The Bavaria No. 1 Tête-Bêches

By Dr. Roberto M. Rosende

Bavaria, the land of the enchanted castles, was the first of the Old German States to issue postage stamps to prepay mail. Located in the southern part of Germany with the city of Munich as its capital, Bavaria became part of the German Empire in 1870, and continued issuing its own stamps until April 1, 1920, when its postal system was absorbed by the German Reichspost.

Under the rule of King Maximilian II (1848-1864), the famous 1 kreuzer black went on sale on November 1, 1849. That was All Saints Day, a church holy day when all post offices were closed. Therefore, November 2 is accepted as the earliest day of usage for this stamp. The royal order of October 24, 1848, indicated that from that day all letters should bear stamps, to be affixed in the upper left corner.

The engraving of this popular stamp was done by Franz Max Josef Seitz, who included the initial of his name (S) as part of the design. It can be seen in the lower right-hand corner of the inner frame. The printing was done by typography at the Universitats-druckerei (University Press) of Munich on a white, hand-made, medium to hard paper. Of the almost 850,000 stamps printed, first in sheets of 180, and later in sheets of 90 arranged in ten horizontal lines of nine, about 725,000 were sold. The first printing was in deep black, and the canceling devices also used black ink. Since the cancellations were hard to see, people started reusing the stamps.

The second printing was in gray-black, the impressions

being slightly less sharp, but the cancellations were more visible against the lighter background.

The 1 kreuzer black, used on local letters and printed matter, had a fairly short life since its color was changed to pink in 1851. Even so, this issue contains the most fascinating error in all of "Old German Philately."

The Tête-Bêches

Three examples of a tête-bêche are known to exist, all within large mint blocks, with all the inverted stamps located in the first vertical row of the sheet next to the white left-hand margin. Joseph de Hesselle, a student of this stamp, explains how this happened in his book *Der Schwarze Einser (The Black One,* Munich, 1949):
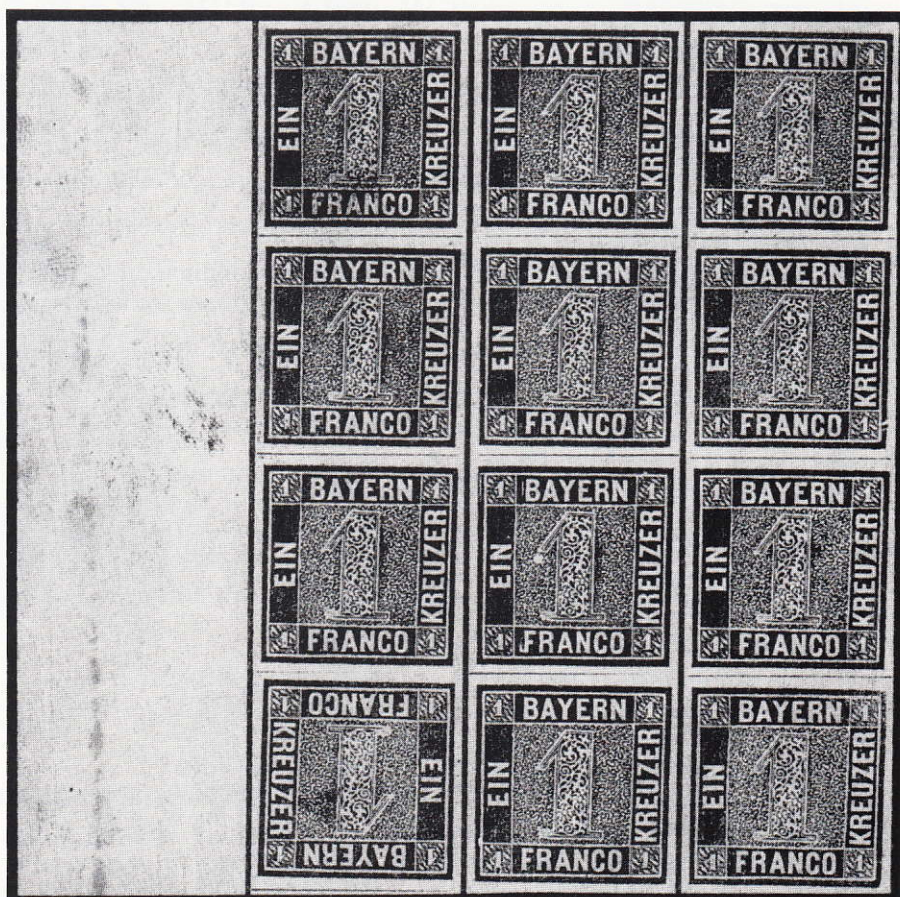

Figure 1. Boker tête-bêche.

"When too many clichés are pressed together inside a printer's frame and for whatever reason a loosening occurs, then it is usually the ones at the margins which fall out. This was the case here and when replaced they were positioned inverted. In any case, they were quickly discovered and corrected."

De Hesselle was sure that a good number of these tête-bêches, even when recognized, were cut apart, since no interest existed in these items at that time.

The Boker Tête-Bêche

One of these tête-bêches was sold by the firm of Heinrich Köhler during the third auction (March 15, 1986) of the John R. Boker collection of Old German States (see Figure 1). It can be traced back to Mr. Koch, a well-known German collector at the turn of this century, and it was auctioned by Gilbert & Köhler in Paris in 1908. It was illustrated as a block of six instead of the actual block of 12 (three

by four) in which the inverted position is located as the first stamp in the fourth horizontal row. It became part of the Rothschild collection sold at the H. R. Harmer (London) sale of October 12-13, 1936, where it was described as "of the greatest rarity, grey-black and with two faint creases which do not touch the tete-beche stamp." Mr. Boker acquired it from the "Theodore Champion" collection.

The Ferrari-Lichtenstein Tête-Bêche

The second tête-bêche, for which The Philatelic Foundation issued Certificate No. 235,000, is also in a block of 12, but it shows the inverted stamp as the first in the second horizontal row (see Figure 2). It was in the collection of Count Ferrari, which was deeded to the German Reichspost Museum. After World War I, the French authorities sold all the Ferrari collections at public auctions, with the amount obtained being credited to the war reparation payments of the German Republic.

Figure 2. Ferrari-Lichtenstein tête-bêche, with PF certificate No. 235,000.

Reportedly this second tête-bêche was acquired by Alfred Lichtenstein as part of a whole collection of Bavaria the distinguished philatelist bought from another collector. It will be offered at an October sale of the Dale-Lichtenstein collection by the Harmers organization. As we expertized this piece, we noted the freshness and original gum.

The third tête-bêche has been in Switzerland in the collection of Johannes Elster for several decades and has not been shown publicly since the 1930's.

Soon after the appearance of the 1 kreuzer black, forgers started to produce copies, forcing the Bavarian Postal Department to use special paper into which a silk thread was introduced. The thread was used in the printing of

the other two values as well, the 3 kreuzer and 6 kreuzer of the first issue.

Usually the counterfeits are lithographed instead of typographed. They are easily detected because the paper is smooth and the design does not stand in relief as in typography. The paper is also a give-away. The original stamps were printed on a hand-made paper that feels fairly rough in contrast to the smoothness of the machine-made paper used in the counterfeits.

A Sperati Forgery

Of course, Jean de Sperati, the best and most famous of all forgers, could not resist the temptation to "reproduce" such a popular stamp. It is known that he made "die" proofs in black as well as used and unused reproductions. Three types called A, B and C exist, all made by photolithography. It is interesting to know that among the stamps confiscated by French authorities as he tried to send them to Portugal, and later used by the French in his trial, was a copy of the Bavaria 1 kreuzer black, mistakenly valued at 25,000 French francs by the expert Edmond Locard on January 4, 1944.

According to the monumental work on Sperati forgeries printed by the British Philatelic Association in 1955, Sperati used type C to produce copies of the tête-bêche and commonly sold them in London prior to 1940. He also produced vertical strips as well as horizontal pairs. These forgeries can be detected by a line joining the letters "U", "Z" and "E" of "KREUZER" and a hook-shaped flaw touching the top left of the letter "B" of "BAYERN." These characteristics (see The Philatelic Foundation's reference copy in Figure 3) are easily detectable when known. Of course, the three original copies of the famous Bavaria 1 kreuzer black tête-bêche do not have these flaws. ✣

Figure 3. Sperati tête-bêche forgery showing characteristic flaws.