

A Catalog of the Perfins of

BULGARIA

by **Vojtech Maxa**

A collection of Bulgarian Perfins is a small one--a mere twelve dies. But thanks to a very devoted collector of them, Mr. Ljuben Kotchov of Sofia, we know a lot about Bulgarian Perfins.

Perfins were introduced in Bulgaria in 1901 and the first ones will be found on the Small Lion Set (Scott #28-37). According to research done by Mr. D. N. Mintchev of Sofia, the use of Perfins was officially authorized by the Bulgarian Post Office.

The Gazette of the Control Department of the Post Office on February 6, 1901, contains an announcement that the Bulgarian National Bank and its branches throughout the country will use stamps perforated with the initials БНБ. The item further states that these stamps will be affixed to envelopes bearing the bank's imprint and that stamps so perforated cannot be used on postal items not bearing the bank's imprint. Indeed, letters carrying the perforated stamps but not the bank's corner card are, according to the Gazette, to be treated as if "without stamps" and handled accordingly. A sample of the perforated stamp was attached to each copy of the Gazette sent to the postmasters so they could easily identify the real thing.

A similar announcement was published in the same Gazette two years later, on December 12, 1902. This time it said that the Commercial Bank of Sofia will use stamps perforated with the letters ТБС and that the same perforation will also appear on stamps used by the bank's branch in the Danube river port of Ruse. Again a sample was attached along with a reminder that the stamps were valid for postage only on letters bearing the bank's return card. The same pattern was also used on stamps at the bank's branches at Burgas, Lom, Plovdiv, Varna, and other cities--but these branches presumably were opened after the Gazette announcement.

Further still, the Gazette on April 26, 1904, noted that the ТБС pattern would be used also by the Commercial Society of Sofia.

These three documents are very important. They confirm that at least in the first years of the 20th century each Bulgarian Perfin was officially sanctioned by the Post Office. Further, it indicates that postal clerks were under instructions to watch for misuse of the Perfins and to ensure that letters indicating illegal use of the Perfins be treated as postage-due mail.

Earliest Bulgarian Pattern Not "Authorized"



A Postscript by Vojtech Maxa

I wrote this article on Bulgarian Perfins before I had the chance to examine a copy of the P.L. Perfin on a postal card dated May 20, 1894.

The card, owned by Mrs. Barbara Kloss, proves that Perfins were used in Bulgaria in 1894 and perhaps even earlier. But I still think that the Gazette of the Control Department of the Bulgarian Post Office, which I cite, confirms that the use of Perfins was officially authorized only on February 6, 1901.

Here's what probably happened.

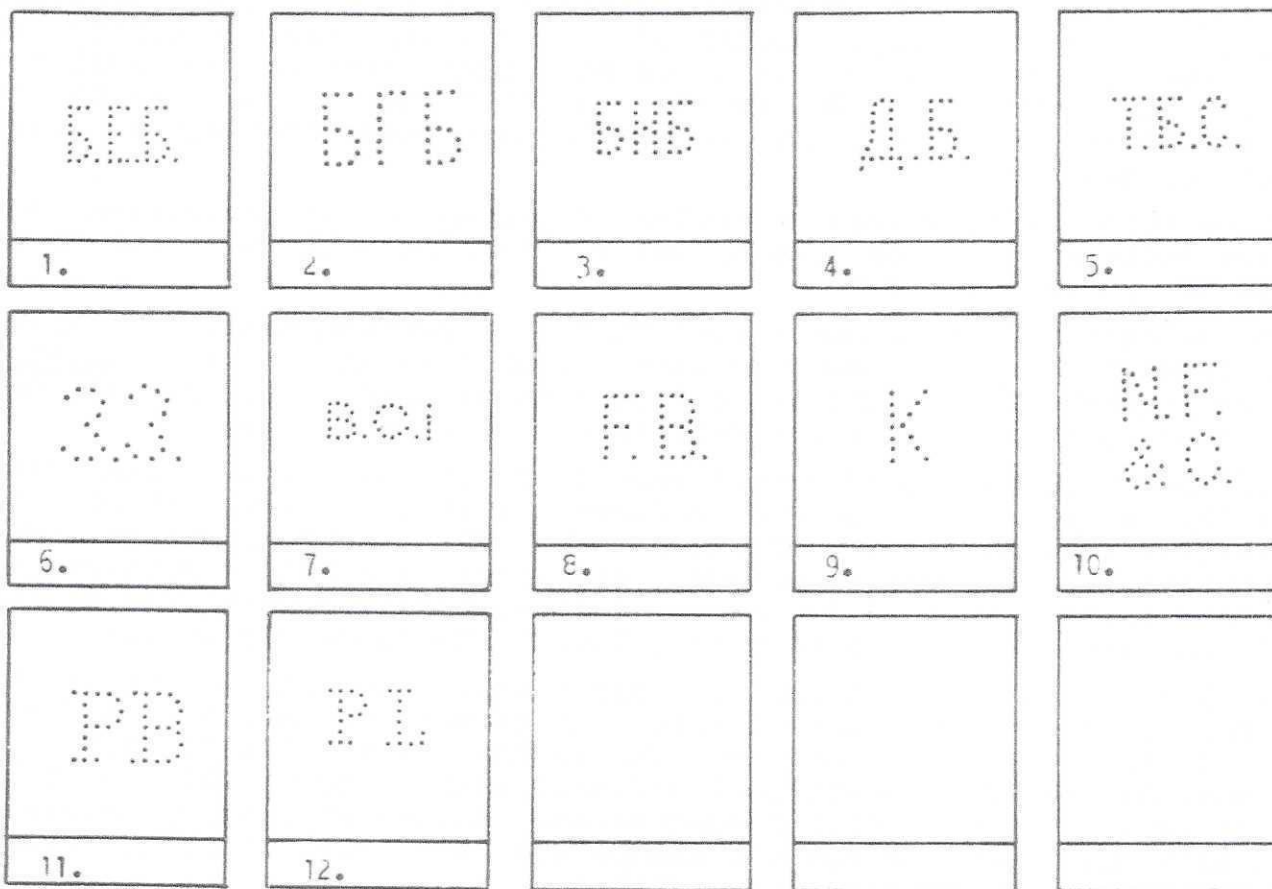
Dr. Paul Leverkus was a German scientist who served as Director of the Institute of Natural Science and of the Library of the Bulgarian Ruler Count Alexander Battenburg. I presume that Dr. Leverkus brought with him from Germany a perforator with his personal initials, P.L. His high post at the Bulgarian Court (the cancel on the card reads "Palace Sophia") certainly allowed him to use his perfinned stamps without an official sanction.

I suspect he used his gadget as some sort of fashionable whim and not as a result of any practical need. There would have been little fear that his stamps and stationery would be misused by his subordinates.

It is possible that Dr. Leverkus's machine is what inspired the use of Perfins by the Bulgarian National Bank. For the bank it was not a whim. They had a real need to protect their postage.

To sum up: Dr. Leverkus's Perfin must be called the first Bulgarian Perfin used, but it was the Perfin of a privileged person serving the Royal Court. The БНБ Perfin, used by the Bulgarian National Bank, is the first officially authorized Perfin.

I hope to be able to add further details to this part of the story as I work with those in Bulgaria who collect Perfins.



THE PERFINs OF BULGARIA

1. Central Bank of Bulgaria, Sofia
2. General Bank of Bulgaria, Sofia
3. National Bank of Bulgaria, Sofia
- 4.
5. Bulgarian Commercial Bank "Unity," Sofia
6. Agricultural Cooperatives, Sofia
7. Banca Commerciale Italiana, Sofia
8. Banque Franco-Belge, Sofia
9. "Kurier" Agency, Sofia
- 10.
11. Bank of Prague, Sofia
12. Paul Leverkusn, Sofia

Research has not yet uncovered whether this practice continued. Obviously with the small number of firms using Perfins during the early part of the century it would have been practical for such controls to be exercised. But as the volume of mail grew during the years 1930 to 1950, such control would have been impossible from a practical point of view.

It is worth noting that a letter rejected by the Bulgarian Post Office because it showed illegal use of Perfins would be a gem in any Bulgarian cover collection.

The Bulgarian Perfins don't pose much of a problem thanks to extensive research. A list was published some time ago in the Bulletin, and new information is uncovered from time to time. But all the dies have been identified with the exception of Patterns 4 and 10.

All the Bulgarian perforators seem to be of the single head type, with the exception of the P.B. pattern (Bank of Prague) which was definitely a double head perforator. the BFB (Bulgarian General Bank) perforator was not working properly and since the 1920's produced incomplete Perfins. the 3.3. pattern (Agricultural Cooperatives Society of Sofia) seems to be the work of a locally produced perforator.

The BFB Perfin can be found on 1922 postage due stamps and the BHB pattern is known on official stamps. In my personal collection I have the 1,2, and 3 leva 1922 postage due stamps (Scott J34-36) with the BFB pattern and the 5 leva 1952 official stamp (Scott 726) with the BHB pattern. A check with a specialized Bulgarian catalog revealed that both the 1922 postage due stamps and the 1952 official stamps could be used as regular postage stamps.

In terms of scarceness, the BHB and the BFB patterns are the most common. The BEE, 3.3., and the N.F./& C. patterns are the rarest.

One can enlarge a basic collection of Bulgarian Perfins by including copies of the BHB, the TEC, and the BFB Perfins postmarked in the various towns where the banks had branches. These include Burgas, Gabrovo, Lom, Plewen, Plovdiv, Ruse, Svistov, Trnovo, and others.

The use of Perfins in Bulgaria seems to have ended about 1952. My last Bulgarian stamp with a Perfin is the 16 st Kolarov Dam stamp issued just after the currency reform of May 12, 1952. It bears the BHB Perfin.

If you can help add another chapter to this story of Bulgarian Perfins, please write me at Antoninska 8, Praha 170 00, Czechoslovakia.