

Modern Forgeries of Croatia 1941-1945

Philip J. Hughes

(Addendum 1 to the CD Croatia, Issues 1941-1945¹)

Introduction

Just before the major revision to the Manual of Croatia by Dr. Rommerskirchen was about to be published in 2004, I became aware of several new "proof discoveries" of the last issues of the NDH as well as one from the planned issues of 1945. On the word of a knowledgeable, long-time dealer in NDH philately who claimed that these originated from the archives of designer Otto Antonini and the recently deceased designer Ivo Režek, I included these in the update of the manual on CD. Over the past couple of years I have had time to further research these "proofs", and the results are not good. Consequently I am publishing my findings as this first addendum to the CD manual in order to update NDH collectors as to the current status of these items.

Michel Block 9

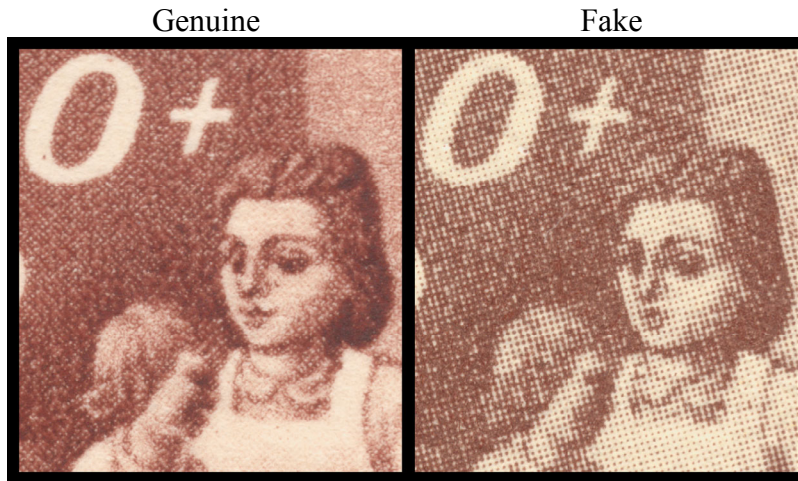
The first such "proofs" are of Michel Block 9, the semi-postal issue to aid Postal Workers. These are found imperforate, on different types of paper, and without the inscription that appears below the stamp on the block as issued. There were at least four types of paper used to create these items - a thick off-white, a normal off-white with an overlay of wide vertical brownish stripes, a heavy gray granite, and a very thick coarse white. In examining the paper under an ultra-violet (UV) lamp, it fluoresces. Paper produced during the war years of 1941-1945 does not have optical brighteners, and so does not fluoresce under UV. The stamp color is generally a brown, yellow-brown, or gray-brown; but one version on thick, coarse paper is a yellow-green. Examples of different colors on the different papers are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. So-Called "Proofs" of Michel Block 9



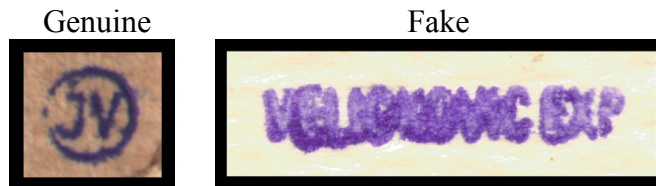
In looking at the stamps themselves, the printing shows coarseness in the design that is not present in the genuine block, which was printed using photogravure. As can be easily seen in Figure 2, the fake shows a definite coarse structure to the print, with large dots making up the design pattern. One must conclude from this that the so-called proofs are definitely fakes.

Figure 2. Michel Block 9 Comparison



Some of these fakes can be found with forged expert markings on the back. One such example discovered on a fake copy of Block 9 is that of "Veličković EXP". Jovan Veličković was a member of the Yugoslavian Association of Stamp Experts. A comparison of his genuine mark and the fake mark found on Block 9 is shown in Figure 3. It is possible that there are also proofs of the other stamps of this issue, Michel 173-176; but I have yet to see or hear of any such.

Figure 3. Comparison of Veličković Expert Marks



Michel 178

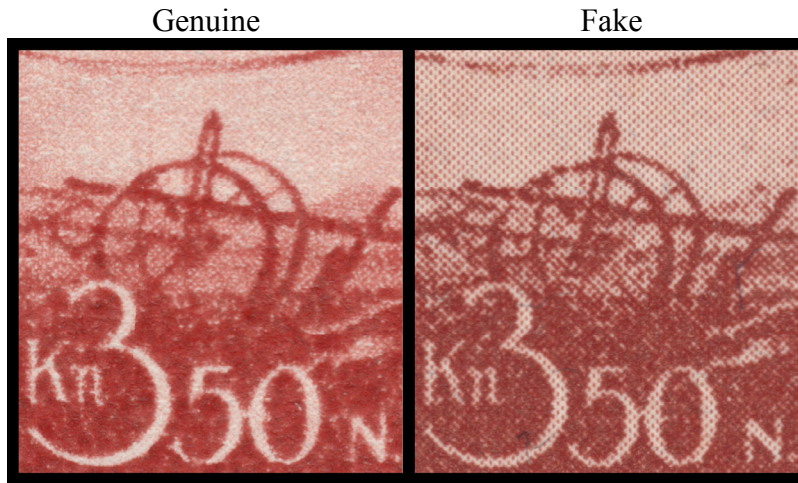
Similar fake proofs are found for the Labor Day stamp of 1945, Michel 178; these claimed to be from the archives of the stamp's designer, Otto Antonini. The fakes are found in brown-red, blue, pink, and yellow-green colors. Examples are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. So-Called "Proofs" of Michel 178



As with the fakes of Michel Block 9, there is a marked difference between the genuine stamp, which was printed using photogravure, and these fakes. A comparison of the two printings is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Michel 178 Comparison



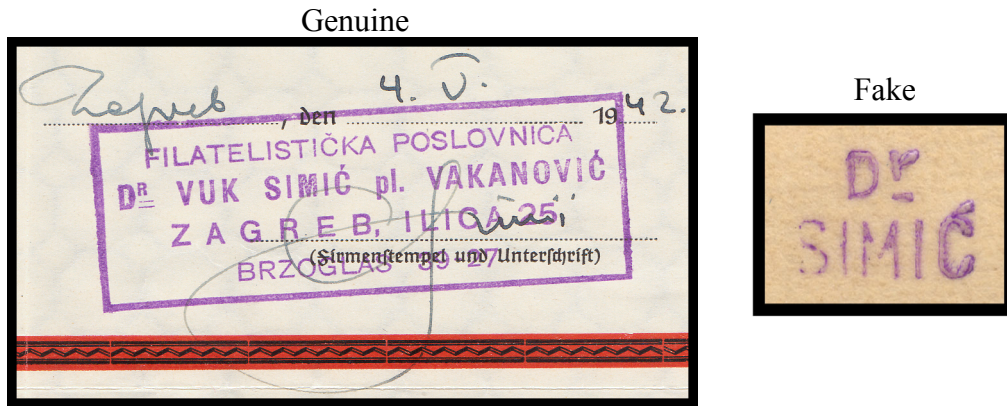
While most of these fakes are printed on paper that fluoresces under UV, some of them are quite deceptive in that they are printed on the back of common postcards from the NDH period to simulate printer's waste. However the coarseness of the printing is again proof that these are indeed fakes. Examples of two such fakes are shown in Figure 6, with the front and reverse of each piece illustrated.

Figure 6. Fakes on Postal Card Stock



As with the fakes of Michel Block 9, an attempt to support the authenticity of the fakes was made by using the faked mark of an expert. In this case the mark to be found on some of these fakes is purported to be that of Dr. Vuk Simić-Vakanović who was a leading stamp dealer in Zagreb during WWII as well as the head of the Croatian Philatelic Society and stamp expertizer. The genuine mark of Dr. Simić-Vakanović from 1942 compared to the fake mark is shown in Figure 7. The large swirling letter at the start of his signature is found in pencil on the back of stamps legitimately expertized by Dr. Simić-Vakanović.

Figure 7. Comparison of Simić-Vakanović Expert Marks



War Victims - Unissued

The semi-postal stamps of the War Victims issue planned for 1945 also has fake proofs purporting to be from the archives of its designer, Ivo Režek. Like the fakes previous described, these again are typically found on UV sensitive paper and are coarsely printed compared to genuine proofs. However, some of these proofs are also found on non-UV sensitive paper; but the coarseness of the printing gives them away. The printing of these fakes was done in two formats - regular panes of stamps as well as single "die-proof" stamps. Regardless of format, all exhibit characteristics denoting them as fakes. The fakes are found in red, green, and brown along with several shades of these colors. Normal examples of the fakes are shown in Figure 8, and a fake "Designer's Working Proof" is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 8. Examples of So-Called "Color Proofs" of the Unissued War Victims Series

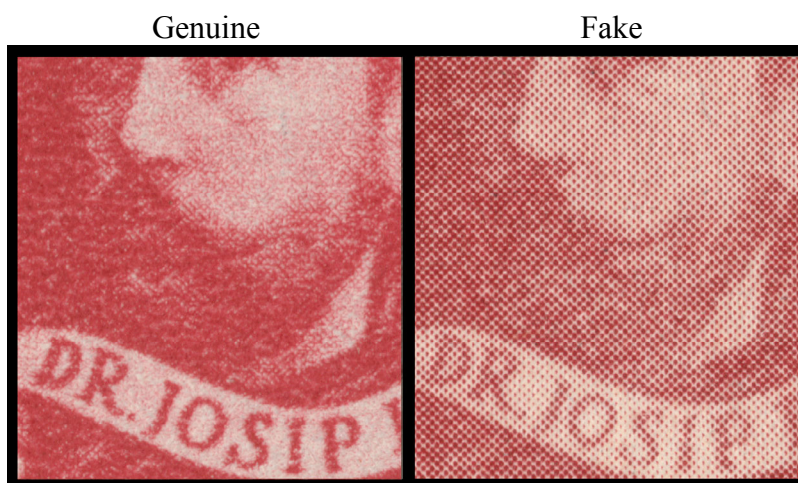


Figure 9. Fake Designer's Working Proof



As with the other fakes, the coarseness of the printing indicates that these also are fakes. A comparison is shown in Figure 10. As with the fake proofs of Michel 178, these fakes can be found with the fake expert mark of Dr. Simić-Vakanović. Again, because some of the fakes are printed on paper that is not UV sensitive, the coarseness of the printing is the best indicator of fakery.

Figure 10. Unissued War Victims Series Comparison



Summary

This is the first of what I hope will be a series of addenda to the Manual of Croatia on CD-Rom. As more items of interest appear, including some new discoveries such as blind overprints on what appear to be normal stamps, they will be appropriately documented and an addendum issued. Contributions of new information by anyone are always welcomed.

References:

¹Hughes, Philip J.; Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, Croatia Issues 1941-1945; Revised 2004; Pages 166, 168, and 208.