well his own ideas and initiatives. One of his first ideas and steps, however, sowed the seeds of a signal failure that would shift his life and lead to until then unimaginable changes.



A SPANISH FORGER LAUNCHED THE FIRST ITALIAN STAMP MAGAZINE - page 107-118

Article about Torres' Italian forgeries

(2) *Gazette des Timbres*, n° 6, febr. 1874, p. 47-48; n° 7, mar 1874, p. 55-56.

(3) *Il conte Giulio Cesare Bonasi accusato di frode*, Qui Filatelia, sept. 2016, p. 5-9

Farewell to Italy

By November or December 1874 Plácido left Leghorn and Italy and went to Spain. He never returned to what had been his second or, in reality his first home. In the summer of 1874 he had fallen out with his patron. But what were the reasons for such a rift and such a serious decision?



The Catania-elephant stamps



Front-page Le Timbre Fiscal

The reason was the failure of the Catania elephant-project. Plácido was, obviously, the culprit. Following initially their common plan, he had not only designed the Catania municipal revenue stamps and printed the proofs for the local administration. He had also sent them to the local administration for approval in November or December 1873. But instead of waiting for the official confirmation of the Sicilian city's council, he had announced and offered them, mint and cancelled, in his review and the gang had even started selling them in Italy and all over Europe.

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LA POSTA MONDIALE

PREZZO CORRENTE

DELLE

MARCHE MUNICIPALI

in vendita presso P. R. DE TORRES

Via Magli. N. 2 LIVORNO

Firenze (Municipi)		Fino	Fino			Fino	Fino			
1	10 Cent. giallo	—	25	15	2	20 Cent. bianco	—	35	45	
2	20 » verde	—	35	45	3	25 » nero	—	45	55	
3	50 » rosso	1	—	25	4	50 » verde	1	—	25	
Firenze (fuori gabbie)						5	1 Lira turchino	1	50	10
						6	5 » bruno	6	50	1
1	1 Cent. bianco	—	10	—	05	Milano				
2	2 » giallo	—	10	—	05					
3	3 » turchino	—	15	—	05					
4	10 » rosso	—	25	—	15					
5	20 » verde	—	35	—	15					
6	50 » violetto	1	—	25	3	20 Cent. giallo	—	—	35	
Pisa						4	50 » turchino	—	—	
1	10 Cent. giallo	—	25	—	15	5	20 » rosso	—	40	
2	20 » verde	—	35	—	15	6	50 » verde (opposto)	—	50	
3	50 » rosso	1	—	25	3	1 Lira verde	—	—	50	
Livorno						Reggio (Emilia)				
1	20 Cent. violetto	—	35	—	15					
2	50 » turchino	—	70	—	25					
3	60 » rosa	—	90	—	30					
Piacenza										
1	20 Cent. bianco	—	35	—	45	1	5 Cent. rosa	—	15	05
2	50 » violetto	1	—	25	3	20 » » » (opposto)	—	35	—	15
3	60 » celeste	1	20	—	30	4	25 » » » (sotto)	1	—	50
Venezia						5	30 » rosa	—	50	20
1	10 Cent. giallo	—	—	25	—	6	50 » » »	—	—	25
2	20 » verde	—	—	35	—	7	75 » » »	—	—	40
3	50 » rosso	—	—	1	1	8	1 Lira » » »	1	50	—
Bologna						Catania				
1	10 Cent. giallo	—	—	25	—					
2	20 » verde	—	—	35	—					
3	50 » rosso	—	—	1	1					
Bologna										
1	5 Cent. rosso	—	15	—	05	1	5 Cent. verde	—	15	—
						2	10 » bianco	—	25	—
						3	20 » rosso	—	35	—
						4	25 » giallo	—	45	—
						5	50 » violetto	1	—	25
						6	1 Lira nero	1	50	—
						7	5 » turchino	6	50	1

NB. Tutte le Marche del Municipio di Milano, quanto quelle di Venezia non si possono ottenere che usate o perché tutte da documenti, oppure non applicate ai moduli, ma inviate dai Municipi stessi, col Bollo d'Ufficio. — Ciò serve di spiegazione per l'assenza del prezzo come nuovo, e per il prezzo di nuovo calcolato nella colonna usate.

Per coloro che desiderano le Marche Municipali a centinaia tanto nuove che usate possono accedere al sesto del 25 per cento, purché l'ordinazione arrivi a L. 50.

P. R. DE TORRES *Gerente Responsabile*

X Tipografia A. B. Zecchini X

Torres' revenue stamp price-list

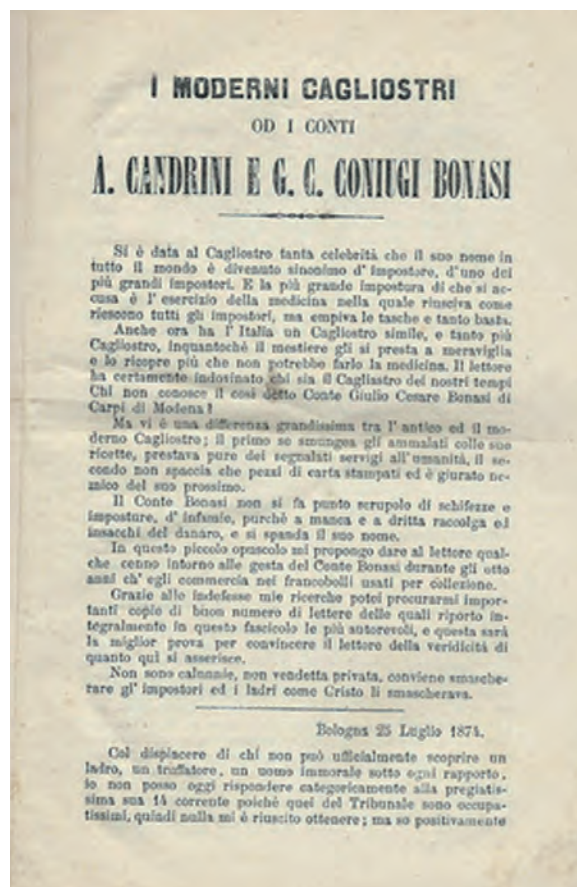


**Frontpage Bonasi-pamphlet
(represented Bonasi and his wife)**

In spring 1875 the French magazine *Le Timbre Fiscal* brought the truth to light: the Catania administration had not yet decided about Plácido's offer and finally would reject it. To save face, Plácido accepted that he had committed a *faux-pas* and offered publicly to re-purchase all the sold specimens. Usigli and mainly Bonasi had been selling those stamps as well, and at least the latter was not willing to follow Torres' steps and kept on offering and selling those stamps.

Obviously accused of lying, Plácido insisted in his review, that he was keeping his word, warning, however, that there was another dealer with a lot of items in stock, not mentioning any name. As it had been a good bargain, Bonasi was not disposed to follow the announced repurchase process.

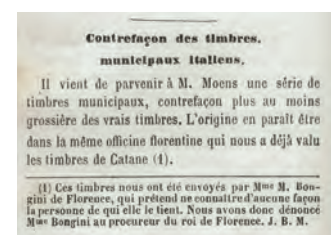
The conflict was set. But there was more at stake. Not only Torres' renown was compromised, the whole project was



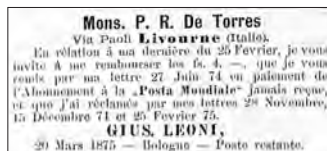
First page of the pamphlet



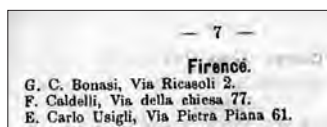
Bonasi at Amsterdam



**Discovering the Italian
revenue forgeries**



Torres is not yet at Leghorn



Stamp dealers Adress Book

discovered as a clever commercial action. And another project was tumbling as well. The selling of the forged revenue stamps of the 10 Italian cities that had issued those stamps before 1873. And, of course, even the perfectly legal project of what the Catania issue should have been the first step, was failing.

There was a third problem. There were the swindling affairs of Count Bonasi and his wife in quite a lot of European towns where they had tried to place their Italian forgeries, while Usigli and Torres had been staying on the sidelines.

Torres had to close his shop and to abandon the establishment. He moved temporarily to another location. Usigli's protection came to an end. The publication of the September-issue of *La Posta Mondiale* had to be cancelled as well. No reconciliation was at sight, Plácido even claimed there was a failed attempt on his life, planned by one or both of his partners in crime.



Forged Bologna-stamp



Genuine Bologna-stamp

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In a desperate attempt to redeem himself, Plácido and his now unemployed executive secretary Alberto Pini revealed the machinations of Bonasi and his wife by publishing and distributing an anonymous pamphlet.¹ This was no good idea either. So, Usigli and Bonasi finally turned against Plácido and opened together a stamp counter at a central Florentine Palace. Advertisements of their new common activities were placed in many European stamp magazines. Usigli replaced the closed *La Posta Mondiale* by a new one, his own magazine, *Il Raccoglitore*.

Inserate.

Italienisches Central-Briefmarken-Depot
via de Servi No. 2
Palazzo Naldini, Presso Piazza del duomo
FLORENZ.

Die an uns adressirten Gegenstände oder Briefe müssen frankirt und an folgende Adresse gesandt werden:
An die
Administration des Ital. Central-Briefmarken-Depot
via de Servi No. 2
Palazzo Naldini, Presso Piazza del duomo
FLORENZ.
Italien.

Bei uns erscheint:
IL RACCOGLITORE
Marken-Journal, zugleich ein Catalog aller Brief-, Telegraphen- und Stempel-Marken, Essais, Nuancen etc.
Preis für Italien 2 Fres. 80.
Preis für's Ausland 3 Fres. 50.

Usigli advertising his Centro Timbrofilo Italiano

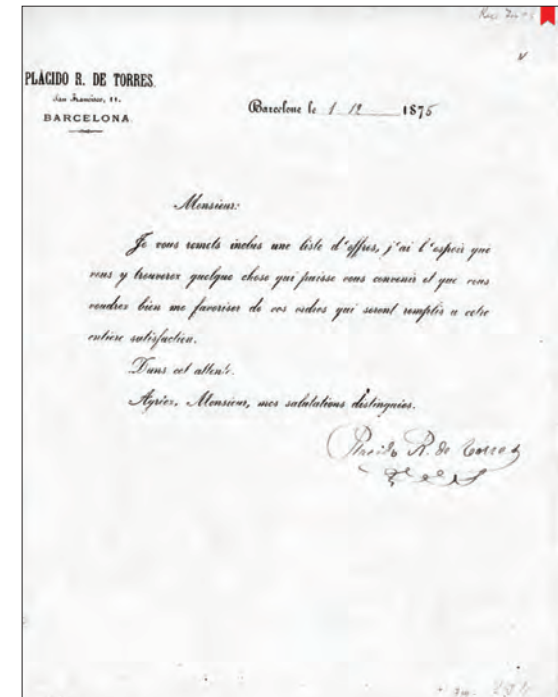
(1) Anonymous: *I moderni Cagliostro*, London 1874.

A New Beginning

Following the only short, very benevolent, filigreed and sometimes fantastical up to date biography existing, written nearly half a century ago by a Barcelona stamp dealer, Plácido came to Barcelona in December 1874, when the only stamp dealer in town, Vergés de Cardona, had closed down his business.¹

He established in Pino Street 6 his workshop and retail and wholesale store the *Centro General Timbroológico Español*. His biographer assures us that he used the tower of the 1875 Spanish issue's watermark as a kind of trademark, as an allusion to his name, Torre is Spanish for tower, but I have never seen it on any leaflet or document.

In an obviously failed attempt to maintain certain contacts and clients in Italy, he put



Prix-Courant pour Marchands. R. FERNANDEZ et Co. Barcelone-Espagne.			
Espagne.	Portugal.		
1860 51, 52, 53 et 54 de 6 cuartos, vertes bien. Fr.	1863 — 25 reis bleu. Fr.	15	—
Idem — 5 reales — — — — —	1865 — 25 — bleu — — — — —	7	50
1864 Timbres pour la correspondance officielle.	1867 — 25 — bleu — — — — —	3	50
1855 a 1870 de 1 real, 12 cuartos et 3 reales.	1862 — 25 — bleu — — — — —	2	50
Idem bien — — — — —	1868 et 67 — 25 — bleu — — — — —	2	50
1860 de 12 cuartos, jaunes — — — — —	1871 bien milieu pour 1000 gins — — — — —	10	—
1860 a 1868 de 10 cuartos, noirs — — — — —	1872 — 1/2 real — 100 — — — — —	5	50
1870-72-73 de 400 milles, et 1 peseta, noirs — — — — —	1873 — 1/2 real — 1000 — — — — —	25	—
Idem de 1,000 id. — — — — —	Grand assortiment pour 100 et 1000 de timbres de Colom- bia, Argentine, Malte, Agren, Montevideo, Brésil, etc. prix tres modérés.		
Idem de 2 onces et 1/2 — — — — —	Par espèce — Cash only — In constant relance.		
Télégraphes 1866-1867 de 10 milles, de couleurs bleues — — — — —	Les commandes sont servies de suite; si elles sont en avance de 10 francs seront expédiées franco.		
Idem de 40 id. — — — — —	L'en reçoit en paiement billets français, Marks et lettres de change sur Paris, Londres, Madrid et Barcelone.		
Idem de 100 id. — — — — —	Les lettres non affranchies sont refaites et les comman- des qui ne sont accompagnées de la valeur seront nées.		
1865 Exacts de timbres postes — — — — —	Tous les journaux de Timbrologie, qui vendent toutes cette annonce et envoyer au comptant à notre adresse seront payés par retour au timbre pour d'Espagne ou de billets de Banque Française.		
Timbres 1865 Diversité de correspondance — — — — —			
Idem — — — — —			
Don Carlos Catalogue de 18 marcs, vertes, rose — — — — —			
Id. Valence — — — — —			
Id. Navarre — 50 centimes, vertes — — — — —			
Id. — — — — —			
20,000 Timbres bien milles, de 1855 à 1870 — — — — —			
Idem 1870 a 1875, une bien milles — — — — —			
Philippines 1865 bien milles — — — — —			

Man abonnirt auf diese Zeitung bei jeder Postanstalt des In- und Auslandes.

Letter to K. H. Tiffany (USA)

(1) José Majó Tocabens, Andrés Majó Díaz: Plácido Ramón de Torres, in *Postas y Filatelia en Barcelona del siglo XIX*, Barcelona 1975, p. 98-107.

Torres price-list

He also placed advertisements in various European stamp magazines offering his services. And he sent his price-lists to selected and prominent stamp collectors world-wide. Their addresses could be found from lists of

He continued furnishing his former clients with his illustrations. A compact delivery of accumulated illustrations he had not been able to send during his last and difficult time in Italy, was published by Walter Scott, at this time editor of the *American Journal of Philately*. Among the delivered illustrations we can find the only existing image of Plácido, a self portrait that would later appear as well in some Stanley Gibbons catalogues, but certainly without any written reference to this very particular personal stamp.²

Denouncing a Torres forgery

Torres included in a German magazine's black list of forgers



(2) Early British Stamp Experts and Spanish forgeries, *The London Philatelist*, April 2017, vol. 126, 1444, p. 132-138.



*Fake(?) - cancel on
a genuine stamp*

When Plácido established his new store in Barcelona, the so-called *Carlist War*, a civil war for the succession to the throne, was still in full play. In Catalonia, as well as in other part of Spain, only rural areas were affected, not the greater cities or the capitals of the provinces. After the end of the insurgency in 1876, following his biographer, Plácido travelled to the villages where the insurgents had imposed their dominion during the war, in order to locate and buy the now absolutely worthless stamps the insurgency had printed and obliged the local administrations to buy in order to finance the costs of war. He

106. Centro general timbrófilo español. P. R. de Torres. Calle Nueva San Francisco, 11, Barcelona, y Veneras 5, Madrid.

Año 1876. Anuncios en cubiertas de paquetes de sellos, y en el membrete de las cartas.

107. R. Fernandez y Compañía. Barcelona.

Anuncio en la cubierta de la *Guía ilustrada del timbrófilo*: Bolonia, Agosto 1876.

Ad in an Italian stamp magazine

allegedly acquired more than 100.000 of those stamps and provided most of them with a cancel, because collectors at that time preferred used items. A peccadillo after his biographer.

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Part of a sheet of the Catalan Carlist stamp

The Joking Illustrator

During the 19th century and part of the 20th editors used almost exclusively black and white images to illustrate catalogues and magazines, because of the better contrast. The photographic reproductions were not really very neat, depending very much on the colours of the originals and a 100% true copy was not needed.

Plácido Ramón de Torres was one of the best and most prolific stamp illustrators worldwide. More than 5.500 were made for his best client, the Belgian editor and stamp dealer Jean-Baptiste Moens. The pictorial quality of the copies varies considerably. Most are quite good and allow observers to recognise the original perfectly, the main purpose of



RERC° instead of PERC°; "S" and "N" mirrored (La Posta Mondiale [LPM])



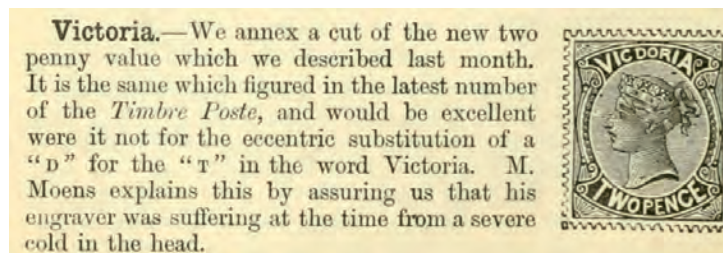
PARAGUAY instead of URUGUAY (LPM)



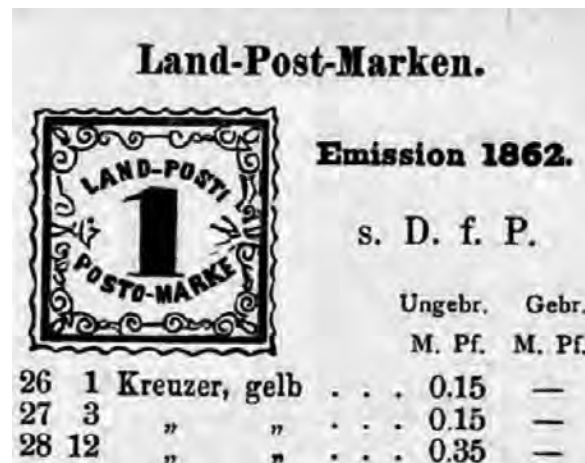
REPUBLIKA URUCUAV (illustration Torres Moschkau catalogue)



FRANCOSOLLO instead of "B" (LPM)



Discovered error (Stamp Collectors Magazine)



POSTI and POSTO instead of PORTO
(Friedl catalogue)

their production. There are other, badly achieved ones. This poor quality is probably due to the huge quantity of copies he had to deliver at peak periods. He even sold second or third quality illustrations, very ugly items, sometimes with horrible "errors".



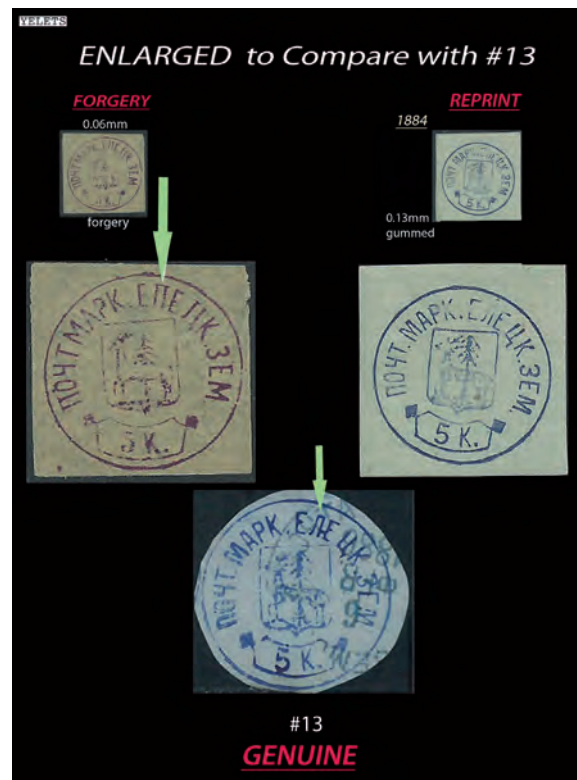
Weird inscription (left), correct at right

Beside the illustrations made for his European clients, there are also some that he specifically made for his American clients.¹ The first Australian catalogues use his illustrations as well.²

A certain number of his illustrations, as well those made for his own Italian magazine, show what we might consider errors. The "errors" that changed the design of the stamp, were and are more difficult to discover than the others that changed the inscription. The latter consisted in adding or omitting letters, hyphens, apostrophes or dots or simply changing or mirroring characters. About 20 of



BUTNOS AIPES
instead of BUENOS AIRES



(1) *The Early Scott Catalogues and Their Illustrations. Discovering a Spanish Forger's Footprints*, Collectors Club Philatelist, n° 96, Nov.-Dec. 2017, p. 205-210.
(2) *The Australian Footprints of a European Stamp Forger*, Australian Journal of Philately, #147, march 2019, p. 5-9. [republished] Stamp Lover, vol. III, n° 3, June 2019, p. 78-80.

those “errors” committed in the illustrations of Moens’ *Le Timbre Poste* are documented through letters to the editor published in the magazine. The editor admitted and excused them adducing different explanations.

But there are some hundreds of those “errors” that can not only be found in *Le Timbre Poste*, but also in the different editions of the Moens-catalogue. And, of course, as most European catalogues used Torres’ illustrations, they appear as well in many others.³

We might be induced to think that they are accidental errors that may have occurred. This is wide off the mark! They are deliberately introduced “errors” we could qualify as well as jokes or mocks. The French Yvert & Tellier catalogue that used until World War II illustrations of one or more unknown engravers, shows an incidence of less than 1% of such errors. The Torres illustrations in the magazines and catalogues show a 15-20% incidence and in those of the works about Russian local stamps (*zemstvo*) the percentage reaches even 50%.⁴

The *zemstvo*-inscriptions show, beside the name of the issuing town, up to a maximum



A laughing face instead
of Bourbon lillies



ПОЧТОВАЯ with
a mirrored “B”/ ПОЧТА
instead of ПОЧТИ

of ten different words they repeat once and again. Nobody would copy, for example, the repeatedly appearing Russian words for “post(al)” or “mail” [ПОЧТОВАЯ/ПОЧТА] 70 times correctly and 30 times erroneously even in stamps of the same issue. Is there any other explanation for this behaviour except Placido’s conscious and deliberate free and strong will?

In some “error”-illustrations the joke-character of the copy is more than evident. Changing three fleur-de-lis for a laughing face is not a slip.⁵

(3) *The old Stanley-Gibbons Catalogues – Handbooks to Detect Forgeries?* Stamp Lover, vol. 112, n° 1, p. 12-15, Febr. 2020.

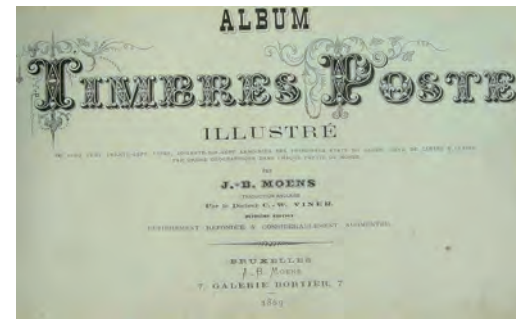
(4) Olga Frey, GLV: Moens, Torres und die Zemstvo-Marken, Deutsche Zeitschrift für Russland-Philatelie, 2017, Nr. 105, p. 19-26. Russian version: Моэнс, Торрес и Земство, Philatelia, Moscú, sept. 2017, p. 28-31 (1st part), Dec. 2017, p. 29-31, (2nd part).

(5) *The Stamp Fun Factory – Poking Fun on Editors and Collectors*, Stamp Lover, vol. 109, n° 6, Dec. 2017, p. 173-175.

CHAPTER 14

The Torres Stamp Album and Catalogue

One of Plácido's unquestionable achievements was the creation of the first really modern stamp album. Since the early 1860, the first stamp magazines and albums appeared on the philatelic market. Many of them consisted only of pages with covers printed on. Illustrations were limited to the opposite previous rear-page where the coat of arms or some geographical information



Lincoln stamp album 1890



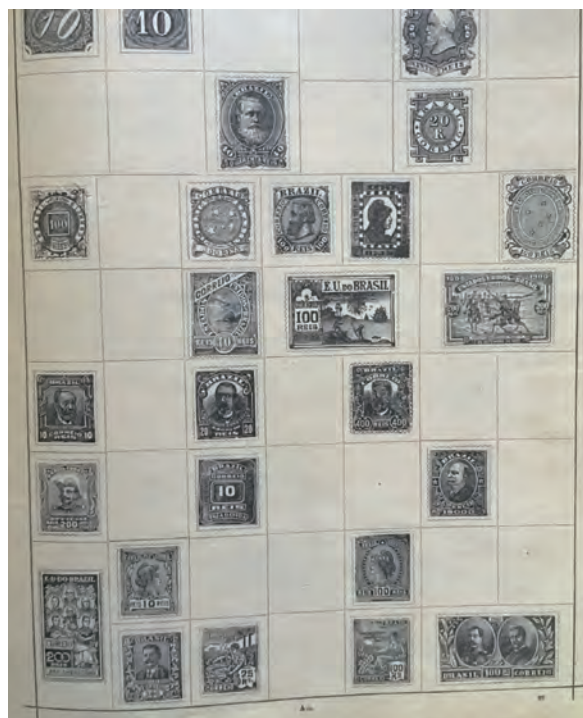
Moens' stamp album

14. The Torres Stamp Album and Catalogue

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about the corresponding country or region was given. Some added on the same rear-page a description of the issue that had to be affixed with gum arabic to the pages. Hinges were not yet invented. How many mint stamps were ruined by being “stuck down” is a matter for the imagination. Many albums of “stuck down” stamps were later broken up and the contents removed by soaking in boiling water, which also ruined stamps printed with fugitive ink or on chalk surfaced paper.

Then appeared the first illustrations at the beginning of the 1870's. But they were mostly located on the rear previous pages as well, in



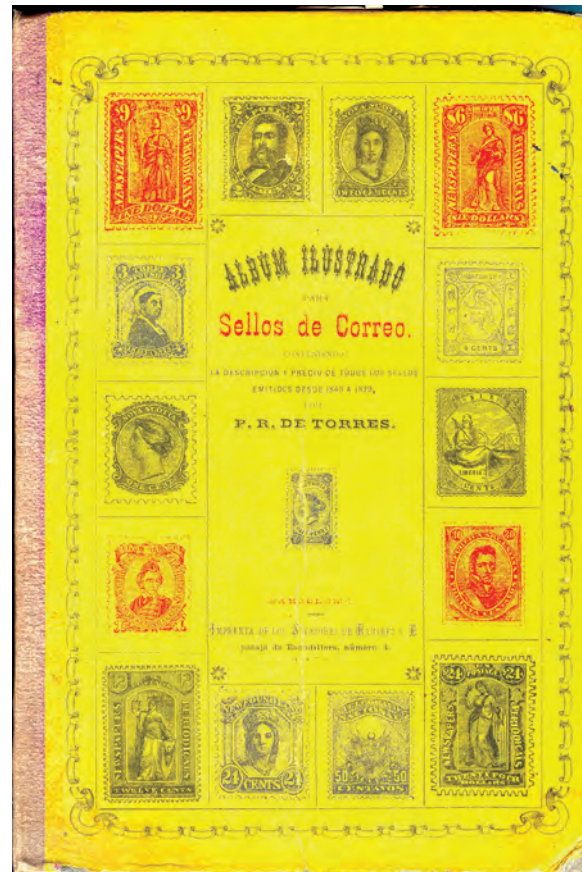
Schaubek stamp album 1924



Maury stamp album 1920

very few occasions at the margins of the page alongside the spaces. There were however not enough places for all the stamps, a situation you find even in some albums 50 years later, when some stamps were illustrated in their own spaces.

Plácido's *Álbum Ilustrado para sellos de correo* is a small lightweight and handy book. On the yellow front- and rear-pages, bound together with a red spine, you see 15 and on rear page 13 multi-coloured illustrations of stamps from all over the world. On the back the illustrations surround various advertisements for stamp sets or packets. A really attractive presentation.



Front-page Torres album

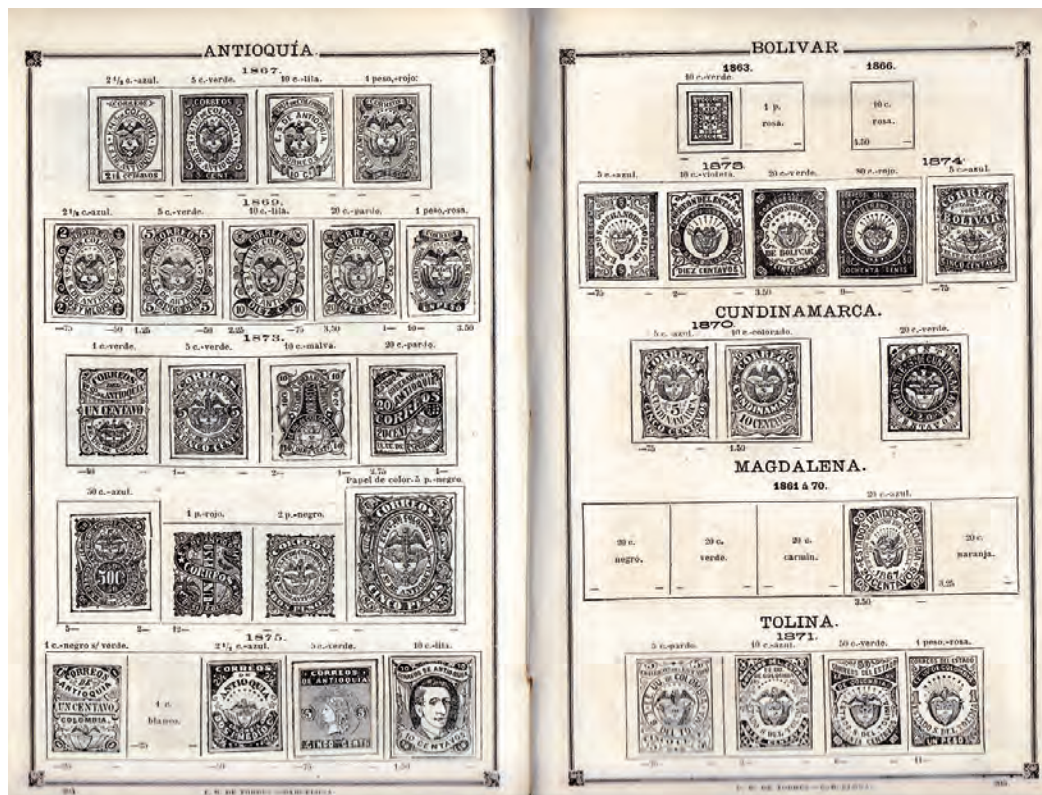
Of its 260 inner pages, 252 are dedicated for the stamps. The others served for an introduction to philately, an index and, ironically enough, words of warning against stamp forgeries. Each page has five to six rows of spaces. For each value of the series its own space was reserved and marked with the description of the value and the colour. The lower part shows the current price of the stamp, mint and used, a fact that makes of the album at a time a price list or catalogue.

Each type of a series was illustrated in one of the spaces. In this instance the descriptions were collocated above and below the case. We find altogether 1.242 illustrations on the inner pages. The order of the countries is by continents, Europe and Spain first. There were also empty pages without spaces for future issues.

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Inner page (Spain)



Inner page (Colombia)



Rear-page Torres album

Why did this album remain nearly unknown among the philatelists? The main reason is, that all descriptions were only in Spanish. So, the opportunities to sell it on the European market were very limited. The only

biographical notes about Plácido, the ones I referred to previously, describe the "great success" of the publication in Latin America. There is however no evidence for this and no second edition is documented.

The “minor forgeries”

When, at the beginning of my research, I acquired a Torres-Album at an antiquarian bookshop, I was surprised about the great number of illustrations it contained. The only old catalogue where I could find a similar number of images was the 1877 Moens catalogue. All other contemporary catalogues show far fewer figures.

The first sample I found among the fake-collection of my initially mentioned friend Don Alfredo (*see introduction*) was a coloured forged sample of the ½ Real Valencia-stamp issued in 1874 during the *Carlist War* in the *Maestrazgo*-region with a revealing “error”.

After this quick and early finding, it took me months of research on the internet to get further



Vertical pair
Valencia-stamps



Torres' illustration
“VALENC_A”



St. Vincent stamp
(genuine)



Torres' illustration



Actual Torres
forgery



Actual Torres
forgery



Japan “Cherry
Blossom” genuine



Torres' illustration



Actual Torres
forgery

15. The “minor forgeries”

60



Hawaii genuine



*Torres' illustration
(Gray catalogue)*



*Actual Torres
forgery*



Servia genuine



Torres' illustration



*Actual Torres
forgery*



Bremen genuine



Torres' illustration



*Actual Torres
forgery*



*Defaced printing
plate Gold Coast
(mirrored photo)*



Torres' illustration

evidence that allowed to verify my suspicion, that some of the illustrations, if not all of them, exist or at least had existed as actual forgeries. Now that I've found about 300 samples of those fakes, most in colour, I now regard the Torres album, as well as all the catalogues of his clients, as handbooks to detect his “minor forgeries”.¹

Those fakes were originally copies, sometimes simple leftovers or proofs, made by Plácido in order to see whether the illustrations were well executed or not. Instead of throwing them away as garbage, they were put into stamp packets, which provided a small extra income.

Once I discovered the entire scope of Plácido's activities, I call those fakes his “minor forgeries”,

because they represent mostly low and single values of the newly issued series. As such they were usually cheap forgeries, not considered worth being reported and documented. They are really easy to detect, because their identical illustrations can be found in Torres' 1879 album-catalogue, the 1877 and later Moens catalogues, and in Stanley Gibbons and Maury.

Not all errors, jokes or mocks we find in his illustrations can be found as well as real existing fakes. He probably improved and corrected the stones in some occasions.

The “minor forgeries” produced from 1879 onwards, after the publication of his Album can be found in later catalogues.

(1) Nigel Gooding, GLV: *The first modern stamp album – a handbook for detecting fakes and forgeries. The case of the Philippine stamps*. Philippine Philatelic Journal, First Quarter 2019, p. 5-13 (1st part), Second Quarter 2019, p. 5-13 (2nd part). How an Old Album Threw New Light on 19th century Forgeries, *Stamp Lover*, vol. 108, n. 6, Dec. 2016, p. 174-176. *The old Stanley-Gibbons Catalogues – Handbooks to Detect Forgeries?* *Stamp Lover*, vol. 112, n° 1, p. 12-15, Febr. 2020.

Phantasies and Forgeries

Copyists and forgers have normally two things in common: they try to imitate the original the best they can, as true as possible. That does not exclude that they can sneak in minute signs, invisible to the naked eye, that prove their identity. Plácido however is the exception to the rule. He did not place such small signs, but deliberately included sometimes quite visible errors. Some of those errors were even detectable by someone who did not know the original.

The errors and jokes we find in his illustrations, described in the previous chapters, were not worth mentioning, had they not been used to produce real and actual stamps. And they, indeed, have. We can find some of those errors as well in the “private copies”, “minor

forgeries” or “left overs”, that survived collectors purging their “album weeds”.

Plácido imitated and created stamps on three levels. They are very difficult to



Andorra-joke fake on postal stationery



*Torres_illustration
(Le Timbre-Poste
[TP])*



*Actual Torres
forgery*



*Torres-illustration
(Moens catalogue)*



*Torres-illustration
(TP)*



*Moens' Andorra-
joke*



Brunei, Gibraltar, Antigua, St. Lucia-phantasy/bogus-stamps



*BUEÑOS AIRES
with label in English*

*"Sydney view"
with European
medieval town*

Torres-illustration

Actual forgery

*Haiti phantasy
original*

*Haiti phantasy Torres
(cap to the right)*

differentiate neatly. On the first level we find the "minor forgeries", mentioned previously. On the second level there are creations based on actually existing stamps or on phantasy stamps. Some are indeed phantasy stamps, created by himself or by his client Moens. The third level are the "major forgeries", imitations of entire sets and individual rare stamps of the classic issues.

The so-called "Pomare"-stamp is one of the first, if not the very first phantasy stamp we know. The black original, made from a wood-block, was originally sold in Brussels and Torres later made a copy for the Moens-

catalogue, the only one which published an illustration of this "essay spéculatif". His "minor forgeries" of this stamp exist in various colours.¹ This implicated both men in this strange "affaire".

The "Moresnet"-stamp is another product in the same style, allegedly issued by the municipal administration of a strip of "No Man's Land" situated between Belgium and Germany. The idea for this April Fool's joke stemmed obviously from Moens.

The "Capacua"-stamp, another of Moens' jokes, was thought to fool the Leipzig Senf brothers, but they did not fall for the joke. So

(1) Die fragliche Pomare-Briefmarke, Magazin für Briefmarken Sammler, Juli 1864, S. 21. 2 .The Moens-Torres Fantasy Stamps and Forgeries, Stamp Lover, vol. 109, n. 2, April 2017, p. 52-53 (part I); n. 3, June 2017, p. 77-79 (part II); n. 4, August, p. 109-111 (part III). The Stamp Fun Factory – Poking Fun on Editors and Collectors, Stamp Lover, vol. 109, n° 6, Dec. 2017, p. 173-175. Unsinn, Scherze, Phantasie. Von den Eigenheiten eines Illustrators und Fälschers. Michel-Rundschau [MiR], 6/2019 S. S. 19-25, 71-74. The Very First Andorran Stamp Was Made in Germany, ValiraTorrent, n° 70, pág. 18-19.



*Eagle with a hammer
(Torres forgery)*



*Torres' Buenos Aires steamship-forgeries
(ciphers instead of characters)*

another, much more sophisticated operation was initiated by Moens. Plácido created a kind of mock-stamp and even post-cards with a "new" Andorra-stamp printed on it. This time the German dealers fell into the trap and published an illustration of the supposed first stamp of the tiny country, that had not issued any own stamp before. Only someone with knowledge of the Spanish language could decipher the joke included in the inscription: "MOSTAZA" means mustard (= SENF in German), "HS" is an abbreviation for brothers. In the following issue of their magazine the meant Senf brothers saw themselves forced to admit having been fooled.²

The colonial style key-type issues of a lot of the British West Indies territories was also forged by Plácido. Applying the same technique of the genuine, he used his minor forgery of Antigua to produce not only a Gibraltar forgery, but also bogus issues of Ireland and Brunei, two countries that did not issue stamps until years later.

One of the strangest creations is his "Spanglish" steamship-bogus stamp of Buenos Aires. He did not only mirror the "N" of "BUENOS AIRES", but included an English "FOUR" instead of "CUATRO" in the value inscription.

The most beautiful creation in this context is one of his Australian forgeries of the so-called Sydney views. The very poor landscape of the genuine stamp with three badly drawn buildings on a hill over a small harbour is replaced by the panoramic view of a flourishing medieval European riverside town that eliminates as well the three poorly represented persons on the mole in the foreground.

Another funny action was the forgery of a Haiti phantasy stamp. In this case he included a joke. The peak of the cap of Liberty points instead left to right, while on the original it faced right to left.

Finally, I will reveal an idea which was entirely a Torres creation, a bogus or phantasy stamp of the US Confederate States issues.

(2) *El primerísimo sello andorrano – made in Belgium?*, Eco Filatélico 1241, junio 2015.

The Forged Cancellations

The errors, jokes and inventions we have been speaking about, are not limited to the illustrations of stamp images, the corresponding “minor forgeries” and other specimens difficult to classify, but also appear in actual existing forged hand-struck cancellations and their illustrations.

A sudden suspicion, that Torres could have been linked to François Fournier and some of his Spanish facsimiles led me to have a look at what is left of his work. The Swiss forger had started his philatelic career in 1904/05, when he bought the stock of bankrupt Henri Mercier, another forger specialised in forgeries of Swiss issues.

The work of Fournier is partly documented in the *Album de Facsimiles*, published by the Geneva Philatelic Association who tried to caution collectors against the fakes Fournier and his successor Charles Hirschburger had

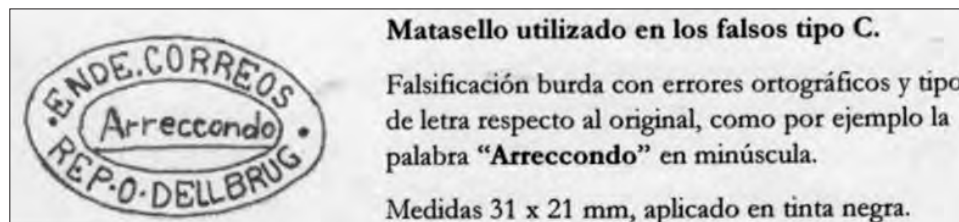


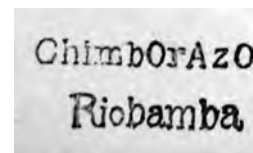
Illustration forged handstamp “Arrecondo”



Forged “Arrecondo”



*Similar forged
“ARREGONDO”-cancel*



*Handstruck “Chimbo-
razO” fake-cancel*



*“AD...” and the botched
following lettering*



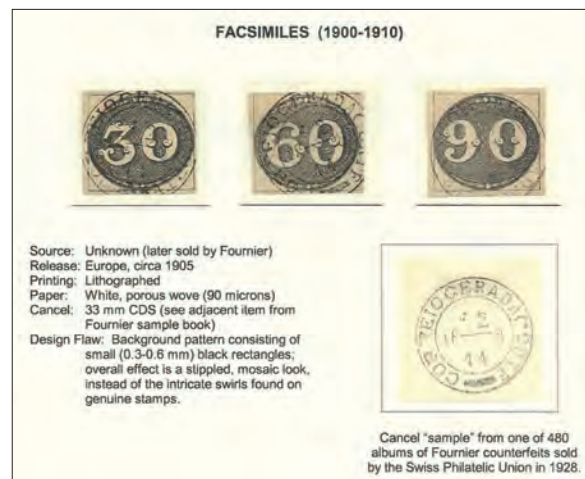
*“QUITO”
instead of “QUITO”*



*“MONIERREY”: “I”
instead of “T”*

17. The Forged Cancels

66



Omitted "L" in "GERAL"

put on the philatelic market. Two versions of this book are available at the Swiss Postal Museum at Bern, conserved together with other material such as printing plates and a lot of other devices for forging stamps from his workshop. The Museum officials kindly sent me a series of scans of some pages. When I analysed them, I got frustrated, because the original Fournier affixed to the album pages did not reveal anything to me I had expected to find. But some strange cancels Fournier had applied to his products finally caught my eyes. Some seemed to be unfinished, half-cancels and some seemed even to show spellingerrors.



"BRAL" instead of "GRAL"



"DIOBRE" instead of "DICBRE"



In the middle: phantasy-cancel with "SS"



"Half-cancel" "CHIVIL..." instead of "CHIVILCOY"



"Half-cancel" without initial "C"

ARAGAS



Phantasy/fake-cancel: mirrored "N" in "VALENCIA"



Moens' Illustration Torres-joke



Fournier cliché



**Bloque de cuatro
with fake-cancel**

A closer examination revealed that those orthographic errors only could be found in cancels with inscriptions in Spanish or Portuguese. So, the probability was high, that Torres – who else? – had something to do with those strange findings.¹ This was undoubtedly an interesting suspicion or supposition, but not a single shred of further evidence on any of those scanned pages that would have confirmed it could be found. The suspicion was based on the fact that I had found among the illustrations of the Moens catalogue a number of errors and jokes in cancels. And more than a century ago, the book had already denounced a fake-cancellation on stamps of the in Spain, ignoring, however, its typical Torres-joke mirroring in this case the “N” of “VALENCIA”.

Only when I had a closer look at two further scans, uninteresting at first sight,

I became aware that among the Fournier-clichés of stamps that he had yet to produce not yet available stamps there were some that undoubtedly bore the trademarks of Torres. Various clichés of the Swiss (private) hotel-post stamps, known from the illustrations of his *Album*, and an American Newspaper stamp appeared. The latter and one of the hotel-stamps even showed one error each, a mirrored “R” in the first and instead of “PERIODICALS” we clearly read “PEROIDICAIS” in the second case. So, the collaboration between the Spaniard and the Swiss was evident.

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(1) Un fallo lo tiene cualquiera. Siguiendo las huellas de un falsificador, Chile Filatélico, n° 299, tomo XXIX, mayo-octubre 2019, p. 39-43. Fehlerhafte Inschriften. Ein Künstler und ein Fälscher als Geschäftspartner. François Fournier und Plácido Ramón de Torres, DBZ 7/2019, p. 22-24, 8/2019, 20-22. Las „bromas españolas“ de Plácido Ramón de Torres, Eco Filatélico, febrero 2019, p. 28-30. Los barquitos de Plácido Ramón de Torres, Revista F.A.E.F. (Órgano de la Federación Argentina de Entidades Filatélicas), n° 147, ago. 2019, p. 19-34.



Illustration Torres



Illustration Torres



**Fournier cliché:
“PERIODICAIS”, “I”
instead of “L”**



Fournier cliché

The “major forgeries”



Genuine ARREDONDO-cancel

With all the knowledge accumulated about the working practices and the particular idiosyncrasies Plácido had shown, I was now prepared to analyse the first specimens of his forgeries out of the pool of fakes that had not been attributed to anybody in the past. The first time I could bring together his “extravagancies”, notably copying and producing fake-cancels, was with the Buenos Aires steamship fakes. The already presented “**FOUR- BUENOS AIRES**”-stamp could be identified by the presence of its applied fake-cancel (ARREGONDO), the mirrored “N” and the English inscription. It was then the cancel that led further. It was applied as well on other forgeries. The association with other cancels, applied on the same type of forgery was conclusive.



Different Torres cancels (courtesy Kenneth Pugh)



"ARREGONDO"/"ARRECONDO" fake-cancel in different versions

18. The “major forgeries”

70



CORREOS; 7. 1. 60 [later retouched 66]; II – III" fake-cancel on stamps of different countries

The Australian Sidney-view-forgeries opened the door wide for the detection of other cancels he used. And it will surely not surprise the reader that his cancellations were applied on forgeries world-wide.

The so-called VF-cancel is a curious and enigmatic specimen. It consists of two words in the upper part of a circle, two centred

big characters and a fat dot at the bottom. Instead of words, I'd better say sequence of undecipherable or meaningless characters or signs. It's certainly, the only fake-cancel of such a kind I've ever seen. Only the central "VF" could make sense and signify V[sigli] F[Firenze], the abbreviation of Torres' Italian patron. He used this cancel only during his time in Italy. But this is a speculation.



VF-fake-cancel ["1st word illegible, DOCIWL"; (central) VF with fat dot below] on stamps of different countries



Cancel: „K. K. ZEITUNGS
EXPEDITION“

While the VF-cancel could be universally employed, despite its bizarre wording and has been found on stamps of more than 30 countries, some of the other of his most typical cancels show an out-of-territory-application. That means, that their inscription theoretically allowed only a limited correct use.

The “ARREGONDO”-cancel was a fake of Uruguayan “origin”, taken from an “ARREDONDO”-cancel, but it was applied on stamps of Argentina, Mexico and even European countries like Oldenburg, one of the old German states. I’ve seen four different fake-versions with up to six “errors” each, depending on the way you make the counting.

The “CORREOS”-cancel, more versatile, because it did not indicate nor a country nor a town, was applied as well on stamps of non-Spanish speaking countries.

And the “K. K. ZEITUNGSEXPEDITION”-cancel, logically restricted to Austria and Germany, if “correctly applied”, can be found as well on stamps of India.

In the case of the other cancels matters are a bit more complicated. Some of them had



Strange “horseshoe”-cancel

been used by different forgers in versions difficult to distinguish one from another. And as in most cases the stamps don’t show an entire cancel, so identification is difficult.

In the case of the Costa Rica forgeries another curious specimen allowed the attribution to Torres. The quite strange and “changing” horseshoe-cancel pointed to Torres. But only a bogus stamp with two inscription errors, that made the issue “super-complete”, confirmed his authorship.¹

I’m sure that the publication of this book will contribute to the discovery of more of his fakes cancels. Perhaps it will prompt readers to carry out their own researches.

(1) *Algunos falsos “centro-americanos” de Plácido Ramón de Torres. Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala.* Timbre 39, set.-dic 2019, p. 23-33.

Torres and Some Special Contacts



Partial-cancel Torres
[ZWICKAU missing final U,
circle incomplete] commonly
attributed to Goldner

According to Majó, the already mentioned, but not very reliable first biographer, Plácido was in contact with two prominent German dealers and forgers: David Kohn in Berlin and Julius Goldner in Hamburg. The first had been in close contact with Usigli and Bonasi, but this is only very feeble circumstantial evidence of a link with Plácido.¹ As far as Goldner is concerned, there is a stronger evidence that suggests that the German could have sold a forgery, probably made and furnished by Plácido, applying his own cancels. The sample of this forgery shown in the *Spud Papers*, a compilation of articles written by three British philatelic experts in order to warn against forgeries, shows a partial or “mutilated” cancel with an erroneous inscription. That was a hallmark of Plácido!

Torres’ relation with the Leipzig Senf brothers, who became later the most important German stamp dealers, came probably through the London dealer Henry Werninck who had tutored in some way their first steps in the world of philatelic business and publications. The editor in chief of the magazine they published, the *Illustrated Stamp Journal* (*Illustriertes Briefmarken Journal*) was the well-known philatelist Dr. Alfred Moschkau



Front-page IBJ-stamp-magazine

who had previously published his own magazine. The stamp magazine with its two issues per month shows a lot of illustrations

(1) Tyler, *Philatelic Forgers*, p. 50-51.



Two mirrored « N » and FUERTA instead of FUERTE

with “errors”. So, the origin of those items is not difficult to guess.²

An each time increasing number of errors and fun-illustrations can be detected in the different editions of the illustrated catalogues Mr. Moschkau started publishing in 1875. In many cases the illustrations are, however, different from those we find in the Moens or Stanley Gibbons catalogues. Nearly all the



Senf brothers Kunstbeilage



First page catalogue illustrations

illustrations of the Spanish stamps from 1850 to 1855 show known and described forgeries, although Plácido has not (yet) been identified in all cases as their author.

During the early 1880's the Senf brothers had a new and successful marketing idea. They delivered with each number of their magazine an additional sheet with one, later two and sometimes even three stamps affixed and more or less extensive explanations about them. The samples were described as “facsimiles” which



Cancel covering « Falsch »



LEV instead of LEY and a mirrored 2 in BOLIVIA

(2) Die falschen Fuffziger des Dr. Moschkau. Das kommt mir Spanisch vor, Deutsche Briefmarkenzeitung [DBZ] 2017, Nr. 3, p. 20-23 (Teil 1); Nr. 4, p. 26-27 (Teil 2).

MABINO *instead of* MARINO

they had printed, but sometimes there was a genuine specimen affixed as well. They used to bear the overprint "FALSCH", "FACSIMILE" or "SPECIMEN". This was more or less visible. The idea was to rebut any charges that they were forgeries intended to deceive collectors. In some cases, notably the "Lovely Ladies", USA Newspaper stamps, the words "Falsch" and "Facsimile" were incorporated into the design. Torres had produced the designs of those "Kunstbeigaben" and of some of them he made, as usually, his private copies or minor forgeries.³ That's why some samples exist without the overprint. Other forgers, maybe he as well, applied cancels the way they occulted the overprint.



Senf brothers Kunstbeilage

(3) *Die Senf'schen Kunst-Beigaben und ihr Autor*, DBZ, Nr. 18, August 2018, S. 12-16.

(4) *Sigmund Friedl und sein Katalog. Orthographische Fehler. Blick in ein Schiessbudenfiguren-Kabinett*, DBZ, Nr. 8, März 2018, S. 18-22.



Front-page catalogue S. Friedl

Another strange collaboration was that with the Austrian stamp dealer Sigmund Friedl.⁴ He presented in 1877 his first stamp catalogue. The illustrations used are awful items, the ugliest I've ever seen in a European catalogue. Ironically, they turned out to be made by Plácido. The only explanation I could find for such a strange fact is, that Friedl had initially not enough money to purchase the current Torres-illustrations. So Friedl contented himself with third quality stuff or maybe quickly made drafts. In a second, incomplete catalogue edition, that should have covered the whole world, he eliminated the worst examples and replaced them with the then current ones.

Torres and the Carlist War Stamps I

That Torres had a special relationship with some of the stamps issued by the insurgency during the Carlist War (1872-1876) had already been reported by his first “biographer”. Jean-Baptiste Moens, the Brussels stamp dealer and editor, one of the best clients of Plácido, also showed a very keen interest in those stamps.¹ And it was Plácido’s “minor forgery” of one of those stamps, that made me take a closer look at the information published by the Belgian about those stamps in his magazine. In the course of more than half a dozen articles in the philatelic press I tried to solve some of the riddles related to the Valencia Carlist issues.²

The first contact Plácido had with one of those stamps was still during his period in

Italy. He described the first of those stamps in his review and with an illustration. This was the only sample out of his lithographic sheets for *La Posta Mondiale* which I could categorise as a “minor forgery”.

Beginning with the last 1874-issue of his magazine Moens dedicates more space to these unofficial issues than to all other regular ones. It’s not only his fixation on the Valencia issue with its particular “double-stamp”, but also the strange images published to illustrate those items that astonishes. Most of them represent known forgeries. However, comparing his detailed description of those stamps with the originals and even with the known forgeries, we can’t find them represented.

(1) *L'étrange amour de M. Moens vers les timbre-postes carlistes*, Le Philatéliste Belge, avril 2017; <http://wwwphilatelie-truchtersheim.e-monsite.com/album-photos/catalogues-gratuits-en-ligne/l-etrange-amour-de-m-moens-pour-les-timbres-poste-carlistes/> [04.06.2020; 19.25].

(2) *The Carlist Fakes, Moens and Torres, Fakes, Forgeries, Experts*, n° 19, May 2017, p. 69-84. *Los sellos carlistas de la región del Norte y sus falsos de Plácido Ramón de Torres*, Catálogo EXFILNA 2017, p. 30-40. <http://www.eseba-fevasofi.org/Paginas/EXFILNA%202017/LIBRO%20Exfilna%202017.pdf>. *El correo carlista en el Maestrazgo (1872-1875)*, Millars, espai i historia, 2017, núm.43, p. 245-268.



**First Carlist Stamp
(Basque Country
and Navarra)**



**Torres-illustration
in his magazine**



**Torres-forgery (col.
Vinkenborg)**



**Torres-illustration
for Moens**



Torres-forgery



**Supposedly
genuine sample
(Spud-Papers)**



**Counterfeit
(Spud-Papers)**



1/2 Real turns out to be a 4/2 Real



**Second Valencia-
illustration (Torres)**



**Supposed genuine vertical
pair of the Valencia-issue**

Even the story told about a supposed second issue of the Valencia stamps is a fanciful tale and the comparison of actual existing samples, corresponding to the descriptions, shows that Moens had described in this case two known and generally recognised forgeries. An accidental defect on one of them made the "1" of its value inscription appear like a "4" and this gave its unknown creator the idea to produce whole sheets of this supposed 4/2-reales error.³

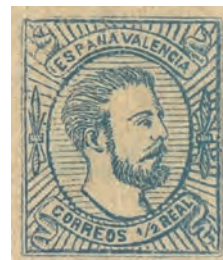
Only in the *Album de planches*, the second of the three volumes of Moens' 1892 catalogue, appears the first hand-drawn illustration of our Valencia stamps, for the first time in their real condition as slightly different double-stamps, that correspond to the description of the real existing items, but without any note or clarification. Taking in account that Plácido was the author of Moens' illustrations, the authorship of most, if not of all those fakes is evident.

Moens is also the only editor that dedicates space to a discussion about the existence of a stamp that never had existed, the $\frac{3}{4}$ cuartos of Valencia.⁴

Among the documents commandeered after the fall of the last Carlist stronghold in the Valencia/Maestrazgo area in July 1875, appeared an until then never seen or documented hand-



**Another Torres-illustration
(Moens: Album des planches)**



**Actual forgery
(Torres)**

(3) ¿Falso filatélico o falso postal? Eco Filatélico, febr. 2016.

(4) José María Sempere: *El 3 cuartos carlista de Cataluña. Un sello fantasma*. El Eco Filatélico, dic. 2012, ene 2013.

stamp for postal use. José Bacener, commander of the troops on site, himself a philatelist and later member of the *French Philatelic Society* sent a sample of the cancellation to Moens. Torres made an illustration, but omitted two important details of the design.

From this defective illustration he made, as usual, "minor forgeries" that started circulating among dealers in Spain. Presented to Moens one of them by a Madrid stamp dealer, they were the object of discussion in his magazine for some months. When Moens finally became aware of the "forgotten" details in the illustration in his revue and the coincidence of the wrongly copied cancel with the actual samples, he consequently declared all adhesive stamp versions or imitations of this hand-struck stamp a fake.⁵ Until the present date, never has appeared a sample with the design as reported by Barcener to Moens.

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Torres-illustration
(Moens catalogue)



Torres-illustration
(López catalogue)



Correctly copied
illustration



Article about this phantom-stamp



Fake gallery

(5) JBM: Die 3 Cuartos-Marke von Don Carlos verurteilt sich selbst, Berliner Illustrierte Briefmarken Zeitung, I, nr. 11 (15.8.1879), p. 85-86.

Torres and the Carlist War Stamps II



Guezala-book: 6 Cuartos

Confusion about the Valencia stamps still continues in philatelic circles. The first Spanish stamp catalogues of the 1890's reflected the confusion of the time, because they showed images of the stamps, based on Torres' illustrations, which were in fact images of the forgeries discussed in the previous chapter.¹ New and more disturbing elements were added in the 1930's and the confusion continues as an examination of the philatelic literature on the subject reveals.²

In one of my attempts to resolve the contradictions about the real design of the type I of our double-stamp, I found interesting information about the Bilbao painter and philatelist Antonio de Guezala who had

published in the 1950's a very detailed analysis about the very first Spanish stamp. He was also going to publish a book about all stamps of the *Carlist war*, but it was never edited.³ As I was



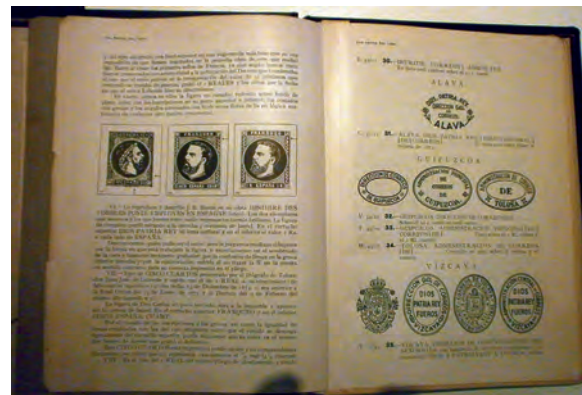
Guezala reference sheet

living at that time at Bilbao, I tried to find a relative of Don Antonio and I was lucky enough to get an appointment to meet his grand-son. He had no idea of philatelic matters, but once I explained my project and research, he allowed me to take

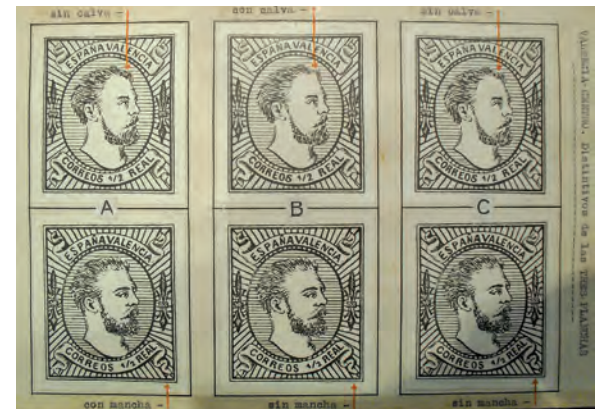
(1) *El sello carlista de Valencia y la confusión de los catálogos*, Eco Filatélico, mayo 2017, p. 30-32.

(2) Hans Vinkenborg: *De Carlistenzegel uit Valencia*, Iberia 100, p. 50-57.

(3) Antonio de Guezala Ayrivié: *6 Cuartos 1850*, Bilbao 1940. *Los correos carlistas en el País Vasco-Navarro, Cataluña y Valencia (1873-1876)*, [draft of the (unpublished) book, Bilbao 1956,] Private Archive Echeverría.



Laidout pages for advertising



Three dies referenced

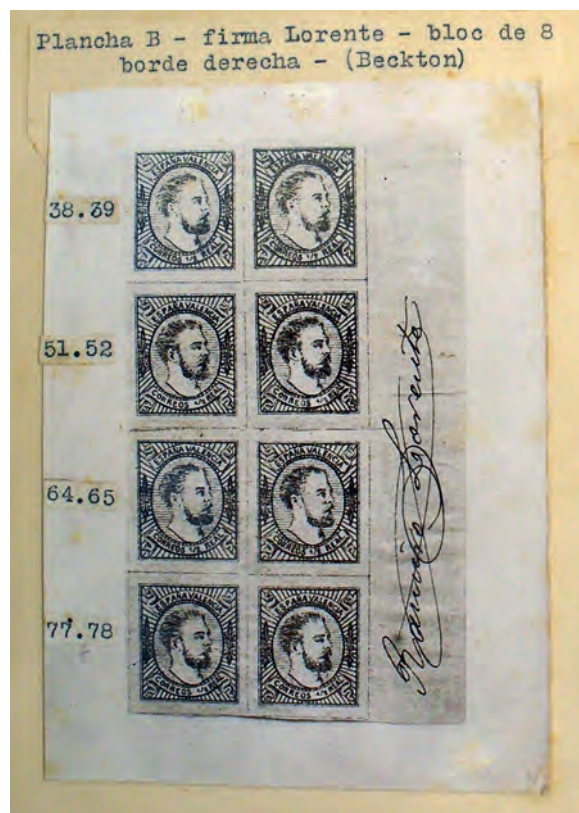
**Beckton plate**

photos of all documents his grandfather had prepared for this unpublished book and use them for my project.

Don Antonio had made a detailed analysis of all Carlist stamps, determining the position of each stamp on the different sheets and noting all printing defects on each position. With the Valencia stamps he had reconstructed two different entire sheets and part of a third, based on one entire sheet and various

multiple famous collectors world-wide had put at his disposition. A similar analysis with only domestic samples had been carried out some time before by Arturo Tort Nicolau, who was awarded the Crawford Medal by the *Royal Philatelic Society* London for the second volume of his work about the early Spanish stamps, Carlist issues included. He certainly detected two different dies of those stamps and a series of very eye-catching defects.⁴

A comparison of the results of the analysis shows, that both philatelists had not analysed

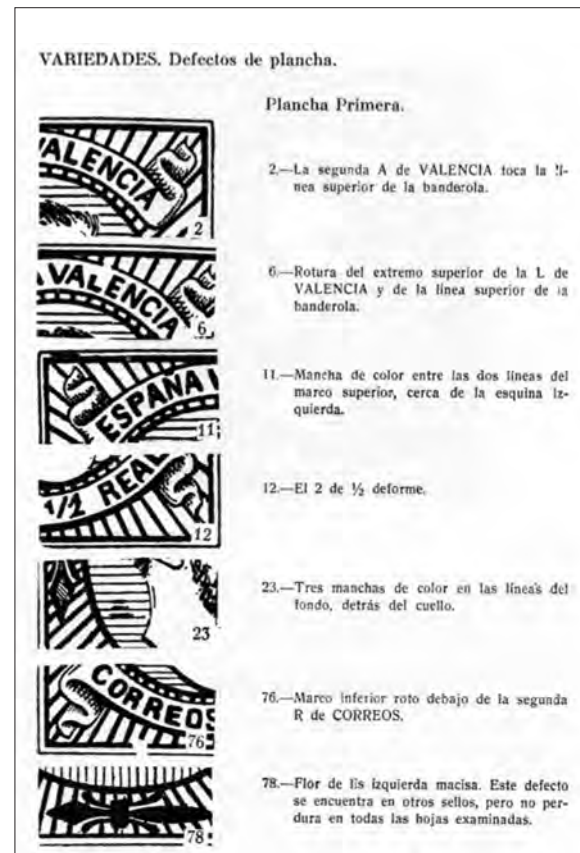
**Third die's sheet****Beckton plate at Guezala**

(4) Arturo Tort Nicolau: *Guía del coleccionista de sellos de correos de España*, vol. 3, 1870-1899, Reus 1950.

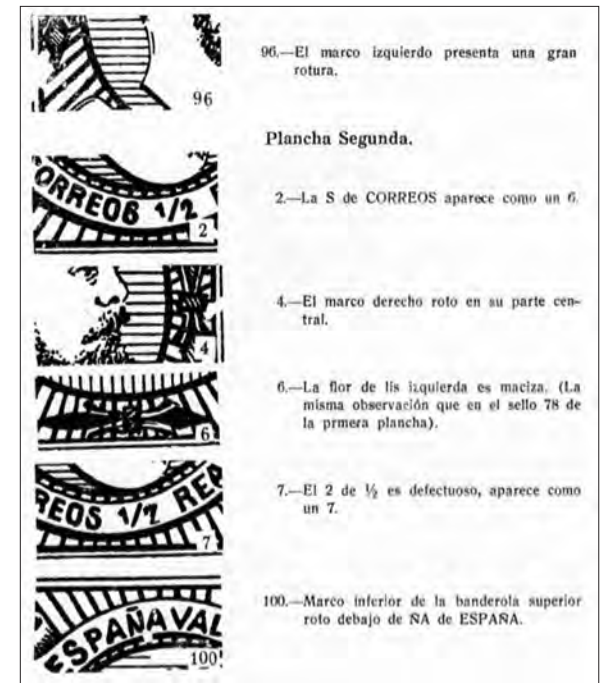


Front-page Tort

the same type of stamp, bringing us back to the confusion mentioned earlier. Tort, as all later Spanish experts that published about those stamps, regarded as genuine a 32-lines sample of type I. Such a sample had appeared for the first time in the 1930's on the philatelic market. All previously presented samples, including a multiple presented in 1927 by her later president Walter Dorning Beckton before the *Royal Philatelic Society* on the occasion of a conference about the *Carlist War* issues, show only 31 background-lines. This difference in the number



Discovered defects (1)



Discovered defects (2)

of lines and the existence of two different dies demonstrate that Tort had analysed retouched reprints, or more clearly forgeries, based on the retouched original stones.⁵

Don Antonio could not have analysed original samples either. The fact he could reconstruct two entire sheets and part of a third, contravene the facts explained in the previous paragraph, and the declaration that Juan Vilás, the producer of the stamps, gave to Francisco Carreras Candi, about their origins: he spoke of one only die. A critical reading of the text shows furthermore that the supposed loss of the printing stones at the end of the war was not the case.

(5) Walter Dorning Beckton: *The Carlist Stamps of Spain and Further Note on the Reprints. A Paper read before the Royal Philatelic Society*, London, on January 7th, 1926.

And what has all this to do with our protagonist? Torres met up in Barcelona with Vilás who had worked in this city as a lithographer since the end of the *Carlist War*. He bought the recovered stones of the first and the prepared second, but never printed issue. The time they passed in their hiding place and damage caused by poor storage and handling obliged Plácido to make some retouching, most clearly visible in the different angles certain characters of the inscription show in different samples. If they had been produced from the original untouched stone, then all the lines of the Beckton-multiple in the figure 17/18, would show identical angles and identical meeting points.



"Essay"/fake made with the stone of the prepared, but not realised second issue

These assertions are based on the comparison with the only 100% sure authentic sample of those stamps, found affixed to a notarial document in the *National Historical Archive of Spain*.⁶ The finding, was made two years ago, but has not yet been published. I wanted to reserve this important break-through for publication in this book.



Only clearly genuine sample on notarial document



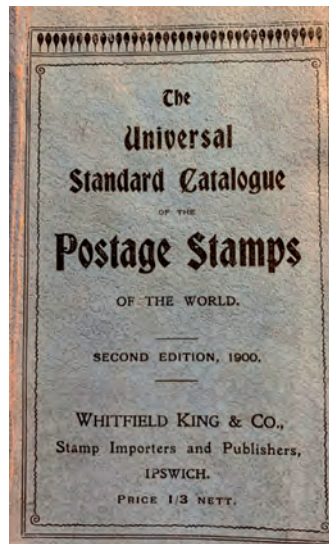
Line pattern on genuine sample



Line pattern on Beckton-sample

(6) Archivo Histórico Nacional, Fondo Borbón-Parma, Diversos 114, exp. 3, 39-43.

The European Selling Trip

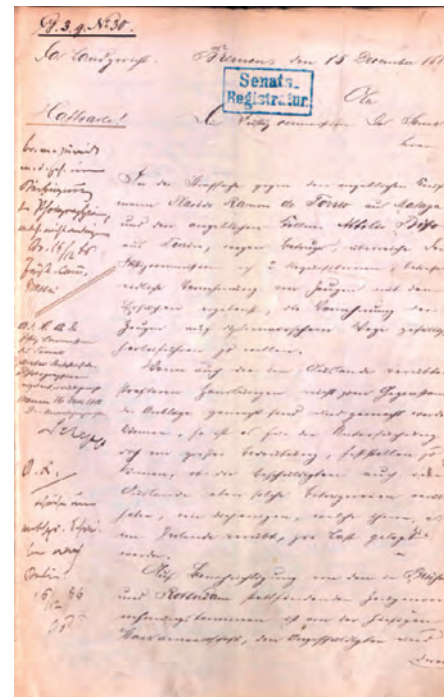


Whitfield catalogue

The sales of the forgeries Plácido had produced during his Barcelona period was seemingly not as successful as expected. He remembered much better results from the time when Bonasi made his tours through Europe. So he decided to visit various countries and some important dealers directly. The idea was not bad, but he had a problem. He only spoke Spanish, Italian and a little French, not the best conditions for the planned enterprise. So he was obliged to hire a reliable interpreter.

From his Italian time he obviously knew a certain Attilio Biffo who lived in England and was working there as a waiter. Plácido was able to engage him for his round-trip through Europe. It started in October 1886 in England.¹

Biffo wrote a letter announcing his visit at the known Ipswich stamp merchants



Initiating proceeding

Whitfield, King and Co. in the name of Rosendo Fernández offering interesting philatelic material. Plácido did not appear in the shop in person. The stamps and covers presented were a mix of genuine and counterfeits. Once the buyers had made her choice, the selling price was higher than expected. The buyer also wanted time to verify the genuineness of the acquired samples. After a pretended telephone call Biffo communicated having obtained the approval for the buyer's lower offer, subject to the condition of a cheque to cash immediately. By the time Whitfield, King and Co. of Ipswich detected

the swindle, the cheque was already paid in and signed by Torres and the duo of swindlers had left the town.

From England both went to the continent. Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark were the following stops where the same procedure

(1) The Philatelic Adviser, n° 9, vol 1, Sept. 1888, p. 102; The Quaker City Philatelist, vol. 4, 1889, p. 122.

was applied. They had planned to go to Berlin, Leipzig and Bremen and other cities. Germany was a large country, but with philatelic magazines that spread news quickly. Before they arrived at Bremen, the local stamp dealers had been alerted and the swindlers finally arrested. All their stamps were confiscated.

86

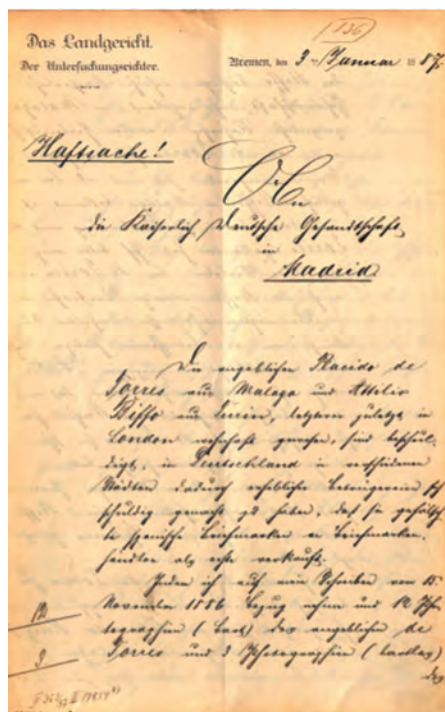
After eight months in prison he was released, the stamps were confiscated. Plácido had to pay a bail of 2.500 marks and was allowed to return to Spain until the start of the court-proceedings. If he would not return for the trial, his confiscated not Spanish stamps and forgeries were lost as well as the bail.

Two years later the trial opened. The stamps of Spain had been presented to a judge who, by chance, was a philatelic expert. He discovered and listed the forgeries and prepared the charges.

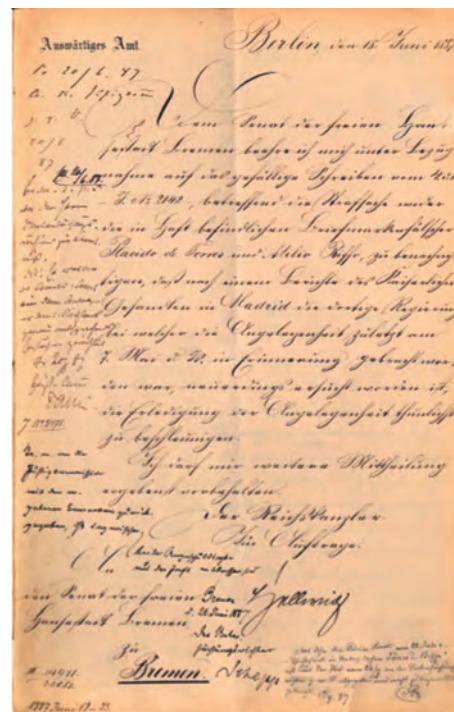
Torres was found guilty for fraud and for selling forged stamps. The offence of forgery was not considered, because it had been committed outside Germany. After paying the financial penalty of 1.200 marks he could return to Spain with the rest of his genuine and forged stamps. After the six months of pre-trial detention in 1886, the jail term was considered as being settled.

Stücke zu	Commission
6 reales blank	1858
11 " gelb	"
2 " weiß	1857
5 " weiß	"
1 " weiß	"
2 " weiß	1852
6 " weiß	"
2 " weiß	1853
6 " weiß	"
2 cuartos gelb	1854
6 reales blank	"
1 cuartos orange	Madrid
3 " "	"

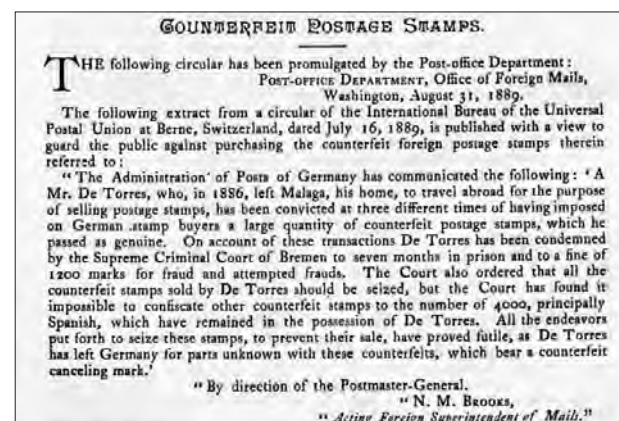
List of forged stamps



Letter from the Bremen Court to the German Embassy (Madrid)



Foreign Affairs (Berlin) asking for help in Spain



„Torres“-circular of the Postmaster General

The American Selling Trip

D 909

No. _____

COMPLAINT.

THE STATE OF TEXAS

VS.

Rosendo Fernandez

Filed 4 day of May 1892

John Forney

Justice of the Peace *Salveston* County
Process No 2.

D 909-20

Complaint against Rosendo Fernandez (cover)

In autumn 1891 Plácido took a ship from Barcelona to Cuba and Mexico to initiate another selling tour through the New World. Various trunks with stamps, genuine and forged, prepared fake covers and other items were part of his baggage.

The first stop was at La Habana, the capital of the isle of Cuba, at that time still a Spanish colony. I could not find any note about his time there. Maybe he could not disembark because of one of the yellow fever epidemics that repeatedly afflicted the isle in those years.

From there his voyage continued to Vera Cruz in Mexico where he arrived at

D 909-COMPLAINT-Class 2

IN JUSTICE'S COURT.

PROCESS NO. 2

Salveston County.

IN THE NAME AND BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

Beatsy J. J., the undersigned authority, on this day personally appeared *Unicus Gaudin*, who, after being by me duly sworn, on oath deposes and says that herebefore to wit, on or about the 5th day of February 1892 *Rosendo Fernandez* *Ramon Torres* in the County of *Salveston* and State of Texas, esp. *near to St. Louis, Mo.* of said County and State, committed the crime of *Swindling by obtaining from affidavits the sum of \$600 & 3 months upon false pretenses by explanation in that the said Rosendo Fernandez said affidavit to afford about 20 false affidavits stamps postage of the Government of Spain for genuine and thereby obtained the said sum of money, contrary to the form of the Statute in such cases made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the State.*

Unicus Gaudin

John Forney's Brother

Signed Complaint against Rosendo Fernandez alias Plácido Ramón de Torres

November 11. During his stay he visited, besides the capital, various towns like Puebla and Guadalajara where he obviously sold his

AFFIDAVIT FOR REQUISITION.

(To be made in Duplicate)

Jas. S. Hogg,
Governor of the State of Texas:

I respectfully ask that you issue a requisition to the Governor of *Missouri* for the apprehension and rendition of *Rosendo Fernandez* *Ramon Torres*, who stands charged by *Unicus Gaudin* pending in the *Justice* Court, within and for the County of *Salveston*.

with the crime of *Swindling by*

committed in *Salveston* County, but who has since the commission of said offense, and before an arrest could be made upon process issued by said Court, and with a view of avoiding the same, fled from justice of the State of Texas, and is now, as your petitioner verily believes, in the County of *Missouri*, and the grounds for such belief are as follows:

The ends of justice, in my opinion require that he be brought back to this State for trial. I herewith present a duly certified copy of my *Complaint*, now on file in the office of *John Forney* *Justice of the Peace* in said County. In my opinion the facts stated in said *Complaint* are true, and I believe that the prosecution of said *Rosendo Fernandez* would result in his conviction of the crime charged. I nominate, *Unicus Gaudin* of *Salveston* County, as a proper person to be appointed and commissioned by you as the agent of the State of Texas, to receive the said fugitive when he shall be apprehended, and bring him to this State, and deliver him into the hands of the Sheriff of said County. I also certify that *Unicus Gaudin* has no private interest in the proposed arrest. THE REQUISITION ASKED FOR SAID FUGITIVE IS NOT SOUGHT FOR THE PURPOSE OF COLLECTING A DEBT, OR ENFORCING A CIVIL REMEDY, OR TO ANSWER ANY OTHER PRIVATE END WHATSOEVER.

Dated at *Salveston* May 7 1892.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 7 day of May 1892.

THE STATE OF TEXAS, *Salveston* County. I, *M. J. Williams*, being duly sworn, on my oath say that the facts stated in the foregoing application are true.

Subscribed and sworn to before me, this 7 day of May 1892.

TO THE GOVERNOR: In my opinion it would be proper for your Excellency to issue the requisition asked.

John B. Gillaspie
District Attorney.

Apprehension of Plácido

forgeries to the local dealers or exchanged them for genuine Mexican stamps.

Before he left Mexico he had to take on an interpreter to be able to continue offering and selling his fakes in the USA. The slowness or absence of communication among the local stamp dealers and the reluctance of many victims to admit to having been swindled was an advantage for Plácido who could leave the country and pass undetected to Texas.



Front-page Mekeels' review

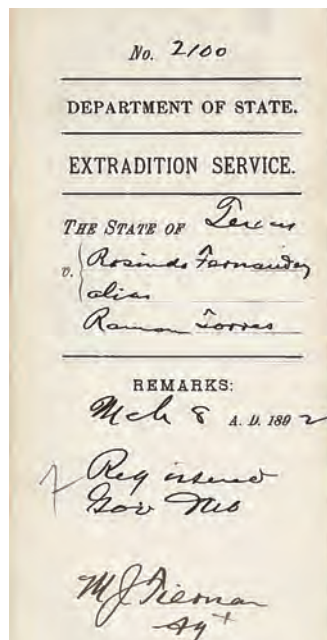
Not so at Galveston, where his illegal activities were discovered and communication between stamp dealers country-wide was better than in Mexico. After finding out that great part of the stamps acquired from Torres were fakes, Vincent Gurdji, a local stamp dealer, denounced him to the police as a swindler. When Plácido, who had meanwhile continued his tour, announced some days later through his interpreter Edmondo Martínez his visit to the Saint Louis stamp dealer Mekeel, he had underestimated the flow of information. Mekeel knew what was about to occur and informed the police who

had already obtained an arrest warrant from the Galveston court.

So, after having tried to sell his forged material, the police arrested Plácido because of the Galveston case and conducted him back to the harbour city. Mekeel examined the stamps he had acquired and as most of them were fakes, he prepared legal actions for a trial at the Saint Louis court. An arrangement with Gurdji avoided Plácido's committal to jail. By order of the court, Mekeel had meanwhile seized Torres' baggage left at Saint Louis and had found many more forged stamps. Things even turned out to be more complicated, because the customs' authorities intervened as well, imposing an import duty for the stamps.



First page of Tiffany's article



Cover Extradition Service

To avoid accusation and imprisonment, Torres accepted an arrangement Mekeel had suggested. The American bought the whole stock, obviously at a quite advantageous price, that allowed Plácido to pay the customs duties and his return to Spain, little more. In turn the charges against him were dropped.¹



Mekeel-envelope

In a series of articles the internationally known American philatelist John K. Tiffany, one of the objects of Plácido's first marketing campaign after his establishment at Barcelona, presented and analysed the retained forgeries in a series of articles in the *Philatelic Journal of America*.² They were the same as Torres had tried to sell in Europe. Until our days, those forgeries were considered the only

(1) Oliver Criselle: *Philatelic Rogue's Gallery*, Plácido Ramón de Torres, Redfield's Stamp Weekly, Aug. 15 1907, S. 78.

(2) John K. Tiffany: *Spanish Counterfeits*, *Philatelic Journal of America*, 1894, p. 199-202; 246-250; 288-291; 309-312; 384-385; 427-429.



Mekeel-article about Torres' Melilla affaire

fakes Torres had produced. The rest, really the main part of his work, is being discovered now.

The End of his Philatelic Career



*Last joke-illustration found,
Maury catalogue 1904*

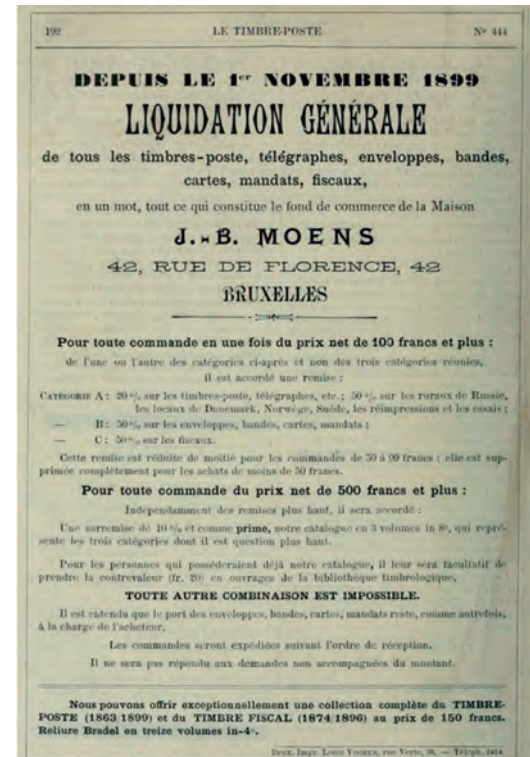


*Error/joke (1902)
in Maury Album 1920*

Towards the end of the 19th century Plácido's career as illustrator slowed little by little to its end. In 1899 his best client, J.-B. Moens, revered by most collectors of the old World as the *Father of Philately*, closed his business down and ceased publishing of his magazine *Le Timbre-Poste*. Some of Plácido's new illustrations still appeared until 1904 in the French catalogue of Arthur Maury. In that year we find the last "error"-inscription, although the Parisian dealer and editor continued using hand-drawn illustrations in his catalogues and stamp albums until 1940.

The selling of stamps in his Barcelona shop and a kiosk on the central Rambla he had acquired during the 1890's, shared in those last years with Guillermo de Pécker, was probably closed in 1903. This illegitimate son of an Austrian baroness, born at Timesoara (today in Roumania) had come to Spain after two attempts in Italian Trieste and in Vienna to launch a philatelic magazine.¹ He spoke most European languages and tried to get a job not only in the Austrian but also in different South American consulates.

Philately and the philatelic business was his hobby and an additional income to survive until he really got employed at various



Last page of the last number of Le Timbre Poste

Barcelona consulates in the 1910's. Despite his good relationship and collaboration with Plácido, he was not interested in continuing his business. He probably did not have at that time the necessary funds either.

(1) La Poste Universelle (Vienna, 1890), Posta Universale (Milano 1891).



Pecker as Barcelona stamp dealer

Juan Lladó, a neighbour of Plácido, took over part of his business about 1902/03 and started selling stamps at Pino 9, presumably tutored by our protagonist. Lladó had, as far as I can see, nothing to do with stamps. Perhaps he was the owner of the house or of a store next to Plácido's shop that he could use for the new business. But under his direction, sales seemingly did not really go well.

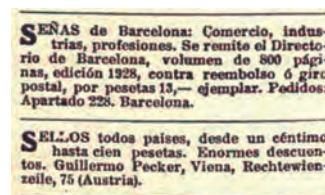
Plácido probably continued with his forging activities collaborating with the Swiss Fournier some years more. We can only speculate how the "illegal" part of Torres' stock survived. He surely did not sell it to Lladó. Most probably Juan Morache, a real philatelist, took it on after Plácido's death, maybe together with the stock of Lladó or independently, establishing his shop in the same street, four houses away.

In the early 1920's the Andorra bogus issues emerged on the philatelic market, while the

stones of the Melilla bogus issues remained in Morache's stock until his death in the 1950's. The allegedly lost stones of the Carlist Valencia issue were used, most probably by himself, to produce the strange, newly retouched 32-lines reprints or rather forgeries during the early 1930's.



Morache-covers

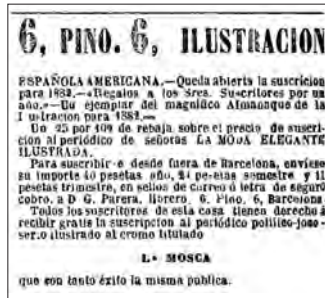


Pecker's Austrian connection



Lladó as a stamp dealer

His Private Life



*Barcelona bookdealer
at Plácido's address*

When I started my research on Plácido, I could not imagine, I'd discover such a big quantity of evidence about his "professional" work. But I'd not imagine either, that I'd, however, not be able to find nearly anything about his private life. So, most of the following few notes in this chapter contain a more or less strong part of speculation. And a large list of deficiencies and missing basic information remains.

Reiterated attempts to find out something about his adoptive parents, their removal to Italy were fruitless. Plácido's boyhood, probably in Florence, remains uncovered until his encounter with his later patron Usigli. The nature of his contacts with Spain remains obscure. His fathers supposed address, placed on record by the police on occasion of his arrest in Germany, does not coincide with the Madrid address (Veneras 5) where his Italian catalogue was available.

About 1880 Torres might have married María Ruiz Gutiérrez, but I could not find any official document about the supposed wedding. The Spanish vice-consul of Saint-Louis told after having examined the content of Torres' trunks, that he had found a death certificate, confirming the death of Torres' wife and son during their stay at Cuba during the 1891 selling tour through America.

The only 20th century document I could find and that mentions Plácido, ubicates him at his Barcelona residence at Pino Street 6, as a member of the citizen committee in 1908. The ecclesiastic archives of his parish show no entry about his passing away during the following years. So I suppose Plácido died during the so-called Spanish flue in 1918 or 1919. The huge number of deaths during the pandemic suggests



Barcelona, Plaza del Pino

Telegramas detenidos.—En la estación telefónica de esta ciudad, hay telegramas detenidos a nombre de los señores siguientes:
Joseph Valen Sagarriga.—Plácido Torres.
—Leandro Ibarz.—Sr. Alcalá.—Tomás Molina
—Joaquín Gibert.—Eugenio Mata.—Font.—
José Gallar.—Mariano Sejé.—Manuel Llop.—
Victoria Baster.—Fomento Industrial Mercantil.

Telegram received for Plácido

Llamamientos judiciales:
 El juez de instrucción de Mataró cita á José Palmada y á los sucesores de don Antonio Perecaula y Damiana.
 El de Tarrasa, á don Enrique Robledo Negrini á Isabel Company y Villarroel.
 El del distrito de Atarazanas, de esta capital, á Francisco Suñol.
 El del Hospital, á Salvador Grau Sabaté.
 El de la Lonja, á don Adolfo Herrero, don Jaime Martorell, don Juan Bautista Clot, don Pedro Vila y don Plácido Ramón Torres.
 Y el de la Concepción, á doña Isabel Casanovas, Isabel Company y Miguel Barrat.

Citation to a Barcelona Court

he was buried in a mass grave without having been officially registered.

The evidence offered by two other documents, possibly related with Plácido, do not really match the just presented fragile framework of his life. In 1923 the register of the Barcelona Freemasons Lodge lists as a member a certain Plácido Torres Ruiz. Was this person Plácido's son or is it only a strange coincidence of names and surname? And an American passengers list from 1931 registers an Antonio J[osé] Torres Ruiz, born at Malaga in 1885, as in transit from Cuba to Spain.

Moens refers to Torres in one of his publications as the "erratic cavalier". Some European as well as American stamp dealer address-books quote him as a resident in Madrid in the middle of the 1880's. It's probable he had to close his Barcelona shop during his foreign countries selling tours and the Melilla-affaire. But maybe he had a substitute who replaced him, because his Barcelona residence remains the same since 1875. A lot of distressing and seemingly contradictory facts.

UNITED STATES
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

11-10834

List **9**

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

ALL ALIENS arriving at a port of continental United States from a foreign port or a port of the insular possessions of the United States, and all aliens arriving at a port of said insular possessions from a foreign port, a port of continental United States, or a port of the insular possessions of the United States.
This (white) sheet is for the listing of

S. S. **MARQUES DE CORTES** . Passengers sailing from **CUBA** in transit to **Spain** , **October** , 19**31**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15				
No. on List	HEAD-TAX STATUS (This column to be filled by Collector of Customs at each port)	NAME IN FULL		Age	Sex	Calling or occupation	Able to—			Nationality, Country of birth, or subject of	Race or people	Place of birth		Inspection, Visa Number	Issued at—	Date	Last permanent residence	
		Family name	Given name				Read	Write	Speak			Country	City or town				Country	City or town
1		Bere Agustin	Mamel de	26	M	Labourer	Yes	Spanish	Yes	Spanish	Spanish	Spain	Granada		In transit to Spain		Cuba	Habana
2		Moreno Padilla	Juan	57	M	do	do	do	do	do	do	do	do		do		do	do
3		Torres Ruiz	Antonio J.	46	M	do	do	do	do	do	do	do	Malaga		do		do	do
4		Perez Mauranti	Juan	48	M	do	do	do	do	do	do	do	Almeria		do		do	do
5		Muñoz Perez Ruiz	José	60	M	do	do	do	do	do	do	do	Malaga		do		do	do
6		Garcia Perez	José	54	M	do	do	do	do	do	do	do	Almeria		do		do	do
7		Lara Peña	Antonio	29	M	do	do	do	do	do	do	do	do		do		do	do

1931 passengers list Cuba to Spain

Torres – a Unique Phenomenon?



*Maeda/Kamigata-forgery
Sarawak, "FODR" instead
of "FOUR"*

One of my final discoveries was prompted by a major failure and an erroneous conclusion. I had found Torres' forgeries of the stamps of nearly all the continents or let us say "cultural areas". The only ambit where I had not been able to discover any, was the Asian area where the characters and lettering are very different from ours and totally unknown to me. After various failed attempts, I finally found one of Torres' "minor forgeries" on the web-site of the Japanese Philatelic Society.

forgery collection. To my surprise I found quickly what I thought were the products of my forger. But this was far from the mark! When I proudly reported him that I was able to attribute some of his fake specimens to Torres, he kindly sent me a couple of used samples of the same type, that I could immediately identify as Kamigata/Maeda-forgeries by their typical cancels. I had to stop the publication of an article on the subject already forwarded to an editor where I had erroneously attributed those products to Torres.



*Maeda/Kamigata-forgery: "CASH"
instead of "CASHI"*



*"IMPERIAL"
instead of
"IMPERIAL"*



*"TOST" instead
of "POST"*



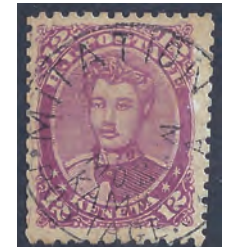
*"DOREAN"
instead of
"COREAN"*



Torres-fake-cancel



*Kamigata-cancel
[I]MITATION*



Maeda/Kamigata-forgery Hawaii

My efforts to get more information from a book about Japanese forgeries did not lead further. I was already about to abandon the search, when I got in touch with an expert in Shanghai forgeries. He sent me some of his publications and scans of the mint items of his

After this reverse I put aside the Japanese stamps and continued researching in other countries where languages with Asiatic signs were also in use. So I suspected, that Placido's kind of deliberately introduced errors would probably not be limited to

Latin character inscriptions. Comparing different Korean inscriptions, I could detect differences, but I was unable to say, whether they were accidental or intentionally made deformations. And, what is more important, I could not say whether they really changed the meaning of the affected signs. Consulting experts in Korean language, I learned that because of those deformations the inscriptions were neither sensible nor meaningful.



Maeda fake-cancel

I finally had to learn, that Maeda had not only forged Japanese and Shanghai, but also Korea. I found samples from a lot of countries in the Asian area, clearly identified by Kamigata cancels.¹ There were even errors in the Latin character inscriptions of those stamps and, as in the case of Torres, those errors could not be accidental ones either.

Are we allowed to label Maeda as a second Torres? I think only up to a certain point. Torres and Maeda forged stamps of their own cultural and linguistic area as well as many outside it. The Japanese did not produce, as far as we know, stamp illustrations, an important part of Torres' work. There's no reliable study on Maeda's work and the number of fakes he made, but he seems to have imitated the stamps of about 40 different countries or regions. If we only add together Torres' different "minor forgeries" I alone have discovered, we reach a total of 300. And I think we are allowed to extrapolate, that Torres produced nearly all of the 1.242 illustrations in his album. We have not yet included in this calculation the "major" forgeries that seem to exist of all the stamp issuing countries of the time.

As far as the "errors" are concerned, there's no doubt that they were deliberately introduced into the work of both forgers. The humorous aspects of Maeda's productions are limited to the inscriptions. I could not find any joke in the designs. Phantasy or bogus stamps produced by Maeda have not been reported or documented. The cancels, which were applied by whosoever ordered or distributed Maeda's productions to any of the fakes were neither "error" nor joke cancels. On the contrary, most of them advise with their inscription that the cancels and the stamps are not genuine, but only proofs, facsimiles or specimen.

Maeda shows undoubtedly a similar forging behaviour as Torres, but limited to the inscriptions. In all other aspects Torres is unique.



Maeda forgery Wuhu



Maeda forgery Ethiopia

(1) Kishei Maeda, Plácido Ramón de Torres und ihre Eigenarten. Eingebaute Fehler. Die Einzigartigkeit zweier Fälscher, Teil II, DBZ 2020, SE 7, S. 12-14; Teil II, SE 9, S. 28-30.

CHAPTER 27

Torres – a Great Forger?



François Fournier

When we speak about stamp forgeries, names like the Spiro Brothers, Oneglia, Seguí, Fournier, Sperati, Taylor, Hussey usually appear in the list of discovered forgers. But did people like the Spiro Brothers, Fournier or Sperati really produce forgeries? The Spiro's described and sold their "facsimiles" as "imitations ", the Spaniard Seguí made his copies allegedly to show, that even philatelic experts are easy to fool. Fournier and Sperati presented themselves in their advertisements as artists and their works as pieces of art. There's no doubt that their



Jean de Sperati



Spiro price-list

products were later used by others to deceive collectors and dealers, but are their authors really forgers? We'll probably have to exclude them from our list of candidates.

Let's point here to another problem, that has no easy answer either. Was Torres a good forger or asked more generally: Who is a good forger? What distinguishes a good forger from a bad one?

We'll have to consider financial aspects like the commercial success, the extent of marketing, the expansion in various countries or even continents. There are artistic aspects like the quality of a copy, very difficult to evaluate objectively. There are aspects of artisanal skills and the domination of different techniques involved in the process of imitation. And last, but not least, it's as well a problem of quantity. How many forgeries must a forger have made to be considered one of the greats.

Asked about the best stamp forger, most experts would answer that Jean de Sperati was the best of all. Sperati produced, as all artists who were forgers, not only high quality copies but also near-perfect copies which were extremely difficult to detect. Many contemporaneous experts were not able to distinguish them from the genuine. What makes nowadays in our perception a good forger? It is his ability to use up to date techniques and procedures reflecting technical progress to create a true copy. Sperati matches this modern idea, an over-valuation of the technical perfection, in my opinion, with his use of chemical agents and photographic procedures. But I think, we can't base our judgement on those modern criteria. We have to take into account, that most 19th century forgers did not use photographic techniques and only relayed on their manual abilities to draw and lithograph.

In this sense I think we'll have to exclude, as initially stated, the imitating and self-proclaimed artists from our considerations. I think there's no objective way or method to qualify most Torres products as better or worse than those the Spiros or Fournier had sold.

Torres is, without any doubt, the most prolific stamp illustrator- lithographer of the 19th century. His until now detected "minor forgeries", made from the stones of those illustrations, exceed in number those made by all other contemporaneous European "competitors".



Jean de Sperati

In the number of joke-, fake- or error-stamps he is second to none. The fact that I could discover Torres' "major forgeries" of at least one classic issue of about 100 of the about 180 stamp-issuing countries at that time, confirms him, in my opinion, as one, if not the greatest among the 19th century forgers.



Segui-facsimiles



**Samuel Allen Taylor
self-portrait**



**Advertising letter
François Fournier**

Open Ended Happy Ending?

The research for the present work could bring to light a lot of forgotten, hidden or nearly lost information about Plácido Ramón de Torres, his life and work. Despite a certain pride in the results, I cannot hide my discontent about some deficiencies.

The first and the last chapters made clear that I was not able to find much and more specific information about his adoptive parents and their leaving Spain. His undoubtedly existing relations with Spain during his time in Italy could not be clarified. It could not be documented either, whether he married and had offspring. And the date and circumstances of his death are equally obscure.

Although I could detect a lot of his forgeries of stamps of countries all over the world, there remain documented

forgeries of various dozens of territories where his probable authorship could not yet be confirmed and definitely demonstrated.

Torres' implication in the forgery of the *Carlist War* stamps is obvious, but there are still blanks to fill. This leads to François Fournier. I'm convinced of lot of the facsimiles sold by the Swiss were designed and/or made by Torres. But there has not yet appeared clear evidence about the range of the collaboration between them.

Another unachieved area of research is that on his Asian-forgeries, especially those of Japan. I could find some of his minor forgeries of Japan and Shanghai. But even the Japanese experts have not yet been able to distinguish between Spiro, Torres and Fournier forgeries of Japan, subsuming different types of



Cuban revenue stamps,
Torres illustration



Spanish revenue stamps, Torres illustration



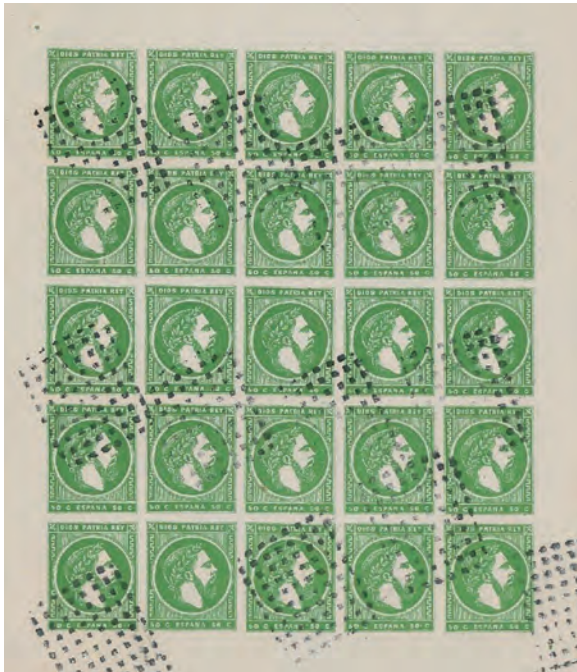
Illustration Torres



Torres'
"minor forgery"

28. Open Ended Happy Ending?

100



Not confirmed suspicion: Torres-made?

forgeries made by European, that means non Asian forgers, under the name of the Hamburg brothers.¹

Another field, not yet investigated at all, are the revenue stamps of Spain. The pool of not attributed forgeries of Spain and it's colonies is huge and still hides a great number of Torres products that have not yet been (clearly) identified as his work.

The same seems to be valid for Italy. Taking into account Plácido's predilection

for municipal and revenue stamps in Italy and his failed project with Usigli, a similar dedication to those Spanish items could be expected. He made illustrations of some of those stamps for Moens in his catalogue, but I never found any "minor forgery" of those stamps. Admittedly, I never cared about them.

The end of his business and the dissolution of his stock is not sufficiently documented and still leaves much room for speculation.

(1) *Some Unidentified or Misidentified Forgeries of the Classic Issues of Japan*, AJPh 152, June 2020, p. 21-26.

Part II

Torres-products

The last part of this book can't claim to be but a partial compilation of the until now discovered and/or not documented Torres-forgeries. It pretends to be a kind of hand-out to facilitate the detection and identification of not yet discovered or not attributed forgeries of stamps of countries and regions forged by Plácido.

Most known forgeries were described in the great amount of philatelic publications all over the world during the last 150 years. And it's impossible to access to all. Among them, there are surely a lot of Torres' products, too. Taking in account the nearly unique joking character of Torres, a lot of his already discovered and sometimes documented, but not or not correctly attributed fun- and error-fakes will come to light. Inscription-errors sometimes occurred, not only when forging a stamp. They are mostly due to the lithographic or engraving technique, but they are not repeated. That means, that most of the really accidental errors in fake-stamps or fake-cancels are limited to mirrored characters or overseen dots. Other severe errors point strongly to our protagonist.

How to discover Torres-products?

Almost all forgeries produced by Plácido are lithographs. Very few times we find typographed counterfeits or samples in *taille douce* (Philippines). Both are the exception to the rule. Most of the stamps he made were imperforate issues, although the originals were already perforated. Until late in his life, he was not able to produce decent perforations. So, he tried to avoid as well copying embossed stamps. As he was not able to imitate that type of impression, embossed areas of copied stamps remained simply plane. The relief structure was sometimes "imitated" by lines.

I've found very few surcharged forgeries made by him, although he made a lot of them as illustrations for the catalogues.

Inscription or spelling errors are a strong indicator for his authorship. Changes in design, mainly different adornments, are another one. Often the background pattern is changed. The number of shading lines differs from the original, the shading pattern is different or simply solid. Changed label positions (left to right, upside down), left out label inscriptions are typical cases. If those changes or errors occur in a whole series with one or more odd (or bogus) colour samples

beside the more or less well-imitated original colours and we even find phantasy-values, the conclusion can't be more evident.

As far as we are dealing with Plácido's "minor forgeries", a comparing look into the 19th century catalogues starting with his own album, the Moens and Moschkau-catalogues can provide the certainty, whether the suspicion and possible detection is ok or not.

If the identification as a fake was made through 19th century catalogue-illustrations (not photos) we can nearly be sure, they are really from Torres or at least are based, if not lithographs, on electrotypes made with his illustrations. I can't imagine this very limited field of action could have offered an attractive occasion for business for other forgers, but a loss of time. I'm sure, in the future there will appear not few of those items, erroneously attributed to Moens, Gray, Maury, Senf, Scott, Taylor and others, because they used the corresponding illustrations in their catalogues and stamp albums.

If we are dealing with his "major forgeries" the used fake cancels often give us the final portion of certainty needed.

The forged cancels:

Most of what has been said about the recognition of Torres' stamp-forgeries can

be applied as well to his forged cancels. Many of them are phantasies, others imitate more or less accurately actual existing cancellations. The deliberately included spelling- or fun-errors appear again. A particularity is the existence of his partial or half-cancels. We find furthermore a lot of strange cancels, sometimes pure fantasies, sometimes inspired in cancelations of exotic countries, although generally applied on stamps, indistinctly of their provenience of different cultural areas.

Cooperations

We should as well take in account that Torres was in contact with the Senf brothers, Friedl, Goldner, Fournier and probably as well some other less known dealers and forgers. Some of them were directly furnished with mint copies and they applied later their own cancels and sometimes perforated the sheets. In other cases they used Torres' illustrations or copies to make their own plates (Fournier) and/or electrotypes. In such cases there's a kind of common authorship and it is impossible to point to one and only maker. The same occurred with many cancels. We can't be sure he produced them. He probably only developed the design and the cancels were made by his clients.









September 20, 1875. THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHILATELY. 129

History as told by Postage Stamps.

No. II.

Below we give illustrations of every type of stamp used for postal purposes in Spain. They give with remarkable clearness an epitome of the various revolutions which have convulsed that distracted country.


We offer a prize of five dollars worth of stamps for the best history of Spain embracing the last twenty-five years, the materials for which are to be drawn solely from a study of the stamps themselves.

Torres illustrations for American Catalogues

 #3, 6-9, 16-19 not delivered to European Clients

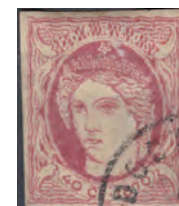
Jokes / "Errors":

 #7, 8 [GUARTOS]
instead of [CUARTOS]

 #17 [E2PAÑA]
instead of [ESPAÑA]
[COMUNICAOIONES]
instead of [COMUNICACIONES]











Torres-products

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