PHILATELIC AS A SPECIAL HISTORICAL DISCIPLINE (ON THE EXAMPLES PRODUCTION AND USE OF STAMPS DURING THE UKRAINIAN REVOLUTION OF 1917–1921)

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Summary. The article analyzes the philatelic traditions during the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921. The emphasis is placed on the high artistic performance of changeable banknotes in the form of stamps – shahiv in the Ukrainian People's Republic. The peculiarities of the use of Austrian postage stamps in the Western Ukrainian People's Republic are analyzed.

Keywords: philately, stamp, shahivka, Ukrainian revolution.

On March 1, 1918, the Central Rada passed a law according to which the national currency of the Ukrainian People's Republic became the hryvnia, which was equal to half a ruble and divided into 100 shachs. The situation on the market of exchangeable banknotes remained a painful issue of money circulation. In solving it, the Russian experience of the First World War was used. On April 18, 1918, the issue of stamps of 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 shachs, which had the appearance of postage stamps, began in Kyiv. They were issued on thick paper in the Kyiv printing house of the Kulzhenko brothers. The total amount of emissions of shachs was 16 014 575 rubles [8, p. 244]. The etymology of the name «shach» has its roots in the Lithuanian-Polish era. Mykhailo Hrushevsky was the one who contributed greatly to receiving this name.

Philatelic literature and various catalogs often confirm that money stamps were also issued in Yukhim Fesenko's printing house in Odessa, but Vyacheslav Angolenko, based on a study of archival documents, indicates that only State Treasury signs were printed in Odessa, unlike exchange stamps. Toothed money stamps were printed on thin cardboard and were without glue. On the back, in a frame of one or two lines, there was a trident and the inscription «Circulates alongside with a ringing coin». The stamps of Antin Sereda contain an image of a trident against the background of the sun (10 shachs) and a peasant with a scythe (20 steps). The author of the stamps of the next three denominations was Georgy Narbut. The central element of the stamp with a face value of 30 shachs is a girl's head in a wreath (allegory «Young Ukraine»), the stamp with 40 shachs contains a
trident framed with floral ornaments and two crossed mail horns in the lower right corner. On the 50 shachs stamp, G. Narbut also used a floral ornament and two crossed mail horns – this time in its upper part. On all five stamps there was an inscription «Ukrainian People's Republic» [5].

In terms of artistic performance of the first brands of the UPR – «shachs» – are unusual and even today they continue to evoke the enthusiasm of experts due to the richness of artistic content and ingenious simplicity and concise performance at the same time, combining a strict drawing and classic means of composition, which should ideally be inherent in postage stamps. This is not surprising, because the authors of those stamps were such prominent Ukrainian graphic artists of the time as Georgy Narbut, Antin Sereda, Leonid Oboznenko, Ivan Mozalevsky, Mykhailo Boychuk, Hryhoriy Zolotov, Oleksiy Krasovsky, Antin Prykhodko, Leonid Ovsyannikov and a number of others to date, lesser-known or even completely unknown authors. The names of graphic artists Georgy Narbut and his student Antin Sereda prove that the Central Rada government took the issue of issuing the first postage stamps with due care and wanted them to have not only postage but also artistic value.

Unfortunately, the stamps saved during the evacuation of the UPR government and restored in the Lviv Museum of NTSh, where they were kept, were destroyed in «Liberated» Lviv by order of Soviet officials on ideology and culture. But before the war, Lviv artists organized an art exhibition in 1932, the catalog of which preserved almost the only printed evidence made in the field of Ukrainian mail during the Liberation War of 1917–1921 [3, p. 35].

The history of the origin of this catalog is dramatic. After the defeat of the liberation struggle and the evacuation of the Government of the Ukrainian People’s Republic abroad (to Tarnów), the archive of the Expedition for Procurement of Government Papers, which provided the printing of Ukrainian money and postal leader Mykola Danylchenko. For some time the materials of the expedition were stored in Tarnów, where in the winter of 1926 they leaked as a result of water damage. On behalf of a Lviv artist, former member of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Central Council and comrade Minister under the Directory Peter Holodny in February 1928 Pavlo Kozhun (Narbut’s student and graphic artist, who saved his life by fleeing with Directory’s military abroad and organized the Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists in 1931) transported them to the Museum of Shevchenko Scientific Society in Lviv, where they were transferred as a deposit. Here graphic works of outstanding Ukrainian artists – authors of Ukrainian postage stamps – were restored, and in 1932 the first and last time was exhibited at an art exhibition in Lviv. From this catalog, an excerpt from which is given below, we learn about the authors of issued and unpublished postal and fiscal stamps.

George Narbut. Postal stamps: 10 shachs, 30 shachs, 50 shachs, 40 shachs. A stamp for tobacco sale for 10 hryvnias. A stamp for the postman for 30 shachs.

Mikhail Boychuk. Theatrical stamp for 2 hryvnias.


3 hryvnias. 4 hryvnias. 10 shachs.


Leonid Oboznenko. Postal stamp for 20 hryvnias. Postal stamp for 50 shachs.
Judicial stamp for 1 carbovanets.
Antin Prikhodko. Stamp for 50 shachs.
Boris Romanovsky. Stamp for 20 shachs.
L. Rozov. Postal stamps: 30 shachs, 50 shachs, stamp for 3 carbovanets.
Antin Sereda. Postal stamps: 10 shachs, 20 shachs.
Unknown authors. Consular stamp: 20 steps. Postal stamps: 15 shachs, 80 shachs 2 hrynia. 50 shachs. 2 shachs. 4 shachs 5 shachs. Consular stamp:5 karbovanets [3, p. 36].

At first glance, it might seem that postal stamps are no different from money stamps. However, it is worth holding them in your hands to see these differences, even with the naked eye. In particular, money stamps were printed on thin cardboard and on the reverse side in a frame of two or one line there were small images of the trident and the inscription: «Circulates along with the ringing coin», which is not on the shachs. In addition, all money stamps were jagged, while postal ones were not. However, in the philatelic literature you can find information that about 400 of the first 400 sheets of postage stamps were jagged. However, except for references to some philatelists, this version is not documented. It is also impossible to exclude unofficial punching of sheets in some places by postmen themselves. There is very little information on the total circulation of postal stamps issued even in the year of their centenary – it is obvious only that their number was in the millions. Therefore, this area still needs thorough research. Despite being put into circulation, they could not meet all the postal needs of the newly independent state. Given this, the post and telegraph decided to «impose the emblem of the Ukrainian State» on Russian stamps. In general, the withdrawal of royal stamps from circulation was extended until September 30, 1918 [5].

Ukrainian classical philately owes first of all its recognition to unsurpassed figures from the times of the Ukrainian State – Ukrainian reprints of Russian postage stamps by printing on them the national emblem of Ukraine – the trident. The decision to print the state emblem of Ukraine on Russian postage stamps, the stocks of which in Ukraine remained significant, was made by the Ukrainian Post Office in August 1918. Reprints were conditioned by the need to defend oneself from illegal sales and the spread of Russian postal stamps on the territory of Ukraine. Ukrainian foreign researcher and director Yevhen Virovij talks about different ways of distributing such postal collections. «When the Romanians occupied Bessarabia, the officials of the post offices received their salaries from their superiors a few months in advance ... in Russian postage stamps because of the lack of cash. These stamps have been illegally sold in Ukraine, even at a reduced price», – the author said [2].

Instead, the Ukrainian stamp impressed the participants with its level of performance. Heinrich Keller, a well-known German philatelist and owner of a popular European philatelic trading company from Berlin, spoke succinctly and clearly about Ukrainian philatelic material, which he became acquainted with in the course of his research, «Ukraine is gold». A well-known German philatelist-researcher
of «Ukraine», doctor of medicine Rudolf Seichter, agreed with him. After all, many Germans, by virtue of their profession or as part of German or Austrian troops on the Eastern Front, were themselves participants and eyewitnesses to the publication of the first postal stamps in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian philatelic region was very prolific and issued many postage stamps, so this from a small interest grew into a hobby, which resulted in numerous publications of German professional collections in special philatelic magazines.

Under such circumstances, on November 19, 1919, a conference of philatelists-collectors of «Ukraine» was held in Berlin, which was attended by famous collectors. The jubilee celebrations ended up with the great and very successful activity of the Union of Philatelists of «Ukraine» in Germany for half a century.

In 1966, German researchers of postage stamps published a specialized catalog «Ukraine» to which, due to ideological circumstances, it was not possible to connect Soviet collectors. Due to the complete closure of the USSR as a source of information, the prospect of reasonable coverage of various productions in the USSR from philatelic «Ukraine» was also problematic. Fedor Chuchin's catalog from 1927 was compiled on the basis of archival philatelic material, moreover, it was not checked and supplemented on the basis of new knowledge and research, it did not have sufficient rating.

The latest edition of R. Seichter's specialized catalog «Ukraine» was expanded and supplemented by postal issues of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic, Carpathian Ukraine, and the post office of Transcarpathian Ukraine. R. Seichter's concept, depicted in his preface to this catalog, was that «The east of Ukraine together with the West and Carpathian Ukraine due to their common history exist in the catalogs as one philatelic whole» [3, p. 90].

R. Seichter's unique collection was put up for auction in Zurich on October 8–15, 1995. It was compiled of more than 80 albums, which were displayed on the shelves of the hotel «International» and included the following materials: 1) Ukrainianized reprints (Kharkiv (4 albums), Katerynoslav (2 albums), Kyiv (9 albums), Odesa (6) albums), Podillya (5 albums), Poltava (1 album) – in total 27 albums; 2) history of mail, which was presented by more than 1,400 storage units in 23 albums (postal envelopes and cards, used and unused postal stationery, registered and censored military mail, etc.); 3) general collection of special (local) postal issues of 1918 (3 albums); 4) duplicates, special (local) collections, issues of Petliura, Swedish republics, etc. (27 albums). The above list does not fully reflect this truly amazing collection-heritage-museum of the history of Ukrainian post and philately. The starting price of R. Seichter's collection was 280,000 Swiss francs, but then it was not sold as a whole, and later sold in parts. The collection of the Polish-born philatelist Zbigniew Mikulska was also soon put up for auction and sold in parts. Lots from the philatelic heritage of Western Ukraine enjoyed considerable popularity [3, p. 92].

Postage stamps of the Western Ukrainian state appeared only at the end of 1918 due to the events of the Polish-Ukrainian war. In the postal circulation on the territory of the Western Ukraine there were postage stamps, as in these departments remained Austrian stamps, and in the case of the situation in the UPR due to isolation ZUNR fronts, not was threats link on her territory. The postal circulation in the territory of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic was mainly
carried out with Austrian postage stamps, as many Austrian postage stamps remained in the post offices, and unlike the situation in the Ukrainian People's Republic due to the isolation of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic by fronts, there was no threat of sending in Austrian postage stamps by another state. Austrian postage stamps by another state. Therefore, the government was in no hurry to take on the costly task of designing and printing its own postage stamps or forms or at least Ukrainianization of their Austrian ones with the help of reprinting, or issuing their own postage handstamps [4; 11].

By comparative analysis of identified sources on the history of philately in the Western Ukraine, modern researchers Volodymyr Velykochy and Serhiy Adamovych found that during the existence of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic its authorities managed to issue 8 stamps: 6 during the first period (state) and 2 during the second so-called «emigration»). In particular, from November 1918 to July 1919 he following stamps were issued:

– one «Lviv» issue (place of publication – Lviv. The exact number of stamps produced is not set available);
– two «Kolomyia» issues (place of publication – Kolomyia. Based on the data of I. Chernyavsky, the total number of stamps of this issue was: 27756 pieces and 15 thousand special recommendation stamps);
– three «Stanislaviv» issues (place of publication – Stanislaviv. Their total number, based on data from A. Chyhyrynets, was 76) [9];
– two Viennese issues of stamps fall on the emigration period of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (July 1919).

That is, they were not in circulation in Ukraine. Regarding the availability in circulation of large denominations of Viennese issue among Western Ukrainian researchers of postal issues views diverge (2, 3, 4 and 10 crown) [1, c. 17]. Instead, there is a version that while in exile in the Polish city of Tarnow, the UPR government decided on August 27, 1920 to withdraw from circulation all previous issues of stamps used in Ukraine, replacing them with a new 14-stamp series costing from 1 to 200 hryvnia. It is known that projects of stamps for 2, 3, 30, 50, 80 and 200 hryvnias are performed by artist Mykola Ivasyuk. Since this issue was printed in the printing house of the Vienna Institute of Military Geography, it became known as the «Vienna Series» [5].

Researcher Ivan Monolatiy in one of the monographs on the history of Kolomyia admits that two people contributed to this necessary and at the same time patriotic actions – a manager of the mail Mykola Ivasyuk and the head of a district court, a philatelist Ivan Chernyavsky [9], who in December 1918 with the support of the local military administration carried out the print «Ukr. N.R.» on former Austrian stamps. In particular, this need arose due to a lack of postal stamps for 5 and 10 sotykys (gelers), which were used to pay for the wholesale distribution of newspapers and publications in Kolomyia and throughout the territory of Pokuttia. Separately for sending registered letters decided to print special new stamps of 30 sotykys. Organizational and technical side of this case started on December 3, continued on December 5–11, and already on December 12 ended with the beginning of public use of «Kolomyia stamps» in postal departures on the territory of the Kolomyia military district [7, p. 168].
The so-called «reprints» of Austrian postage stamps in some regions (for example, the Chortkiv local reprint of Austrian postage stamps from 3 gelers to 2 crowns and surcharges for 5 and 10 gelers) were unofficial and were not identified in European philatelic catalogs. In the wake of the national upsurge, some post offices ukrainianized Austrian stamps on their own initiative, printing Galician emblems on them. After the proclamation of the Act of Unification, the trident as a coat of arms of Unified Ukraine and other national symbols were spontaneously printed on Austrian stamps. These issues did not have legal status. Finally, in the late 1930’s, European philatelic catalogs represented only Lviv, Kolomyia, Stanislav and Vienna postal reprints as those of Western Ukraine [6].

Summing up the review, it should be noted about the interesting philatelic traditions of the period of the Ukrainian revolution of 1917–1921. The stamp was used not only as a means of payment for postal services, but also as a currency. Professional and interesting design of Ukrainian «shachs», Ukrainian-language prints and patriotic symbols on Austrian postage stamps in the Western Ukraine, undoubtedly, were a manifestation of Ukrainian national consciousness and another step in the establishment of important state attributes.

References: