

Scribblings

...from the Rocky Mountain Philatelic Library



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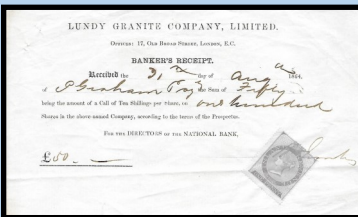
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Plácido Ramón de Torres: A Prolific Forger

By Gerhard Lang-Valchs

Translated by Ernesto Cuenta

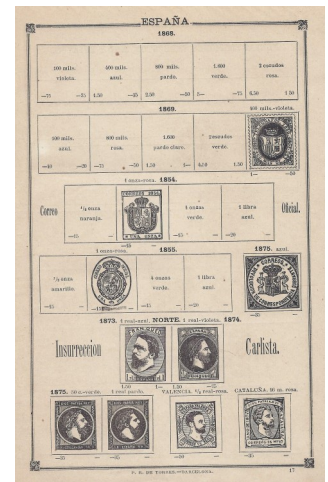
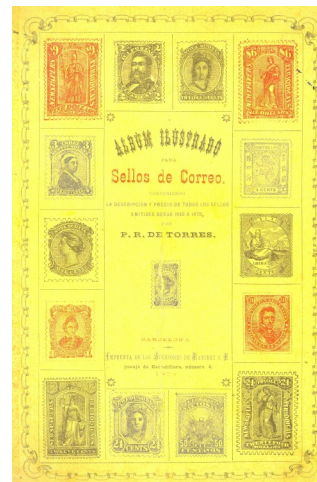


Fig. 1 (upper left). The first worldwide stamp catalog in Italian. Figs. 3 & 4. From the Torres "Álbum de Sellos"

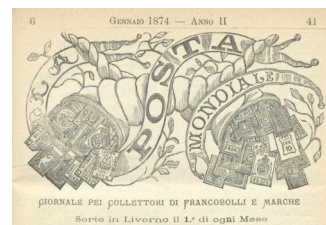


Fig. 2. The first philatelic journal-"La Posta Mondiale"

Plácido Ramón de Torres (1847-1918) is a practically unknown forger, even in his native country of Spain. After some brief biographical notes, we will present a summary of the research steps that revealed his overall production of forgeries and allowed us to assign to him some Cuban forgeries, most of which have already been identified and described.

Born in Estepona (Málaga), he grew up in Italy where he learned the trade of lithographer. The editor and philatelic dealer Elia Carlo Usigli (1812-1894) discovered his professional abilities, his talent, and his passion for stamp collecting. He mentored him and used him to produce illustrations that he sold to European editors of the nascent stamp journals and catalogs starting in the mid-1860s.

Usigli introduced him into the world of forgeries. They imitated and commercialized the issues of the old Italian states as well as municipal stamps.¹ Torres even published the first worldwide stamp catalog in Italian (Fig.1) and during a year, the first philatelic journal, La Posta Mondiale (Fig.2). After the total failure of a common project in 1873/74, the Spaniard was forced to

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 1)

leave Italy forever. He installed himself in Barcelona as a philatelic dealer and continued his work therein. In 1879 he published his *Álbum de sellos* (Stamp Album) which also served as an illustrated catalog with more than 1,200 of his illustrations (Figs. 3 & 4). After an agitated lifetime this "errant cavalier" started withdrawing from his philatelic and forgery activities towards the beginning of the 20th Century.

Course of the investigation

Reviewing all of the available philatelic journals of the 19th Century, I realized that most of them not



Figs. 5-10. Example of "private copies" that were sold as part of stamp packets

only showed the same denominations of the illustrated stamps, which already defied the rules of probability, but additionally, they were identical even in their most minute details which pointed to a common origin. Experts in the field pointed to Jean-Baptiste Moens, Belgian philatelic dealer and editor of the journal *Le Timbre Poste*, who was considered by most on this side of the world as the Father of Philately.

Following this trail, I came upon the fact already mentioned above in the introduction that Torres, with

Victoria.—We annex a cut of the new two penny value which we described last month. It is the same which figured in the latest number of the *Timbre Poste*, and would be excellent were it not for the eccentric substitution of a "D" for the "T" in the word Victoria. M. Moens explains this by assuring us that his engraver was suffering at the time from a severe cold in the head.



Fig. 11. A probable intended "eccentric substitution" rationalized as the result of a sick engraver.

the help of his mentor and, later, on his own, had produced with the lithograph stones of his consigned illustrations his "minor forgeries." They were collateral proofs and "private copies" resulting from his consigned work as philatelic illustrator that metamorphosed into forgeries when they were placed in the philatelic market within stamp packages (Figs.5-10).²

In many of these illustrations, I was able to find "errors" that at first appeared to be accidental. In some cases, these had already been discovered, publicly denounced, and some even corrected (Fig.11). Moreover, being illustrations, some errors here and there were not very significant. However, within the illustrations of the rural stamps of Russia, those called *zemstvo*, the percentage of forgeries was as high as 50% and that the errors and/or "jokes" also appeared in the corresponding forgeries that I was finding. I realized that such was not the result of accidental flaws, but rather that those errors and/or jokes were deliberate.³

I also discovered another facet of his activity: his "fantastic" work—stamps that could be classified somewhere between forgeries, jokes, or fantasies.⁴

When I discovered his collaboration with Swiss forger François Fournier, I realized that his outlandish activities were not limited to the realm of stamps, but also extended into the field of cancellations.⁵ The mixture of his fantasy creations, the errors and his forged cancellations, also invented or erroneous, eventually led to discovery of his forgeries of Argentina, Australia, and Italy.⁶

The way of understanding his work as a forger is undoubtedly completely contrary to the norm. There are forgers that have produced fantasy or bogus stamps as they are known in the Anglo-Saxon world. There are others that have produced jokes or mocks, but I only know one that in his limited scope of operations also intentionally included a few errors in a few of his forgeries - the Japanese Kishei Madai, sometimes erroneously called Kamigata.

However, the only one that operated in all of these realms and others at the same time was Plácido Ramón de Torres. His *modus operandi* is unique worldwide.

The revealing cancellation

The key to detecting many of the Torres forgeries was the existence of a peculiar and obviously fake cancellation, applied to some examples of the Torres forgeries of Buenos Aires, the so named “barquitos” (“small boats,” Fig.12).⁷ It is the cancellation [CORREOS; 7.1.66; II-III] that can be seen in some of said forgeries and can therefore be attributed to him. Note, in many cases, the year in the cancellation seems to be “60” due to the poor definition of the last digit. The “6” of the last digit is not closed and



Figs. 12 & 13. A telltale cancellation

can be easily be confused with a “0”. This cancellation has already been documented on forged stamps of about twenty countries, not all Spanish-speaking countries where the use of this cancellation would have been justified, among them Jamaica (Fig.13) and the old German states.

Torres and Cuba

Contrary to what I was able to detect with respect to the issues of the Philippines, where we found a great number of his minor forgeries within the 13 illustrations of his Álbum, as demonstrated in a recent article published together with the specialist in Philippines forgeries, Nigel Gooding. In Cuba's case, I have been unable to find any minor forgeries within his 23 illustrations. I have also not been able to find any of his errors among his additional illustrations prepared for other editors. We only observed a nice error-joke in a Puerto Rico illustration that he produced for the German catalog Moschkau (Fig.14), a precursor of the later Senf catalog.⁸



Fig. 14.

The 1862 Issue

Among the forgeries of this issue we note a type that bears in all of its varieties, both Spanish as well as Cuban, the already noted “CORREOS” cancellation.

The sad face of Queen Isabel is the most notable characteristic of this set of forgeries which will simi-



Figs. 15 & 16. Genuine and forgery

larly be found in some of the forgeries of the 1864 and 1866 issues in which the facial expression of the Queen is notably languid and sad (Fig. 15, genuine; Fig. 16, Torres forgery).

Other than the 1/4 Real denomination, none of the other four denominations that were issued in Spain were issued for use in Cuba. Torres does not appear to have known this fact when he produced his Álbum because he reserved space in it for all of denominations issued for Spain. He also made a mistake in reserving two spaces for the lowest denomination for which he showed an illustration. Although we are



Figs. 17 & 18. The green and blue forgeries are often considered proofs. Fig. 19 (upper right). The 2 Reales forgery exhibits a Torres “joke” as seen in the Fig. 20. enlargement: R8 rather than Rs.

pretty sure that they existed, I cannot show any corresponding minor forgeries.

We can also certify the existence of examples of the same denomination in different colors and possibly on different color papers. For example, there is a 1/4 Real printed in black on white paper and the 1 Real value in two colors-blue and green (Figs. 17 & 18). Some consider these forgeries as proofs and others consider them as fantasies. Some examples of the 2 Reales exhibit one of the typical jokes (Fig. 19) of the author. The abbreviation of Reales shows an “8” instead of an “S”, so that it reads “R8” instead of “Rs” (Fig. 20).

The 1864/66/67 Issues

In unison with the scheme of issues of the metropolis, the design is changed for the 1864 issue that two years earlier is only issued as a single 1/4 Real stamp

which would in turn be surcharged with a “66” two years later. At the beginning of 1866 four new stamps of the same design were issued, now with the denominations 5, 10, 20, and 40 “céntimos de Escudo” followed by the year date and still imperforate as in the previous issues. This stamp issue would be replaced the next year with a new one with the year updated and perforated for the first time.



Figs. 31-33.

Torres introduced in the 1 Real stamp (PLATA instead of PLATA, Fig. 29) and in the 2 Reales stamp (inverted S in RS, Fig. 30).

The 1864 Stamp Surcharged “66”

The ¼ Real stamp with the “66” surcharge (Fig. 31) was also forged by Torres. It is odd that even though the illustration in his Álbum was a very fine imitation (Fig. 32), like all of his Cuban ones, no example of this minor forgery has been found. The forged sample shown in Figure 33 presents the same characteristics that are seen in the forgeries of the 1864, 1866, and 1867 issues of Cuba that will be analyzed later.



Figs. 21 & 22. Genuine and forgery

Forgeries of the 1864 Cuba and Antilles Issues

Fig. 21 shows a genuine copy of the 1864 ¼ Real stamp issued for Cuba and Fig. 22 shows a Torres forgery. Besides the tone of the stamp, note the difference in the facial expression of the queen in both stamps. Also note the differences in the hairdo, the eyebrow, and the shading of the neck of the queen.

The 1864 Antilles Stamps

Figures 23 to 25 show the genuine 1864 Antilles stamps and Figures 26 to 28 show the corresponding Torres forgeries. Again, note the differences in the facial expression of the queen, the hair, eyebrow, and shading of the neck between the genuine and forged stamps. Furthermore, note the intentional errors that



Figs. 34 & 35

The 1866 and 1867 Issues

The 1866 (Fig. 34) and 1867 (Fig.35) issues do not show a redesigned stamp, just the same design with a change in the denominations, now in “céntimos” of an Escudo and a change of the year designation. The difference between the two issues is just that the 1866 issue is imperforate and the 1867 is perforated, a process that started being used in Spain already in 1865.

The forgeries of these issues follow the same pattern as those of the preceding issues: the facial expression of the queen is sadder than in the genuine stamps, the appearance of the hair is different, the ornaments surrounding the head of the queen are more irregular, and the letters and numbers of the top and bottom cartouches are also more irregular and with the numbers of the year dates bunched closer together.



Figs. 23-30. The top three stamps are genuine and can be compared to the bottom three forgeries



Fig. 36. Genuine stamp on the left

Additionally, the identical measurement of the forgeries of both issues of 23 x 19.25 mm. clearly separates them from the genuine stamps which measure 22 x 19 mm.

In the 1866 issues we find a 20c value in a light green color rather than the genuine bluish green of the genuine stamps and another 20c stamp in the lilac color of the 5c value (Fig. 36). In the 1867 issues we find 20c and 40c values with different color shades than those of the genuine stamps (Fig. 37).



Fig. 37. Genuine stamps at left and forgeries at right for both values

The 1870 Issue

It is strange that for this issue (Fig. 38) we have only been able to identify one Torres forgery, the 40c rose value. It is shown at the right in Figure 39 together with a genuine copy of the stamp in the center



Fig. 38. Genuine 1870 issue (above).

Fig. 39. Torres forgery on the right, a genuine stamp in the middle and a Spiro forgery at the extreme left for comparison. The cancellation on the right is classic Torres and adorns forgeries of more than 20 countries.

and a Spiro forgery at the extreme left. Like the Spiro brothers, Torres didn't forge isolated stamps in an issue, but rather the entire set, except in the case of his minor forgeries. The almost illegible top inscription "CORREOS" and the missing engraver's initials [EJ] below the effigy distinguish his forgery from those of Spiro, Seguí, and some others of poorer quality.

Evidence that we are dealing with a Torres forgery is provided by the cancellation that was applied to the stamp which is fairly visible in the photo. It is a

"VF" cancellation, so named after the two letters VF placed in the center of the circle. This cancellation usually shows two words: the first one is only partially decipherable in some examples [...TII], the second word is "DOCIWL" and has no meaning in any language to my knowledge. A bold period along the margin opposite the two words completes this rare and attractive invented cancellation.

This cancellation appears in Torres forgeries of more than 20 countries and has been ascribed to him from forgeries from Argentina and Honduras that have been positively identified as his work.⁹

Summary

I am sure that eventually after the publication of this article, some philatelists will discover other "errors" and "jokes" in the Torres forgeries that are yet to be discovered.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Ernesto Cuesta who had faith in and supported my research project and prompted me to explore the Torres forgeries of Cuba. He also provided me with images of all of his collection of Cuban forgeries for the study. The same applies to Evert Klaseboer, author of the CD-ROM-Catalogue and its illustrations. It was he who started listing, ordering, and documenting the various cancellations applied to forgeries on a worldwide basis.

English translation by Ernesto Cuesta

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